Storying Shame: Humiliation in the Colonized Classroom

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore the use of shame and humiliation in schools as technologies of colonial violence. In particular, I draw from critical race and anti-colonial scholarship to situate colonialism as both violent and ongoing. My interests are in tracing systemic racism in classrooms as it exists through acts of humiliation and shaming. In this process, I am interested in examining the physicality of humiliation and shame: the subtle, metaphoric, and emotional ways in which shame weaves into and through bodies. Utilizing personal narrative and collective storytelling as my methods of analysis, I argue in this thesis that contextualizing and historicizing humiliation within a collective gathering of shame stories has the potential to bring the operation and ongoing effects of colonialism into a collective consciousness, one that has the potential to highlight the ways humiliation is bound to bodies and the ways in which racialized bodies are organized and educated in social spaces.

In order to respect the multiple voices and experiences of this research project, I combined personal narrative and collective storytelling (Baskin, 2005; Mahoney, 2007) to explore the collective gathering of shame stories as an anti-racist practice. My focus is on expanding our understanding of student disengagement to account for the affective experiences of shaming. To do so, I draw on critical race theories that explore the corporeality of racism and
the ways it operates through affective forms. My hope is that by focusing on the corporeal mechanisms at work in colonial technologies of shaming, this work will make meaningful contribution to anti-racist work on student disengagement and will support racialized students struggling with racism and oppression in classrooms across Canada.
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Chapter 1
Introduction: Decolonizing the Story

It is shame that is rooted in the humiliation that colonialism has heaped on our peoples for hundreds of years and is now carried within our bodies, minds, and our hearts (Simpson, 2011, p.13).

Shame inflicts something on you that is very hard to take away. It feels like it is in your heart. It makes you feel different.¹

In this dissertation, I explore the use of shame and humiliation in classrooms as technologies of colonial violence. Part of my interest in the use of humiliation and shame in schools was shaped by discussions I had as a child and teenager with my mother and siblings. In these discussions, I remember my mother talking to us about racism in school. The memory that rushes back as I write this is of my brother, then in grade two, locked in his classroom alone, by his teacher, while his classmates and teacher prepared for a school play in the auditorium. I have memories of hearing my mother tell this story at different points in my life. Always, she finds the teacher in the auditorium and asks for my brother². Always, the teacher turns red and rushes Mom upstairs to the classroom where she unlocks the door and explains that it was all a misunderstanding; my brother must’ve forgotten to join the rest of the students and gotten himself locked in the classroom.

By sharing this experience in the form of a story, my mother made it possible for us, as young children, to open up a door into the world of racism and arrive at a collective awareness of what

¹ Definition given by my 8-year-old niece when I asked her what is shame.

² A few nights before the play, my brother had told my Mom about it and told her that parents were invited to come see the play. My mother showed up to the school along with all of the other s parents.
it felt like in Toronto classrooms. Through the story, I learned what was possible in Canada: Teachers could lock you away if you were dark skinned and they could excuse themselves or find ways to minimize what had happened. In thinking about the power of collective storytelling, I’m drawn to the ways in which this story moved the experience of racism outside of an individual experience and into a collective understanding of race and racism in Canada, one that was impacting my entire family. In the story, it wasn’t so much that the teacher was responsible for the racist act of locking a child in a classroom, but that the school made those acts possible. The experience happened to my brother and mother, but in the story, my mother made it clear that this incident happened to all of us. Told and retold in the form of a story, it allowed us to understand racism as something more than an individual experience. And I grew to understand it as something that we needed to find ways to collectively disrupt.

As youth and young adults in the nineties my siblings and I continued these critical discussions around our everyday experiences with racism in schools, on the T.T.C\(^3\) and in shopping malls. We were targeted differently, called by different names, but we took it up as a shared experience. Together we spoke about white spaces and tried to understand how whiteness operated on busses and was legitimated. We joked about the need for support groups for people of colour to talk openly about racism and the ways in which it was impacting us. We wanted to build alliances with teens, had fantasies around building a national community of students that could share strategies for surviving schooling. Somehow these projects didn’t make it past these discussions, but early on, these collective gatherings helped me develop a critical awareness of the emotional and long term effects of racism as well as the importance of community and collective

\(^3\) Toronto Transit Commission, the public transportation system: Buses, subways and streetcars in Toronto, also a place where people of colour in Toronto experience often overt forms of racism.
gatherings. It is a process that we consistently return to as a family. In doing the work of writing with different groups of people in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), I realize how rare these collective gatherings are, as most often collaborators\textsuperscript{4} of this study expressed having little to no opportunities to critically engage with issues related to racism and oppression.

The research that this work is based on came out of these experiences of collective gatherings and my experience as a racialized girl in the public and Catholic school system in Toronto and my own experiences with racism and disengagement. In this work, I wanted to centre the multiple voices and experiences of this research to examine shame collectively. To do this, I combined personal narrative and collective storytelling (Baskin, 2005; Mahoney, 2007) to allow for a process of collective gathering and sharing of shame stories. My focus is on expanding our understanding of student disengagement to account for the affective experiences of shaming. To do so, I draw on critical race and critical pedagogy (Ahmed 2000, 2012, 2015; Cote-Meek, 2014; Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997; Dei, 2008; Fanon, 2004; Karumanchery, 2003; Razack, 1998, 2002, 2004, & 2008; Smith, 2005) and approach this project with questions around how raising a collective awareness of shame and humiliation can inform anti-colonial and critical education work on student disengagement.

In exploring shame and humiliation in schooling, I situate the circulation of shame in classrooms, as a productive technology of colonialism. I use the word productive in order to highlight that humiliation and shaming are implicated and perhaps fundamental to the making and sustaining of dominant subjectivities and integral to the process of race making. Building on scholarship

\textsuperscript{4} I want to take this time to emphasize that in addition to my family there were a few collaborators that I also know personally and had already, previous to knowing me, shared an interest in these issues. The collaborators that I mention in this section are writers that I had not known previously and that agreed to participate in this study based on either an interest in writing or an interest in learning more about oppression and racism in Canada.
that makes evident the colonial enterprise involved in the formation of whiteness, I examine how whiteness is legitimated and authorized through acts of shaming (Frankenberg, 1999). In doing so I also explore how whiteness is performed by subjects through acts of humiliation and shaming and examine how shame naturalizes whiteness. Focusing predominantly in how humiliation operates and thus reproduces racialization, this study attends to this reproduction as it occurs through subtle educational norms and practices. My suggestion is that these norms and practices employ technologies of humiliation as part of the grammar of white supremacy.

Shaming and humiliation find currency in educational practices that teach not the definition of race and racism and racial structures, but what the internal feeling of whiteness or Browness feels like, such as, the pleasure of being white, the pleasure of walking into a classroom and feeling welcomed by a teacher, the feelings of being acknowledged by the educator as something of value.

What it feels like to inhabit a body marked by a particular race is learned through particular practices, and some of these practices take place in the classroom. These affective practices are in fact critical anchor points for the circulation and maintenance of the intelligibility of race and racism, and also for the feeling states embedded in these racial structures, so that shame and humiliation can be seen as potential anchor points that make certain types of discourses and sites of knowledge possible. The fiction of race and racism only makes sense because through the practice of humiliation an understanding of racial difference based on hierarchies becomes embodied. In this model, for acts to have productive force they must produce affective links with a particular racialized structure. Subtle performances of humiliation mitigate the reality of racial order in the educational system, by affecting how you learn to feel what it’s like to inhabit
a racialized body, to be marked by race (Razack, 2002, 2008); it is by means of an affective transmission of knowledge, a knowledge that is rooted in feelings.

Because an understanding of racial structures as existing in and through affective forms (Ahmed, 2000, 2012 & 2015; Cote-Meek, 2014; Fanon, 2004; Hook, 2005, 2006 & 2008; Leonardo, 2004) is a key conceptual framework underpinning this work, I draw from critical race and anti-colonial scholarship (Dei et al., 1997, Dei 2008; Fanon, 2004; Karumanchery, 2003; Razack, 1998, 2002, 2004, & 2008; Smith, 2005) and in particular, work that explores affect in the context of systemic and structural violence (Ahmed, 2012, 2015; Farley, 1997; Hook, 2005, 2006, 2008) to explore shame and humiliation as ongoing technologies of colonial violence. So that, as Ahmed (2012, 2015) purports, we can start looking at emotions as mechanisms through which we come to understand ourselves and our place in the world, and examine emotions as the means through which complex narratives, about ourselves and our place in the world, are transferred between and through bodies.

In exploring humiliation in the context of colonial violence, this work situates colonialism, not as a historical event, but as a nation building project that is both “ongoing and violent” (Cote-Meek, 2014) and implicated in sustaining and creating dominant subjectivities. I also take up humiliation and shaming specifically, as a part of a colonial educational structure that has historically sanctioned the use of violence against children. As writes Monzó, “Violence (in varying forms) has been socioculturally and historically situated within our education system … to manage children’s behaviors, eradicate indigenous languages and cultural practices, … and indoctrinate young people …” (2013, p.84).

To explore the historical and ongoing use of shame in the classroom, I draw on Indigenous scholarship that highlights the important links between colonization and education (Cote-Meek
2014; Smith, 2005; Simpson, 2011) and in particular, the violence of the residential schools system and its legacy. Aimed at mentally, emotionally and spiritually destroying Indigenous people, the residential school system serves as a compelling reminder of the use of humiliation as a mechanism of colonial violence and as an example, of the institutionalization of sanctioned violence against Indigenous people. As Cote-Meek (2014) notes, education for Indigenous people “has always been and continues to be a part of the colonial regime – one that is marked by violence and abuse” (p.10). And as Simpson (2011) reminds us, part of the mechanism of colonial violence is to transform genocide and rape into a shame that is heaved onto Indigenous peoples. Shame directed in this way not only facilitates the internalization of self-hatred but is a critical mechanism of systemic denial and part of a wider system “designed not only to destroy peoples but to destroy their sense of being a people” (Smith, 2005, p.3).

One of the questions that I have struggled with is how to translate my engagement with scholarly debates on and around anti-colonial and critical race studies in a way that is accessible to an audience outside of the academy. In my reading of particular theories and ways of thinking there were moments that I felt that I was moving farther away from my intentions in this work: Essentially to make meaningful contribution to anti-racist work on student disengagement, and by that I mean, work that could be meaningful and accessible to students struggling with racism and oppression in classrooms across Canada. I wondered whether someone like me, as I was in middle school and high school, could have the patience to go through dense academic jargon in order to arrive at the importance of gathering shame stories collectively and whether it was even useful to complete a dissertation in order to bring these anti-racist practices to communities.

This struggle with accessibility and form increasingly brought me back to examining writing, structure, and form. During this time, I played close attention to the distinct features associated
with Western academic text: tone, rules of citation, formal language, and audience (that set it apart from other forms of writing) and how these features regulate and organize bodies and in particular, the impact that these features and formal rules have on racialized bodies through shame. In thinking about the ways academic text circulates shame, I thought critically about the audience and how the intended audience of the text impacts what could be written. Increasingly, I experienced the different ways that I could engage with creative non-fiction and the lyrical essay as a way of approaching the feeling states and physicality of my own internalizations of lack and deficiency. It was also my strategy to imagine the readers as my family and as a broader community of people of colour. This centering of a particular reader facilitated writing that had not been possible before. It also allowed me to go back to the work that I was doing creatively around shaming and humiliation and examine, how to include the process of writing on shame and the possibility of including work I had deemed as not “academic”.

It is with this purpose in mind that this thesis attempts to play with form and structure and text, to include what I perceived (initially and for some time) as disposable, or not good, and/or outside the limits of academic text. And as a result, I focus on the process of writing an academic text on the racial violence of shaming, as an immigrant woman of colour. In utilizing personal narrative and collective storytelling as a form of inquiry, to gather and share experiences of shame in the form of stories, I am also following in the footsteps of scholarship of women of colour and Black feminist scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Lorde, 1984) who have historically demanded a closer look at affect, power and have used lyrical writing to unmask systems of power the ways they take root in bodies. In some places, I chose to expand on the lyrical essay and provide an analysis of the work. In other places, I have chosen to leave the lyrical essay and the questions it poses for readers to stand on its own without elaborating on the theoretical frameworks that underpin this
work. This was done purposefully because in bringing an analysis of the lyrical essay into
conversation with the piece I often impacted and narrowed the piece in fundamental ways.

I am aware of the multiple ways that particular voices and ways of telling are valued over others.
I am also aware that writing, and in particular, academic writing is made up of authorized and
subtle writing practices that secure dominant epistemological conventions and ways of knowing
that sustain dominant subjectivities. Over the course of working on this dissertation, I have
struggled with writing. I now understand this tension as part of my own discomfort with
producing knowledge and making meaning in ways that make me feel fractured and/or
incomplete. This tension has proven to be more reflective of my own experiences as a racialized
woman and speaks more of the experience of being educated in a white dominated society and
the often subtle ways I have internalized racism and felt silenced and out of place in academic
spaces. Writing collectively and finding different ways of telling is an attempt to disrupt the
ways in which shame and humiliation have found refuge in my body, but also to disrupt my own
notion that there is only one particular way to write a dissertation based on collective shame
stories.

Although the narratives that are written in this dissertation are personal, and in some ways
represent individual slices of memories, these narratives are explored through the same lens of
solidarity from which my mother first introduced me to racism and with the same purpose. My
intention was to utilize the collective gathering of shame stories as an anti-racist practice that
both allowed for a development of a collective awareness of the pervasive impact of racial
violence on people of colour and its productive effects, and also served to recreate a sense of
belonging and solidarity among the collaborators and future readers of this work (Dei et al.,
2004, p. 186). Because the practice of collaboratively examining racism is a part of my ongoing
anti-racist practice, a collaborative methodology and that advocates for the creation of spaces where people of colour can openly explore colonial shame is fundamental to this work. Drawing on the importance of group solidarity, Dei et al. (2004) remind us that, “[w]hile racism functions to isolate the oppressed within self-disciplining positions of regulation, fear, disengagement and disconnection, “group solidarity” re-creates the sense of belonging and safety that has been made unavailable to us” (p.166).

Rationale
We are living in paradoxical times, a moment where race and racism are in the fore front of an array of exciting social movements, like #blacklivesmatter, #Ferguson #Baltimore, and where these movements themselves are anchored in public recordings of police killings of Black and Brown people. These movements, while originating in The United States (U.S.), have also had an impact on the types of conversations that are taking place across Canada around similar issues around police brutality, carding, and broadly, racism in Canada. Ironically, this is also a moment purported as post-racist, the moment after the election of America’s first Black president. This visible representation of power in the hands of a Black man both purports vivacious support for “American dreaming” and ironically, seeds critical awareness of the failure of liberal notions of representation. At the same time, as The United States prepares for another election, overt white supremacist organizations are on the rise, as well as the use of overtly racist discourses around illegal immigrants withholding jobs from white men and ruining the economy and the assumption that terrorist equals Muslim. Donald Trump’s campaign slogan “Making America Great Again” exploits these white fears and fantasies. And yet, just as race and racism become more salient in mainstream media, there is an aggressive push back, as systemic denial is operationalized to suppress critical awareness of white supremacy and oppression.
Recently, in a writing workshop, I asked elementary and high school students if it matters to them if we have discussions about racism in Canada. Participants at this workshop gave a variety of answers. Some spoke about the individual pain of racism as well as the societal costs, a few participants simply answered, yes, some said, it matters, and one participant answered defiantly, it matters cause it matters. I find it striking how often youth tell me that they do not talk about issues of race and racism at school or with their peers or families. What these conversations suggest is that although a plethora of diverse conversations are taking place online and in the media, strategies for understanding the day-to-day impact of living in a white dominated nation are not taking place in schools or at home. I would argue that it is of paramount importance that students are exposed early to anti-racism and anti-oppression frameworks and the impact that racism has on their lives. This work is not just an attempt to highlight the violence of shaming and humiliating young bodies in classrooms, but also, an exploration of the mechanisms at work and the productive element of humiliation and shame. By this I mean to examine:

1) How whiteness is performed through acts of shaming in everyday schooling practices
2) How humiliation and shaming are linked to colonial nation building practices
3) How collective gathering of shame stories can contribute to meaningful anti-racist and anti-oppressive work

As a result, I argue that a focus on the corporeal mechanisms at work in colonial technologies of shaming can result in meaningful contribution to anti-racist work on student disengagement by supporting racialized communities struggling with racism and oppression in classrooms across Canada. In part, this involves localizing the body, tracking the ‘affect technologies’ (Hook, 2005) that white supremacy exploits and relies upon. In tracing the ways that the violence of humiliation is naturalized, I’m interested in examining the “pre-discursive” and what Hook also refers to as the “irreducibly corporeal aspects” (Hook, 2005) of racism and oppression, the
“habituated symptoms and intentions” the physical pain of shame (Hook, 2005) and the processes and practices through which the violence of humiliation becomes authorized in classroom.

Definition of Terms
The Oxford Dictionary of English (2nd Edition Revised) defines humiliate as the act of making “(someone) feel ashamed and foolish by injuring their dignity and self-respect” and utilizes the example: “you'll humiliate me in front of the whole school!” The act of humiliation not only implies the making of shame, it requires it, along with the circulation and internalization of shame within bodies. The interrelationship between humiliation, shaming, and schooling is highlighted within the example “you’ll humiliate me in front of the whole school!” where place is used to exemplify the threat of humiliation. I find the mention of place particularly telling: although humiliation is not exclusively found in classrooms, hallways, or cafeterias the fact that it happens in a school setting is not completely arbitrary or without consequence. Humiliation is not only destructive, it is formative. Miller (1991), who has written extensively on the “hidden cruelty” in child rearing practices, highlights this destructive and formative interrelationship. Miller (1991) points to the deep psychological trauma that comes from repeated childhood experiences of humiliation with the ultimate cost of “being separated from [our] true self” (p.103).

Research that explores the impact of humiliation and shame emphasize the following characteristics: “…humiliation occurs within relationships of unequal power where the humiliator has power over the victim. While a humiliator may be emboldened by feelings of power, a victim of humiliation will feel degraded, confused, powerless, paralyzed, ostracized, violated, or assaulted” (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999, p. 260). Hartling and Luchetta also
emphasize that humiliation entails an attack on the whole self where the “internal process of negatively evaluating oneself is accentuated” (1999, p.262). In the same vein, shame is enacted sometimes because of a perceived failure or transgression. Researchers emphasize the intense physical emotions associated with shame and the resulting “negative appraisal of the overarching self” (Clerkin, Teachman, Smith, & Buhlmann, 2014, p. 561). That is, the emphasis is on the person feeling shameful for their entire selves as opposed to feeling shameful for their actions or behaviour (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Essentially even though they can exist simultaneously, what distinguishes shame from an emotion like guilt is that “shame focuses on the self and guilt focuses on behaviors” (Grout, 2013, p.1). Because of the impact that humiliation and shame have on the self, shame, in comparison to other emotions, is “more likely than are the other emotions to be implicated in psychopathology” (Clerkin et al., 2014, p.561 referencing Tangney et al., 2007).

This emphasis on an attack on the whole self is important. It infers an attack that is impactful and perhaps transformative. This attack also occurs in the presence of a witness (Klein, 1991). In fact, the witness is a critical part of the humiliation dynamic in that the witness ensures that the circulation and impact of the violence continually threatens with the possibility of a future attack. The witnesses hold the power to retell and re-humiliate. The authors emphasize the long lasting feeling of self-betrayal and guilt at not being able to protect oneself. “This internalized guilt makes one more vulnerable to future humiliations” (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999, p.263).

While researchers like Miller (1991) and Klein (1991) have explored the destructive effects of humiliation at the individual level and its formative and socializing elements, Hyman and Snook (1999) by asking participants to write about their “most traumatic school experience,” expose the psychological trauma of humiliation. Other studies explore the impact that humiliation and
verbal abuse have on student development, specifically noting the correlation between verbal abuse and not graduating from high school (McEachern et al., 2008). Most recently Monzó (2013) examined the experiences of Latina mothers in schools by looking at their experiences of humiliation. Monzó, having recently become a Latina mother herself, and speaking about the experience of humiliation, writes, “[I] have felt its effects at a physical, psychological, and emotional level. Thus, I have come to recognize it as a form of institutionalized violence … [leaving] Latina mothers feeling violated …” (2013, 182). Even though this research attests to the destructiveness of humiliation it has done little to transform the ways that humiliation is enacted in classrooms and the historical context that gives the violence of humiliation authority and meaning.

Contextualizing Humiliation

At a first glance, there seems to be nothing notable about the root of humiliation: It stems from *humus*, which refers to earth. Nothing notable until I find that the reference to humus infers the physical act of being pushed down into the ground (Klein, 1991). This pushing down into earth relies on an understanding of hierarchy: soil signifying less or dirt, and sky, as in heaven, standing in for supremacy. The act of pushing down to earth takes on emotional weight because soil is perceived as less and associated with a downward movement. This pushing down into earth invokes for me a sense of decay and a movement towards or the becoming of that which is disposable.

In *The ‘real’ of racializing embodiment*, Hook (2008) elaborates on the work of Mangany (1981) to draw attention to how racial fantasies and the upward construction of whiteness as superior and disembodied is rooted in a fear of death and decay. As Hook examines, this existential anxiety, that Mangany (1981) explores, is woven into racist systems and fantasies that attempt to
disavow the body as a way of disavowing death (Hook, 2008). Hook notes that it is, “…the body’s inevitable fate of decay and death… mortality and demise that make it… so demanding of rejection, disavowal and projection” (Hook, 2008, 142). This body/ego existential crisis “replay[s] the rudimentary dynamics of racism (its logics, that is, of superiority and inferiority), [it] also represent routes of identification” (Hook, 2008, p.144). In this work, I argue that it is precisely these routes of identifications that allow for particular subjectivities to take shape and acquire meaning through acts of humiliation and shaming.

Hook’s (2008) writing on “the upward trajectory of whiteness-mind-goodness-life and the downward trajectory of blackness-bodily-evil-death” uncover what shame attempts to naturalize (Hook, 2008, p.144). While the downward trajectory links black to bodies and continues traveling down moving bodies towards soil and decay, the upward trajectory begins with race and moves whiteness outside of body and locates it in mind, goodness and life. The two signifiers operate through racial lines where, “the upper pole (whiteness) provides a means of narcissistic self-valorization, affording its subjects the position of symbolic idealization; the lower pole (blackness) represents that which is devalued, deserving of denial and repression” (Hook, 2008, p.144).

Humiliation and the act of being pushed down rely upon this trajectory of movements - “the upward trajectory of whiteness-mind-goodness-life and the downward trajectory of blackness-bodily-evil-death”- in order to circulate shame. The body that is being pushed down is also being cast out (Razack, 2008). There is a movement out of the collective white disembodied rational mind and into a racialized body that decays and an unearthing of the universal anxiety of inhabiting a body that is dying (Hook, 2008). This anxiety around death and decay, as Hook notes, is at the heart of white supremacists’ fantasies of superiority, fantasies that increasingly
attempt to situate whiteness in the place of mind, rationality, and progress as a way of escaping the deathliness of bodies.

These associations and hierarchical positions are not only racially constituted, but also take shape through acts of violence. Andrea Smith’s (2005) analysis of the relationship between sexual violence and colonialism sheds light on this. In the chapter *Rape of Land*, Smith notes how *nature* is increasingly linked to Native people and in particular to Native women’s bodies (2005). This linkage also situates whiteness as existing outside of nature and as the force that has control and dominion over land. This connection, as Smith notes, is not “simply metaphoric” as it both affords and authorizes acts of violence against land and people by marking the land as well as “Native peoples as inherently violable” (Smith, 2005, p.55). The lower place that is inferred in the pushing down is constituted through histories of colonization and acts of violence. As a result, the etymology of humiliation leads us to an understanding of the ways in which racial hierarchies and anxieties are built into the act of pushing down to give meaning and tone to the experience of humiliation.

**School and Violence**

In this section, I argue that these signifiers operate in the context of schooling to situate violence as residing in particular racialized student bodies. The association of particular bodies with violence functions through the same trajectory of movements that Hook (2008) highlights, they move particular bodies into the space of being pushed down and out of spaces. These movements of being pushed down happen discursively, as I will discuss, but also physically and emotionally, through acts of shaming. These upward and downward signifiers serve to legitimize everyday practices of surveillance, violence and shaming in schools. As a result, the grafting of school violence, onto particular bodies, is part of a host of practices that “serve to
sanctify the benevolence/goodness/morality and humanity of white bodies” (Dei, 2008, p. 22). These practices are also implicated in broader processes that secure the privilege of white bodies in schooling and establish white students as “rightful occupants” of educational spaces (Razack, 2002, p.101). In this way, whiteness circulates as a route of “identification worth performing” (Razack, 2002, p.101) not only out of fears of decay and of being associated with finite bodies but also out of the pleasure of privilege and of belonging.

In the context of Canada, and specifically in Toronto where I attended most of my schooling, school violence circulates as a meaning making system that consistently situates school violence within racialized tropes associated with young Black and Brown bodies “at risk”. Internal to this meaning making system is the circulation of particular narratives, such as, “senseless gun-violence,” “gang violence” and “Black-on-Black violence” that not only link violence with Black bodies, but also operate through polarized routes of identification that have the effect of securing a system organized around binaries where the violence and criminality grafted onto racialized bodies not only frames and produces particular scripts associated with Black bodies, but also results in the purification and construction of whiteness (Dei, 2008). This framing of violence in schools as residing in particular bodies also serves to legitimize a host of disciplinary practices: hyper-vigilance, surveillance as well as suspensions and expulsions of racialized bodies from schools.

Humiliation, although a common (Hyman & Perone, 1998) and everyday occurrence in schools, rarely enters into public understandings or portrayals of school based violence. The common scripts of schooling, at least by omission, also highlight a way of conceptualizing and profiling the non-violent student body. Here we see how the out-of-control, at-risk, violent racialized body serves to construct, as Dei (2008) points out, the civility and goodness of particular white bodies.
When examining the discourses on school violence, I find it striking how little we speak of the impact of colonial educational structures. Knife attacks and gun violence are not only portrayed as connected to particular racialized youth, but are also, existing in a vacuum, and outside of an understanding of colonial violence and the profound impact that it has on bodies (Fanon, 2004). What would be the result of including the effects of being educated in a racist, white dominated colonial education system, within discourses of school violence? What would it mean if we started to understand disengagement as a healthy response to a toxic environment, similar to the ways in which walking away is framed as a healthy response to an abusive relationship?

The main argument in this work is that humiliation and the circulation of shame are technologies of colonial violence. As a result, I argue that humiliation and shame are embedded in performances of exclusion that make whiteness into “an identification worth performing” (Razack, 2002, p.101). In narratives of school violence, we can see the pushing down of humiliation, in the large numbers of Black and Latino youth that disengage from schooling (Dei et al., 1997; Schugurensky, 2009). It can also be seen in the discourses that continually attempt to frame racialized bodies as at-risk and/or as linked to violence or deficiency. These processes, while not revealing specific performances of humiliation, are indicative of a larger system of violence that relies on the framework of humiliation. What they reveal is the spirit of humiliation, the pushing down, and the downward trajectory which is lived and contained within bodies. They are reflective of the structure of ongoing settler colonial violence that has historically utilized humiliation to secure and maintain settler sovereignty and white dominance.

At the structural level, humiliation takes place within the lived experience of surveillance and the mark of criminality that characterizes the experience of racialized student’s in school. Humiliation lies in the language of security that demands that racialized bodies be searched, stopped, ordered, and consistently checked. It hides in the language of responsibility and discipline and [is authorized by the language of safety and risk] that
restricts the freedom to move, to go to the washroom, to eat, and to speak (Carranza, 2009).

I situate whiteness, not as a static identity, but as an unstable felt practice that requires constant reconstitution (Frankenberg, 1999). The ways in which colonial violence, systemic racism, and white dominance are omitted from talk on school violence is indicative of the process by which whiteness intends to naturalize itself. I suggest that an examination of humiliation in daily school practices and its relationship to the performance and production of whiteness is not easy. Partly because the daily practices that produce whiteness “are always in the process of being made and unmade” and because the routes of identification that humiliation relies upon are embedded in shame, and thus deeply painful and difficult to openly examine and discuss (Frankenberg, 1999, p.16).

In thinking about the process of (un)naturalizing the relationship between whiteness and humiliation in schools, I want to focus on a documentary titled, *Muffins for Granny*. The documentary explores the experiences of elders who attended residential schools in Canada. Through home-movie fragments of McLaren’s grandmother and interviews with elders, the film documents the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse endured by Native children. McLaren (2008) uses the last segment of the film to focus on one moment of humiliation experienced by her grandmother. Although, the interviews with the elders contain explicit testimonies of excessive forms of violence, her grandmother’s experience of humiliation at first seems strikingly different. I would argue that this accomplishes two processes: first, it isolates the weight of humiliation so that it can become visible and, second, it situates humiliation within the broader context of colonial violence. By highlighting a single act of humiliation as embedded within a history of colonial violence the film exposes the relationship between humiliation and the making of white dominant subjectivities.
To illustrate this, I want to examine the humiliation that McLaren explores in her film. She tells us that her grandmother attended a mixed residential school, one that was populated by both Native and white children. She recounts that for dessert sometimes the nuns handed out muffins, but only the white children received them. Once the white children had finished their muffins, the nuns instructed the white children to throw their scraps on the floor for the Native children to consume. McLaren learned from her grandmother how she watched, waited, and then picked up the paper-muffins-cups from the floor and ate the leftover bits of bread.

I want to argue that the act of denying the muffins to the Native children served as more than a pleasurable treat for the white students. I draw on this experience of humiliation because it reveals some of the mechanisms at work in shaming. I argue that through the muffins the nuns enacted a felt border that accomplished two things: The muffins and the feelings of pleasure, made physical and emotional the pleasure of belonging to whiteness, and through pleasure delineated the border between those who received and did not receive the muffins, and reconstituted whiteness through a felt privilege. Shame was reinforced from the final act of humiliation where white children watched as Native children ate the scraps from the floor. In a school open to white and Native students, the muffins become a technique for constructing a contested racialized border: contested because both the Native and white children shared the playground, the classroom, and the teachers, but only white students were given muffins. The legal system that authorized the physical exclusion and separation of Native bodies from white spaces had shifted, and as a result, new ways of enacting white supremacy were necessary.

The act of situating a single act of humiliation in the context of testimonies of terror is instrumental in highlighting the colonial violence involved in humiliation. Removed from the colonial violence that it was party to, the muffin story could easily be dismissed as a moment
where one group of children was forced to eat from the floor the leftovers of another group.

Removed from the colonial project, and outside of an understanding of race and racism, the story could be perceived as an individual act of cruelty or pathology on the part of the nuns. Outside of the context of the residential school system and even framed outside of the terrors experienced by the elders in the film, humiliation could be dismissed and accepted as a form of punishment, and as something existing outside of race or racism. Maybe, someone could argue, we would have to understand whether certain children were misbehaving and as a result were not given treats. However, within the context of the residential school system, racialized violence, and terror, the act of making Native children eat the leftovers from white children off the floor becomes productive, and the magnitude of the violence and its connection to larger systems of oppression becomes visible: Humiliation moves outside of individual malice or pathology and can be seen as a technology, and most importantly as a critical technology, for the performance of colonial violence and the construction of white hegemony. The repeated act of denying muffins and then of instructing the white students to dispose of them on the floor for Native children is constructing a colour line, and this I would argue is a colonial act that requires deliberation and careful crafting.

The white students also come into close contact with the authority of the nuns in the school, as they are also allowed to experience and exercise the power to deny desserts (by consuming them as the Native children watched), and to regulate Native bodies (by deciding when they could eat the leftovers and how much they could consume). By securing the right to pleasure, the right to regulate and organize Native bodies, the students and nuns position themselves as the “rightful occupants” of the school and through shame and pleasure experience themselves as belonging. That McLaren (2008) tells us that the practice happened sometimes suggests a repeated re-
enactment that for me signals the rather instability of whiteness as dominance in a mixed residential school and the need for repeated performances.

I argue in this thesis that contextualizing and historicizing humiliation provides a critical imperative for social justice and critical anti-racist work. Far removed from the terrors and brutality associated with colonialism, humiliation can seem to be a minor characteristic of school discipline. As a result, we need to show how it is connected to larger structures of terror and brutality by examining what humiliation and the circulation of shame produce in classrooms. This, I suggest, is imperative if we are to recognize that because it has the ability to injure and destroy, humiliation is a powerful tool for oppression.

Chapters Ahead
In the next chapter, I lay out some of the frameworks that are foundational to the ways I take up humiliation and shame in schools. Specifically, I frame humiliation as part of a colonial project that is violent and ongoing and explore the ways it operates. I examine humiliation in relation to the formative and pedagogical possibilities involved in humiliating and the implication it has for the kinds of identities and selves that are constructed over time. Tracing the circulation of shame between bodies, I inquire into the role that humiliation plays in the construction and maintenance of racialized, disengaged and degenerate bodies, as well as the successful, civilized, white body.

In chapter three, I focus on the methodology and methods of this study and I explore the importance of grounding this work in a community based and collaborative methodology. We store early childhood experiences of shame and keep experiences of shame private. By using collaborative storytelling, I attempt to explore the ways that writing and sharing stories of shame disrupt(ed) the many silences associated with racism and what these disruptions allowed for in terms of a critical analysis of the “affective assemblages” of racism (Hook, 2005). I know what
it feels like to hold back voice, to stay silent, to keep parts of me hidden. I always thought these reactions to the classroom were personality traits and never thought of these as reactions of lived reality of racism and oppression. Because I lived and identified with these silences, I am interested in the ways collective gathering of shame stories can disrupt and allow for a closer examination of how structures and racial hierarchies, in particular, come to be internalized into ways of being.

Chapter four, *Memory, Narrative and Writing Shame*, is a longer exploration of the process of writing shame. In this chapter, I explore the dynamic of shame and its relationship with writing. I examine specifically the experience of writing about racial injury within white institutions and the impact that this has on what can be written. Chapter five picks up on some of the elements around writing shame and examines the writer’s voice and its relationship to shame. Here I bring an embodied reflectivity to the experience of disengaging and explore the affective assemblages that impact voice and in particular a writer’s voice. In chapter six, *Mobilizing Strategies and Creative Disruptions*, I focus on the process of writing and not writing an academic text as an immigrant woman of colour, and the explore engagement and disengagement.

Chapter seven, *Ugliness and Shame*, explores the use of stories as prompts for deeper dialogue around the everydayness of racial violence and examines the ways ugliness relies and utilizes shame to take meaning. I look at the intersection of ugliness and shaming in learning English as a second language. This chapter is an attempt to narrow in on ideas around the wanted body and is a call to place closer attention at the ways racial literacy develops through understandings of beauty.

Chapter eight, *Collective Gathering of Shame Stories* is an attempt to illustrate the process of gathering and sharing collective shame stories. Often I used these bits of narratives to start
workshops around racism and the experience of racial injury. Often these bits of narratives made people remember moments of racial injury and harm. What I hope is that this chapter is an invitation for readers to think about how collective gathering of shame stories can allow for a closer examination of structures of violence and in particular provide critical reflection on the affective qualities of racism.

Chapter nine begins with a lyrical essay that centers on an experience of humiliation. The text integrates insight and stories gathered in the research process. While the story exists separately as a collective literary project, I draw on critical race and critical pedagogy theories to question how collective shame stories can inform critical education work on student disengagement. Questioning how humiliation shapes the very contours of the classroom, the borders between failure and success, praise and ridicule, pain and pleasure, and the ways in which they contribute to the making and securing of dominant subjectivities. I approach these issues starting from the context of the body and the way that humiliation moves through bodies, limiting and collapsing the realm of possibilities of the self. My hope is to present the use of collective shame stories as a fruitful decolonizing project that allows for the kind of colonial unmapping that Razack (2002) calls for in her work.

In the final chapter, I utilize the lyrical essay to engage with the experience of shame. It is an attempt to heed Hook’s (2008) call to engage with the “affective factor of bodily experience” in order to highlight the bodily “anxieties, visceral responses, symptomatic episodes” in addition to the physicality of racism’s bodily fascinations (2008, p.148). This lyrical essay is a form of resisting in the sense that it takes up the theoretical frameworks of this research through creative non-fiction in order to approach affect and its relationship to racism. It is an attempt to revisit
and relive moments where race is being inscribed onto body and to leave enough space for readers to engage critically with the affect of racialization.
Janelle: Yeh, [students are picked on] because of their dress and stuff like that, or you have the Somalian girls who have the wraps all around their faces. In summertime it's a religion and people know this, but just to be noticed or have someone trying to be popular they'll be making fun of them or asking stupid questions like `Aren't you hot? Are you a Ninja?' stuff like that.

Rebecca: Do you see that as racism?

Janelle: I don't think it's racism, I just think it's doing it to get attention.

(Raby, 2004, p.367)

My children have experienced [racism] too. My daughter used to get teased at school due to her accent. Even the school principal did it too. She did not want to go to school anymore . . . She used to cry a lot. It hurt so much to see her like that … (Carranza, 2007, p. 393)

1. Discourse

In trying to unpack the way that humiliation becomes operationalized and obscured, Foucault’s concept of discourse becomes particularly useful. One of the main currents of his work lies with the question of how, out of a multitude of experiences, do very specific thoughts and statements become intelligible and sayable at a given moment (Mills, 2003). In a sense, this is about the hidden grammar that shapes what can be stated and acknowledged at a particular time and place, and the systems and relations of power that work through these moments. For Foucault, discourse is embedded within relations of power and individuals are the place where power is enacted and resisted (Mills, 2003, p. 35). Highlighting the agency of individuals in responding to these rules and relations of power, scholars in cultural studies (Yon, 2000; Hall, 1997) make note of the tensions and complexities in the ways in which individuals and groups respond, alter,
resist, manage and take up discourses through which they speak, think, and write themselves into the world. I see the interplay between agency and resistance in the demand for mutual respect in the classroom, from students of colour (Dei et al., 1997). The demand for respect is sometimes dismissed as student misbehaviour or taken up within talk about the demise of our education system and of students over stepping their place. This framing overshadows the demand for mutual respect by racialized students. As I would suggest, contextualizing humiliation and shaming as colonial acts, allows us to see first what might also be articulated by students’ demand for mutual respect. In part that the demand for mutual respect exposes the unequal power relations between educators and students, and also articulates a clear demand, from the part of the students, for the right to education without humiliation. And given the destructive and formative effects of shaming and humiliation, the demand for mutual respect is powerful (Hyman & Snook, 1999; Klein, 1991; Miller, 1991).

One of the collaborators in this study spoke about a moment in school where an educator engaged the class in a discussion around each other’s future professions. Students went one by one and listened as their classmates shared how they imagined their future selves.

When it was my turn I went up and all the kids said things like businessman and entrepreneur, and I remember feeling happy. The teacher then turned to the class and said: “No, I think Jose’s going to be a mechanic,” I stood motionless. And I remember the entire class going really quiet. I knew it bothered her that the class thought so highly of me. She needed me to know that she didn’t think I would ever achieve those things (Carranza, 2009, p.29)

Jose remembered the feelings of shame and the contrast between how the teacher saw him and how his classmates saw him. I find it also interesting how the educator needed to interrupt the discussion to impose her way of seeing Jose: The power to shame. When I think of the demand for mutual respect, I think of the ways it makes visible the violence in these daily moments of shaming, and the ways in which they are tied up in securing dominance in the classroom. By
interrupting the discussion and saying no to what the students are saying, the educator is able to exercise her power, and categorize a young Latino student within a stereotypical career. In that moment, it matters little that Jose had always envisioned himself as a business man and that his classmates shared that vision. The demand for respect from students highlights the threat of humiliation and shaming that students manage in schools every day. As a result, I see the demand as powerful and as an example of the ways in which students name, resist and challenge race and racist discourses in schools.

For Foucault, power does not possess a one way causal relationship from top – down. Instead, his work is focused on the way “power relations permeate all relations within a society”. This analysis “enables an account of the mundane and daily ways in which power is enacted and contested, and allows an analysis which focuses on individuals as active subjects” (Mill, 2003, p. 36). In addition, Foucault argues that it is not easy to observe these multiple power relations at play, and sees power not just as repressive but as productive (Mills, 2003, p. 36).

In light of the way that humiliation practices get pushed out of the discussion of school violence, it’s useful to trace some of the ways that race and racism operate through discourse. In a 2007 paper, Augoustinos et al. set out to present an overview of the discursive patterns of what they identify as “formal and informal race talk”. They argue that contemporary race talk utilizes liberal principles of equality and fairness to produce and disguise discriminatory language. Linked to equality and justice, Augoustinos et al. note how liberal principles allow individuals to frame often discriminatory and sometimes even overtly racist discourse as acceptable and morally ‘good’ talk (2007). The utility of framing race talk through egalitarian principals lies in the way that it protects itself from critique and becomes morally justified. For one, the authors
point to the difficulty in connecting or contextualizing what is being said, or in their words, the statements are difficult to “pin down”. They write:

> [D]iscourse does not have to be explicitly racist to create circumstances that have discriminatory, exclusionary, and oppressive effects. In fact, discursive practices that remove overt signs of racism … possess distinct advantages over classic biological and overt racist discourse (Augoustinos et al., 2007, p.133).

Utilizing the statement “everyone should be treated equally,” the authors point to the multiple ways that the statement functions rhetorically as a ‘self-sufficient argument’ that is “commonly mobilised in text and talk” to oppose affirmative action policies (Augoustinos et al., 2007, p.133). The authors also point to the use of ‘merit’ and the argument that “everybody can succeed if they try hard enough” to show how these statements are often operationalized together as a direct challenge to equity. Using an excerpt from an interview with a white Australian student to exemplify the use of these “self-sufficient arguments”, the authors highlight how the student uses the statements rhetorically to position himself as morally justified while at the same time producing discriminatory talk. “I’m one against sort of holding places for specific groups (Mmm) umm not because I’m racist or discriminating but because I think that merit is the most important thing, you give a person the job because you think they are capable of doing it not because of who they are...” (Augoustinos et al., 2007, p.136). The student goes on to state: “I know that if I was put to that situation I probably would prefer not to take that job because … I’d never know whether I got the job because I might be male or because I’m white …” (2007, p.324).

The student’s statement is worth examining not only because it functions to challenge affirmative action policies as the author suggests, but also because it does so by negating white privilege, racism, and oppression, at the same time that it naturalizes white dominance. The ability to feel himself as earning his place positions the student as a hard worker and as someone
who is righteous and good willed and it also erases the history of oppression and systemic violence that produces his privileges. The feeling of earning his place which I take to mean pride allows us to see that these discourses are not only circulating through talk but are also circulating emotionally (Hook, 2005, 2006). We can see that positioning himself as earning his place in the social structure is pleasurable not just because it makes the student feel good about himself and his place in the world, but because it makes him feel better than those that want to benefit from affirmative action policies, mainly people of colour.

Not only are these statements difficult to pin down because of their use of liberal principles’ of equality, justice, and fairness but also because these statements are moving and ‘sticking’ simultaneously to bodies and producing different types of affective technologies (Ahmed, 2015). Including an analysis of the way that emotions operate through racist and race discourse can help us understand further the role that pleasure plays in bringing people together and creating a sense of righteousness and morality that binds liberal egalitarian talk to whiteness. Ahmed (2015) explores this movement and the stickiness of associations between words and statements that allow particular signs to circulate and accumulate value. She notes, “The word ‘Paki’ might then stick to other words that are not spoken: immigrant, outsider, dirty, and so on.” And it is these multiple unspoken associations that expand the effect and affect of the statements and words. As Ahmed writes, “[t]he association between words that generates meaning is concealed: it is this concealment of such associations that allows such signs to accumulate value” (italics in original, Ahmed, 2015, p.92). Words are not only sticking and moving through discursive associations, they are also sticking to emotional trauma, and pain, and shame, as in the experiences of having racial slurs thrown at the body as weapons of exclusion.
Ahmed’s (2015) concept of stickiness and associations exposes the way that emotions work through discourse. The concept of stickiness can be used as a tool to explore the way that race and racism disappear from the concept of ‘merit’ or at least in the case of associations, are removed from whiteness, but are at once associated with it emotionally. Merit acquires a particular type of association with whiteness, as whiteness becomes associated with hard work and the idea of earning one’s rightful place in society. Merit also carries the emotional value of pride that comes with working and deserving your rightful place and specifically the pride that comes from being situated in ‘whiteness’ as the place of merit and hard work. As Ahmed writes, “[t]hese short sentences depend on longer histories of articulation, which secure the white subject as sovereign in the nation, at the same time as they generate effects in the alignment of ‘you’ with the national body” (2015, p.1-2). This statement of merit moves through bodies in very particular ways. In essence, it involves first the conceptualizing of merit as whiteness, and second, the pleasure of existing within that space of merit through the exclusion of the “Other” so that pleasure moves subjects and sticks them together at the same time as it excludes. In this example, pleasure moves the concept of merit and functions as a form of belonging and entitlement. It feels good to reside naturally in the space of merit, and this ‘feel good’ state moves the statement “everyone should be treated equally” and sticks to very particular bodies as it constructs the space of belonging and un-belonging.

Critical to an examination of affect is tracing the way that colonial shame moves through spaces and connects bodies to other bodies. Belonging, bonding, connecting, and attaching become products and effects of affective technologies of shaming: It is difficult to speak critically about a force that is bringing people together and creating pleasure. As Ahmed notes, emotions are “a form of cultural politics or world making” that are productive and allow for “such structures to
be reified as forms of being” (2015, p.12). As bodily processes these technologies of affect are not easily captured by language or understood consciously. Ahmed notes, “one does not notice this as a world when one has been shaped by that world, and even acquired its shape. Norms may not only have a way of disappearing from view, but may also be that which we do not consciously feel” (2015, p.148). If we can agree that norms have a way of disappearing into bodies, then shame and the circulation of shame and pleasure become the felt spaces where we can examine these structures in the process of becoming. The embodied aspects of these structures and systems of oppression seem to suggest or to point to the embodied investment that subjects have to these structures such that a challenge to the structure is felt as an attack onto the self or “felt as a kind of living death” (Ahmed, 2015, p.56).

II. Whiteness as practice

In order for white racial hegemony to saturate everyday life, it has to be secured by a process of domination, or those acts, decisions, and policies that white subjects perpetrate on people of color (Leonardo, 2004, p.137). This leads us into an understanding of colonial violence as a felt practice and towards an examination of affect in relation to the construction of dominant subjectivities. Fleshing out the early work of Peggy McIntosh (1989) and the larger study of whiteness Studies, Leonardo argues that a critical analysis of whiteness “must be complemented by an equally rigorous examination of white supremacy or the analysis of white racial domination” (Leonardo, 2004, p.137). Without this, Leonardo contends, the analysis of white privilege ends up reinforcing the innocence of whiteness. Referencing McIntosh’s (1989) examples of white privilege as the taken for granted daily aspects of having ‘skin’ colour bandages that match white skin, or textbooks with images that affirm and normalize white identity in history and literature, Leonardo notes how these examples and the broader study of white privilege “obscure the subject of domination, or the agent of the action” (Leonardo, 2004, p.138). Leonardo argues that
much of the work on whiteness describes white privilege “as happening almost without the knowledge of whites” and “conjures up images of domination happening behind the backs of whites, rather than on the backs of people of color” (p.138). White privilege is then perceived as an ‘innocent’ advantage that “white subjects accrue... by virtue of being constructed as whites...” where “[p]rivilege is granted even without a subject’s (re)cognition that life is made a bit easier for her” (p.137). As a result, Leonardo argues that “the theme of privilege obscures the subject of domination or the agent of actions,” and “begins to take on an image of domination without agents” that “obfuscates the historical process of domination” (p.138).

Leonardo’s critique of white privilege is useful in terms of thinking of shaming as calculated performances that circulate not only privilege for whiteness but also, pleasure, and with that perhaps, an investment in pleasure. As Leonardo maintains, “a critical pedagogy of white racial supremacy revolves less around the issue of unearned advantages or the state of being dominant, and more around direct processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it” (Leonardo, 2004, p.138). The analysis that I offer in this thesis draws on Leonardo and others to show that whiteness is more than a state of being. It is an investment and a practice that can be examined in everyday schooling practices.

In terms of thinking of whiteness as a practice, Coleman (2004) is particularly useful in his exploration of the associations and attachments between civility and whiteness. In his study, Coleman (2004) traces how Canadian fiction, poetry, drama, journalism and political writing are implicated in the conflation between white supremacy and British civility. Coleman’s focus is on the way that white privilege is constructed and normalized by means of conflating whiteness with a ‘British model of civility’. Built on a colonial history, civility is understood not as a natural state of being that is fully accessible to all humans, but as an ideal form of evolution that
inadvertently enlists a plethora of perceived behaviours, conducts, ways of thinking and speaking with the construction of white dominance and civilization. Most importantly civility is not an individual state of being but a historically specific evolutionary process of a particular type of subject within a particular type of nation state. Coleman’s (2004) work bridges the connection between white dominance and the politics of nation building, but more important the way that white civility functions as a national practice or project that normalizes at the same time that it erases the violence of domination.

In the same way, that Augoustinos et al. (2007) trace the contradictory use of liberal principles of equality and fairness in the production of discriminatory language, Coleman (2004) examines how civility brings together two contradictory and disparate histories and practices. Coleman exposes how the concept of civility both combines and contains the “temporal notion of civilization as progress” central to the idea of modernity and colonialism with the “moral-ethical ideal of orderliness” exemplified or understood as “cultivated polite behaviour”. One might ask how civility is capable of fusing and sustaining the violent history of colonialism with the concept of “cultivated polite behaviour”. How can cultivated politeness ever come to inhabit a close proximity and a mutual history with colonialism, let alone be paradoxically held within a word?

In thinking of this proximity and the erasure of violence, I examine closely the work of Taussig (2006) on colonial torture and terror. I suggest that we need to examine the move from horrific torture and terror to the making of the “cultivated polite” civilizing subject in order to examine the complex ways that whiteness consistently generates positive white identities that enable the white subject to feel good about its membership (Ahmed, 2012, p.170). Ahmed illustrates this in relation to anti-racism, and points to the ways in which anti-racism work itself becomes another
anchor point for “white pride” (p.170). As Ahmed notes: “the most astonishing aspect of this list of adjectives (positive, proud, attractive, antiracist) is that antiracism becomes just another white attribute or even a quality of whiteness” (p.170).

I include a section from Taussig’s (2006) work here to highlight the complexity involved in both relying on and erasing, the horrific and terrorizing violence of colonialism that sustains and transforms the violence of civility into cultivated polite subjectivity. However, I will say that the quote is difficult to read and can create distress for readers and in particular people of colour. If readers wish, and in the interest of taking care of our bodies, please feel free to skip this quote and move on to the analysis that follows.

Writing about the torture of Native people in Brazil, Taussig (2006) references a series of articles written by Hardenburg in 1909 and states:

They are inhumanly flogged until their bones are visible. Given no medical treatment, they are left to die after torture, eaten by the company’s dogs. They are castrated, and their ears, fingers, arms, and legs are cut off... The whites cut them to pieces with machetes and dash out the brains of small children by hurling them against trees and walls... on special occasions such as Easter Sunday – [they]... douse them in kerosene and set them on fire to enjoy their agony (Taussig, 2006, p.42).

I find Taussig’s (2006) writing horrific. The first time I read it in a graduate course, I feel nauseaus and for days, I cannot get the images out of my head. I introduce this text here because of its terrifying violence. I do this because the act of civilizing explicitly involves this colonial violence and it is worth revisiting in order to analyze how this lived reality of torture and terror becomes the foundation for the construction of the polite orderly white subject. In that sense, civility accomplishes an extraordinary feat as it neurotically attaches race to a particular form of violent historical conduct, and performs a selective erasure of said violence. The violence is at
once always a part of the civility, as it gets mobilized in varying degrees to delineate the border between the colonized and the colonizers, and the victors and loser of history. It justifies the use of violence by virtue of suggesting that the people to be colonized were uncivilized and required civilizing. I was about to write how complicated this narrative is until I think of James Bond, and the murdering and killing that he does in the name of the British nation state. In cinematic form, this fictitious character encapsulates this terror of polite civil behaviour and constructs the superior male colonial subject. Whiteness, through the violence of colonization, comes to attach itself to advancement and to the right to civilize and by that rationale to the state of being civil.

Coleman tells us how the idea of progress inherent in civility allows us to see how civility retains its colonial roots. Colonial-era Europeans believed that there was “one path to civilization and social development” for all societies and this meant that some societies were further ahead than others” (2004, p.12). Coleman writes:

This idea of social evolution, however, introduced colonialism’s troubling ambivalence, for while it confirmed the civility and modernity of White Europeans by contrast with the stages of primitiveness it posited among Europe’s others, it also suggested these others could be civilized and that, indeed, the signs of European civility would be best demonstrated when those who were well advanced on the scale of modernity helped those who were less advanced (2004, p.12-13).

Coleman (2004) illustrates how white civility extends into “the idea of progress” which is “deeply informed by a central value of whiteness”. Elaborating on the work of Dyer, Coleman highlights how “enterprise is often presented as the sign of White spirit – that is, to a valuation of energy, will, discovery, science, progress, the building of nations, the organizing of labour, and especially leadership” (Coleman, 2004, p.12). He concludes that Canadian civility is both a “contradictory and ambivalent” project that “organize[s] a diverse population around the standardizing ideals of Whiteness, masculinity, and Britishness” (Coleman, 2004, p.10).
As a technology of white supremacy, civility enlists projects like the literary projects that Coleman explores but also circulates in other ways. Thus, it is not surprising to find civility listed in The Toronto District School Board’s (TDSB) (2008) Code of Conduct Policy. The TDSB lists *civility* along with respect and responsible citizenship as the standards from which to measure ‘good’ student behaviour. If white hegemonies are attached and associated with civility and other concepts such as superiority, cultivated polite behaviour, and class, what then signifies the space outside of civility where student conduct and behaviour is evaluated? How are racialized students’ bodies educated, graded, evaluated, and measured in accordance with white civility? Is it a simple process of perpetual failure and or eviction? Is the racialized space outside of civility also the space outside of responsible citizenship, and what are the consequences of falling outside? For the TDSB the failure to self-manage and self-discipline is marked by, detention, suspension, and or expulsion. But more importantly, are some bodies already suspended, expelled, and humiliated from the space of white civility and thus the school body? And how is this lived, experienced, performed and enacted.

For Coleman civility moved into a practice by becoming “more than something a person or culture simply *had*” (italicized in original) and more of “something that person or culture *did*”. He tells us:

> The idea of civility as a (White) cultural practice not only made it a mode of internal management and self-definition, because it distinguished the civil from the uncivil, but it also made it a mode of external management, because it gave civil subjects a mandate for managing the circumstances of those perceived as uncivil (Coleman, 2004, p.12- 13).

The practice of civility then requires the constant ‘discovery’ of the uncivil and the bodies to civilize. This necessary requirement or mandate suggests a number of things about the ways that humiliation operates in schools. For one, I would argue that civility forms a critical part of our education system, that is, civility is an explicit form of expected and developed student
behaviour. In essence the association between civility, progress and whiteness demands that a particular type of colonial racialized violence be performed and pleasured in order for whiteness to continue to be linked to civility and superiority. While Coleman (2004) attempts to rescue the concept of civility from white dominance in the final part of his paper, it is worth returning to the concept of stickiness and associations to examine how histories of violence are not only discursively associated but circulating through affective forms (Ahmed, 2015; Hook, 2005). Coleman (2004) suggests that the term can stand outside of the history of colonialism and violence that gives it meaning and that somehow we can begin to attach social justice and principals of equity to civility and cast out the violence from where it was formed. To pretend that the violence of civility can somehow be dislodged from the concept is in my opinion similar to the neurotic amnesia that’s associated with the right to educate under the guise of civility, that is, in removing or refusing to acknowledge that civility is linked to colonial violence we run the risk of reinforcing or naturalizing white dominance. Following Ahmed’s arguments (2012) on the ways good feeling are mobilized in response to anti-racism, “which allow progressive whites to be happy with themselves in the face of continued racism towards racialized others” (p.171) we can ask what is produced when civility becomes aligned with social justice. Does not aligning civility with social justice allow social justice to “become another white attribute or even a quality of whiteness” that as Ahmed (2012) reminds us in regards to the move to appropriate anti-racism where “[a]nti-racism even becomes a discourse of white pride” (p.170).

In terms of the classroom, I would ask what types of acts and performances are justified under the guise of maintaining civility in a classroom? My brother and I were recently talking about his experiences in school. He was remembering that he got into a heated discussion with one of his favourite teachers about Canada. It seemed that his critique of Canada’s colonial system was
challenging the teacher’s assumption about what a refugee from El Salvador should be able to speak about Canada. He kept bringing up the language of gratitude as a way of silencing my brother’s critique. In the end, because my brother did not display polite civilized behaviour and assume a position of quiet gratitude, the teacher told him that he should go back to El Salvador and get shot. He was in his teens when he heard this violent speech directed at him from an educator who he admired and it was shocking for us to think an educator could utter a violent wish towards my brother’s body because he was not performing himself as a civilized subject grateful to the state for granting him citizenship. This movement towards the justification of violence is what is at once always embedded in civility. In addition, this sense of gratitude is also linked to ideas around the model minority that is expected to perform gratitude for being allowed citizenship. This gratitude also comes with ideas around criticism as ungratefulness and in this case rudeness, and lack of civility is punishable with violence.

Razack’s (2004) study of peacekeeping exemplifies the potential risk of removing the history of violence from civility. Razack traces the function and operation of the concept of peacekeeping as a tool for the production of Canada as a middle power, and as a peacemaking nation. Razack (2004) explores how peacekeeping is attached to good will, humanitarianism and these attachments serve to enable any type of violence in the name of good will and peacekeeping. Peacekeeping, like Coleman’s (2004) attempt with civility, is removed from the violence that it enacts. So that even in cases where the violence of peacekeeping becomes public, the construction of Canada as peaceful and benevolent nation remains intact. A peacemaking mission remains discursively and affectively attached to peace regardless of the violence that it perpetuates. Indeed this suggests that exposing the violence is not enough. The very mythology of peacekeeping, and the pleasure of being an upright citizen, part of a peacekeeping and righteous nation, is a powerful affective technology that effectively utilizes violence to then
cleanse itself from it. In addition, Razack notes how the concept of peacekeeping is inextricably linked with civility and like Ahmed’s (2015) suggestion, this concept is sticking to other concepts to circulate powerful meaning making systems. Razack tell us:

peacekeeping... secures, an international sphere that positions some actors as more civilized than others, some states as having the right to intervene and discipline others... What the hegemonic peacekeeping story accomplishes is to turn these conflicts into attributes of Third World states and Third world peoples, qualities that are somehow innate and unconnected either to colonial histories or to contemporary Western dominance (Razack, 2004, p.46).

The right to intervene and discipline others is also the right to humiliate in the name of civility. In the same way that violence is justified against nations which are understood as underdeveloped, punishment is performed onto the student who is evaluated as underperforming or misbehaving. The associations attaching civility with peacekeeping and the practice of civilizing or humiliating are also felt practices of shaming. The violence is justified as a kind and noble pursuit that will civilize under the guise of ‘for your own good’ or ‘for the good of society’. By virtue of being the target of humiliation the racialized student exists outside of white civility. Students are made to believe that if they work hard enough they will find success. However, civility requires the recognition and the humiliation of the uncivilized Other in order to construct itself as civil. School policies demanding for civility suggest that the uncivilized will have to be consistently constructed in order for civility to have any meaning. Humiliation thus functions as the performance that makes these distinctions real and embodied. And I would argue, the civilized subject is constructed and reconstructed through repeated acts of routine humiliations onto racialized bodies.

Thus humiliation and the circulation of shame are part of a colonial legacy that continually scripts our lives. These associations are not merely imaginary, social or discursive. They function as bodily symptoms: tightening muscles, elevated heart beats, body heat and sweat, tightening
So that colonialism and racialized violence comes to operate like “reflexes” through the body’s automatic response system (Hook, 2005).

III. Affective Technologies

Unless we are able to grapple with the vicissitudes of such modes of affective formation, and indeed, with how these modes come to be operationalised as technological elements of broader procedures of governmental logic, we fail to appreciate the tenacity and slipperiness of ‘whiteness’ in this (post) Empire era (Hook 2005, p.19).

For Hook “affective technologies arise “as an extension of hegemonic forms of whiteness’ (2005, p.3) In his paper, Affective whiteness: racism as technology of affect, Hook (2005) explores racism within the context of “contemporary forms of ‘white terror’” which he understands as the “distinctive array of racialised violences, exclusions, and modes of governmentality that are predicated on the protection and expansion of what Hardt & Negri (2000) call Empire” (2005, p.2). Hook argues that white terror functions at the level of the individual, the social, and the nation. Hook tells us that “[w]hite terror in its more spectacular and material varieties should be linked to more seemingly mundane versions of whiteness,” and by that to include the “insidious modes of internal reflection and identification” that at times are situated as distant or separate from the “domain of actual material divisions, violence and subjugation” (Hook, 2005, p.3). These hegemonies of whiteness for Hook are not necessarily overt, but “exist in tacit forms, in extension and variations of historical forms of racism with which they share many of the same patterns of identification, aggrandizement, objectification and exclusion” (2005, p.3).

One of his underlying concerns is with the ways that affective forces are conducted through the social field by various political interests. Hook explores how these affective forces and movements arise out of an investment in hegemonic forms of whiteness and “operate in dispositional arrangements of ambiguous causality and agency” (2005, p.3). Another critical
concern for Hook is with the attachments that these affect technologies have with place and in particular the way that they “bind ‘subjects and communities to the questionable ‘substances’ of place, history and nation” (2005, p.3). This concern with the productive and constructive role of certain affect-positions in relation to place and nation exposes the way that affective attachments function through divisions and exclusions. As Hook notes, “This is an oblique mode of ontological production able to affect passionate attachments – and equally powerful divisions – that often speak louder than words and that typically feel as if they predate the immediate history of either subject or community” (2005, p.3).

Hook exposes the “histories of privilege and dispossession to lingering hegemonies of benefit and exclusion” (2005, p.5). These lingering hegemonies of benefit and exclusion are intimately physical sensations, and like Farley (1997) suggests (in his analysis of race pleasure) they are experiences not of an abstract idea but of an embodied experience. The “tacitly coding for whiteness, or, if not ‘whiteness’ per se, then something like it, such as the artefacts and values of a less inclusive time and culture found in the valorization of Englishness” are lived and pleasured in the body (Hook, 2005). Hook’s analysis of white hegemony aligns with Ahmed’s (2015) concept of stickiness and explores white hegemony through a mathematical understanding of whiteness as implicitly moving and shifting, and operating as a common denominator. This shifts the analysis of affective technologies from what they are generating to how they are at once already attached and working through each other. The common denominator does not require articulation in discourse. It exists within disparate concepts like civility, entitlement, and national identity and the feeling states associated with these concepts, such as the pride of being civilized or civil.
Here it’s worth revisiting a common classroom practice, sometimes understood as objective and disconnected from racism or oppression. What I’m thinking of is the grading system and in particular the way in which whiteness is at once already associated and attached to concepts such as excellence, superiority, progress, and advancement, to the extent that the area of superiority encapsulated by the letter grade A or A+ is closely attached both materially, symbolically and affectively with particular representations of whiteness. This sense of belonging to superiority is coded not only within the grading system but within the system of knowledge that degrades and ignores or caricatures the histories of African, Asian, Latin American and Indigenous peoples. A felt attachment also organizes the ways that we measure and find excellence in students. In terms of the school environment, the task might be to explore some of the ways that white hegemonies operate through the concept of ‘responsibility’ and ‘respectability’. A body not able to perform “proper” discipline by conforming to the school schedule, to wake up early, to finish homework on time, and arrive on time is to some extent a body existing outside of respectability. It is read as an unruly body. However, when we look carefully at what else the schedule is based on we can see that it is attached to a capitalist system that demands that the body adhere to the dollar value attached to time and efficiency. A body unable to perform in a timely matter is also a lazy body, a degenerate body, and these points of identification are deeply racialized and pleasured attachments for the one doing the measuring.

For Hook the common denominator operates through ‘rhetorical discontinuity’ so that what occurs may not be “an outright attack on minorities, but a rather more insidious process of disqualification in which such subjects come to be marginalized relative to a proliferation of discourse celebrating the norms and ideals of a privileged majority” (2005, p.6). This common denominator operates and moves through subjects and governmental discourse in a way that the
agent is critically disguised and displaced. Hook hypothesises, “do we have a ‘sharing relationship’ of sorts on our hands here, a constant ‘de-agenting’ pattern of circulation that ensures that neither singular subject nor isolated instance of governmental discourse can be identified as the agent solely responsible” (2005, p.9). So that, as Hook suggests, an attempt to apprehend the movement of affective technologies between subjects and nations, often yields only ‘para-racist’ formulas, that is, in line with Augoustinos et al., argument on race talk, what is being generated at the specific moments may not fall into the category of overt or outright forms of racism (2007).

Hook questions how we might come to understand and grasp the logics of government found in “rhetorics of belonging” “tacit codings for race”, and “alignments with historical discourses of national identity”, and the “fierce individualisation of these sentiments” (Hook, 2005). When what is being generated holds little resemblance to the systems of violence that inform and support it, how do we trace the “affected and stylised inscriptions of such logics” (Hook, 2005)? How do we process the “powerfully personalised patterns of meaning, loss, value and threat” (Hook, 2005) that contain hegemonies of whiteness as a common denominator? Although no one single value or term spells out this denominator, for Hook, exclusion and belonging are certainly core parts and members of its functionality.

The theoretical frameworks in this section were selected to exemplify the ways in which I will be examining humiliation and shame in the classroom. My hope is that by exploring the embodied exclusions and the pleasures of shaming we will come to see humiliation as productive violence. The study of humiliation demands new ways of understanding school violence but in particular new ways of grasping affective technologies in relation to white dominance in schools. In order to better understand disengagement, we must examine how the violence of humiliation is
silenced and authorized. This work, therefore, attempts to forge connections across different theoretical approaches in order to examine humiliation as more than an incidental disciplinary practice and rather as a technology of colonial violence. I suggest that coming into a collective awareness of the ways in which colonial shame is used to circulate a felt racial hierarchy is a necessary part of our anti-oppression and anti-colonial praxis.
Chapter 3
Methodology and Methods

Intuitively, I sought to embark on this work collaboratively from the start because even though I experienced the isolation of being humiliated in school in my own separate body, I also experienced it as a member of a family, and as a member of a marginalized and racialized community. I was born in El Salvador but came to Canada as a child with my family during the war\(^5\). We came to Canada as political refugees. Although there were clear similarities between my experiences and the experiences of my siblings – it was never the same for each body - each one of my siblings was targeted in unique and yet similar ways. When we were children, racismo was offered to us by our parents as a way of understanding our experiences in school. Racismo as a tool to fight back, as a way of resisting, and as I mentioned in my introduction, it was that initial language and storytelling that prompted a collective awareness of systemic racism. What that means is that even before I embarked on this research, the experiences that shape the analysis took place within a community. Because of our shared experiences, it was my intention to look for ways to collaborate with my siblings on this study, and to look for ways to expand the ways that we understood the impact of racism on our separate but interconnected bodies, as individuals, as a part of a family, and as part of a racialized community.

I think we were easy targets. We were poor. Refugees. We had ugly clothes. Our father was suffering from PTSD\(^6\). We came to Canada with nothing, no savings, no bank accounts, nothing. Even though my mother and three of my siblings are light skinned, we are still seen through the lens of a collective Browness, read as a group of refugees from El Salvador. And so with nothing of value to barter we were easy to shame (Carranza, personal narrative).


\(^6\) Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Part of my process involved what I have previously mentioned, which is the process of sharing my writing on shame and humiliation with my siblings and opening up discussions about our shared experiences and understandings. In addition, we also wrote together and often shared what we wrote with each other. I was struck by the reach of this community based methodology after reading Weatherbee’s Master’s thesis (1995). Weatherbee explores masculine working class subjectivity through narrative. In his work, he develops and explores the process of working with an autobiographical methodology that incorporates a family narrative. Weatherbee (1995) identifies, early on in his process, the desire of writing as both a desire to explore working class subjectivity and as a desire to move away from that subjectivity and by extension, a desire to move away from his family. “There is a relationship,” writes Weatherbee, “between my current investment in ‘escaping’ the working class through academics and painful memories of my family that I took/take to represent all working class families: I wanted/want to get out of my family and that meant to me, the working class as a whole” (1995, p.4).

I see a lot of similarities in our work. I am utilizing personal narrative and collective storytelling (Baskin, 2009; Mahoney, 2007) as a methodology to explore shame both individually and collectively and I am starting with family narratives of shame. More importantly, I also share Weatherbee’s investment in escaping painful memories, memories of childhood experiences of shaming. In reading Weatherbee’s (1995) work I remember that I started this work with a desire to understand disengagement in school for Latin@ youth in Toronto because I wanted to understand what racism had done to me. I was curious if research could be transformative, and in that, I was invested in doing work that could move me away from shame and what I feared it

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7 I utilize the concept of lower and upper class as a way of underscoring the construction of a hierarchical space.
revealed about me. In a sense, like Weatherbee (1995) who sought an escape from working class subjectivity, I was invested in making a new self that could be free of the experiences of racism.

However, unlike Weatherbee (1995), rather than a movement away from the family that shares these experiences of shame with me, this work, and my desire, are grounded in community social change. Even though, I was ashamed of the ways my body had internalized racism, I am/was also invested in fleshing out how shame is/was constructed and operationalized, not as a way of escaping my family or the race that is inscribed onto our bodies, but as a way of escaping the hold that shame had on us. In addition, I was and am invested in creating work that enables marginalized communities, and in particular, racialized youth, grappling with similar issues, to develop tools to expand the discourses available to us, in order to make sense of our subjectivity in relationship to the colonial structures that continue to impede on us.

Writing this thesis has been difficult, for many reasons. Some of which involve the limitations and challenges of doing community research with family (which I will explore shortly), others involve the investment in doing research that aims to be transformative. In this way, it is difficult, first, because this core group of people that form the base of my community/family have always been a part of my work and in my mind, they are the intended readers of this thesis. Second, because in some confused idealism, I am trying to write a thesis that will finally heal us or at least loosen the power that shame had/has on us. And lastly, because I am aware of the multiple ways that writing and in particular academic writing impacts the work. And because I am thinking of you Leo, who shuts down every time I try to read you an academic text, and of you, Angel, because you say that you don’t like school, and to you, Liz, who searches for a language that won’t talk down to you, and I’m writing this for me, for all the parts of me looking for ways to understand how shame continues to circulate through my/our bodies, and because I
want something that will help all the other Mari’s and Juan’s trying to understand disengagement in relation to violence in school and the sanity of pulling out of toxic spaces. And of these investments, I am most aware of my desire to support other families and communities struggling to understand the confusing and ghostly (Gordon, 2008) apparitions of racism in Canada.

And because when I remember how tiny we were, how desperately we were trying to belong, to find a home, to find friends, to feel welcomed, I want to carry us out of those spaces, and into spaces of love. Because I can’t change the past, because I can’t go back and take us out, because I couldn’t speak loud enough then, because we couldn’t make anyone understand, I’m offering this work with the knowledge that I am forever changed after engaging in this work with you, and that coming into a collective awareness disrupts shame in fundamental ways. No longer in the quiet silence - the space within – I feel colonial shame differently. It is in essence less my shame, as it resides in pages and is held in attention by different people - it feels less mine and this opens up a space to feel it differently, and to look carefully at what it has been doing inside me/us all this time.8

I. Specific Procedures

In developing a methodology for this research project, I thought carefully about the way that violence extends into research practices, where more often, marginalized and racialized voices are sought as objects of study rather than as knowledgeable research collaborators. My work is grounded in community based learning that centers the voices of the collaborators in this study

8 In utilizing italics in this section I am intending to signal a change in voice. This is important for me because it brings attention to the writer’s voice in this dissertation both the variety of voices and the quality and tone of shifting voices and what they accomplish. In italicizing this voice I want to signal the ways in which this voice and way of writing approaches a sense of self that feels vulnerable and exposed. This is different from the section, for example, on the theoretical frameworks where I feel completely hidden or masked. In chapter five I pick up on this focus on voice.
and evolves from a process of co-construction and co-creation. My questions concerning the bodily aspects of racism and oppression and the way they circulate and take meaning through experiences of humiliation and feelings of shame are grounded in what Dei (referenced in Dei et al., 2004) defines as an “action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and interlocking systems of social oppression” (p.4).

Community based methodology combines anti-colonial research practices with a collaborative storytelling methodology (Baskin, 2005; Mahoney, 2007) both in an attempt to disrupt the researcher participant dichotomy, and emphasize a collective process where the lived experiences of oppression matter and center the work (Dei et al., 2004). My process is also guided by an anti-oppression anti-colonial lens that intends for research to be meaningful for writers/collaborators and for the communities that we are connected to. It is also work that focuses on the value of shared community knowledge and co-constructing of research and stories by recognizing that research is most helpful when it does not begin from a deficit model but from one that recognizes the strength and resilience of communities. This also means paying close attention to the process of sharing the knowledge with communities and collaborators, and thinking critically about the audience and ways of presenting the work that can be accessible to collaborators and partners in this research, as well as readers both outside and inside the academy.

With this emphasis I have also remained reflective of the limitations of doing collaborative community work, and to be open and honest about the power that I hold as the writer of this dissertation. And the unequal power relations involved in the process of doing collaborative work, from the position of an emergent researcher that intends to publish the work as a dissertation, the choices I made in terms of choosing which pieces to include, and what areas to
focus on and analyze. With this in mind, I took several steps to ensure that writers/collaborators were aware of the limitations of this collaborative work, and the ways in which I would be entrusted to bring our work together. That said, in some ways, this written dissertation is only one representation of this work. The creation of a POC (people of colour) writers’ collective that was born out of the gatherings for this research also represents another expression of this work. In addition, I also tried to ensure that collaboration offered writers opportunities to learn new skills in freewriting and workshop facilitation. This for me was an important part of the work as it ensures that collaborators/writers also benefited and continued to benefit from writing collaboratively on issues related to racial violence and shame.

By acknowledging this support, encouragement, and communal space, my intention was to explore ways of honouring and respecting this process of knowledge gathering that in my mind develops as a result of community struggle and for the benefit of transformative social change. Because I was interested in working together and co-constructing and co-interpreting the knowledge that was gathered, my methodological concerns aspired towards a process of collaboration that seeks to respect the vital role of the storyteller, the community of listeners, and the process of gathering our stories. These concerns were focused on not merely sprinkling marginalized voices into this study in order to authenticate my research, but grounded this work in an ongoing critical engagement with the ways that structural systems dehumanize and oppress marginalized people. This was done by creating spaces where we could collectively gather and

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9 Pages on Fire is a collective made of writers of colour who strive to confront the various forms of isolation, negativity, and oppression that are prevalent in our modern era using the power of creative writing. We facilitate engaging and inspiring writing workshops, organize, host, and perform at various events in the local arts scene, and maintain an online + social media presence where we connect with like minded people and publish original content.
explore shame stories and contextualize the circulation of shame and pain and how it is held in bodies.

The community based methodology that grounds this work is based on principles associated with anti-colonial community research, where the emphasis is on a collective gathering and interpretation of data, a production of knowledge that is directly useful to collaborators, and most importantly, where results are applied directly to the community with an aim at co-creating transformative social change (Baskin, 2005; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; marino, 1997). In thinking about my collaborative storytelling methodology, I took heed of Baskin’s (2005) critique of the ways in which collaboration is “mis-used in the context of research with Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous researchers” (p.174). She argues that “the term is often used by some Western researchers who simply want to be seen as "politically correct" or as a way to gain access into an Aboriginal community” (Baskin 2005, p.174). She further argues for research that is rooted in the struggle for decolonization and suggests that research that is “not contribut[ing] in some way to these objectives is not worth doing” (p.174).

Reflecting on the ways in which collaboration could be defined as meaningful for participants and grounded in a struggle for decolonization, I thought carefully about authorship and about the process of gathering and sharing knowledge. Baskin’s (2005) outline of guidelines for engaging in Indigenous research, although meant for large scale research projects with research teams, poses very important ethical concerns and tensions for the emergent researcher embarking in community research. Referencing the work of Battiste & Henderson (2000), Mihesuah (1996), Tuhiwai Smith, (1999), Weaver (1997), she summarizes the following guidelines:

(a) that research findings be the intellectual and cultural property of the community;
(b) they be of direct benefit to families and communities; that
(c) they transfer skills;
(d) that they include mechanisms for continued gains and work;
(e) that findings be reviewed to ensure accuracy; and
(f) that community members be included as co-authors in publications.

(Baskin, 2005, p.174)

These parameters pose some challenges and unique tensions for an emergent researcher aiming to bridge these guidelines with the production of a dissertation (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Despite the initial phases of this work, which involved the transferring of skills in freewriting, and workshop facilitation, and the aim of directly benefiting families and racialized youth, by collectively gathering and sharing shame stories, the writing of a dissertation dictates a transition from a collaborative model into an individual process of writing. This tension allowed me to examine the limits of collaboration. I thought a lot about how do I present a collaborative community based writing research project? Because the choices at this stage did not involve the collaborators of this study, I struggled with concerns around authorship and the power of representing and authoring this work as an individual and making choices as to what to include and exclude. I say this because although this work involved collaboration, collectively gathering and sharing shame stories, collaborative analysis and reflection, and because I thought carefully about co-construction and co-creation of narratives, this final phase of bringing these elements together into a cohesive written structure involved solitary practice, individual choices and decisions, and negotiating with a very particular academic writing format and style and the move from we to an I. I was also aware how much I resisted this last stage of the work and how different it might have been if I had the resources to pay collaborators to continue to work with me through the final stages of this work.

While I tried to incorporate collaborators into this process by sharing some of the insight that arrived at this later stage (from writing the dissertation) and by talking to them about some of the processes by which I would organize this dissertation, there were limited opportunities for
collaborators to engage in this process. This I understand to be because it would require more from them then they are able to commit to, at this time. But also because I believe that the initial gathering and sharing of shame stories and the insights we gained collaboratively were in a lot of ways meaningful and involved the sharing of knowledge.

II. Collaborative Storytelling Methodology

The collaborative storytelling methodology is an attempt to blur the lines between participants and researcher, in part, to subvert the privilege of the academic voice, but also to open up the space for collaborative gathering of stories. This relies on a process of co-creation and co-construction of narratives, and aims at an equitable and community oriented processes of research gathering grounded in anti-colonial methodologies. As a result, my aim in utilizing these methods is to offer a space for mutual and collaborative reflexivity. In doing so I reflected on the different types of processes and writing styles that might offer collaborators a rare opportunity to explore past experiences of humiliation, within a group or in partnership, and most importantly gain new insight.

With these considerations in mind, this study also borrows elements of memory-work (Haug, 1987). Memory work, as originally conceived by Haug et al. (1987) was explicitly feminist and involved an all-women research collective formed around issues of female sexualization. As noted by Crawford et al. (1992) the strength of the method lies in its ability to reveal how we play an active role in the processes by which we internalize social constructions of feminity even when this involves subordination (Crawford et al., 1992). Since its development, memory work has also been utilized in mixed gender research within a variety of fields to uncover socialized belief systems and the way that they form and are taken up by individuals.
My research differs from Haug’s (1987) formulation in several ways. While Haug’s method was utilized in a collective of female researchers, this study took place, at times, with mixed groups of people who had an interest in exploring race and racism in writing but did not necessarily identify as researchers or as students within the academy. Through careful exploration of the guidelines for conducting a memory work study, I reconstructed a method that included the use of free writing, elements of storytelling and reflexive narrative analysis.

Although not confined to specific guidelines of memory-work, Mahoney (2007) utilized collaborative storytelling to develop fieldwork relationships that complicate boundaries between “friendship and fieldwork practices in an effort to intensify” the storytelling (Mahoney, 2007, p.578). His methods moved away from the separation between researcher and participants and encouraged collaborators “to construct with (their) own languages of intimacy and locate themselves interpretively in their own narratives” (Mahoney, 2007, p.574). Like Haug et al. (1987), Mahoney emphasized the role of research collaborators as both narrators and storytellers throughout the project. As Mahoney states, his aspirations were “to define these endeavours as story co-constructions between myself and the study collaborators; and by doing so, to create opportunities for more democratic ways of knowing between us” (Mahoney, 2007, p.575). In the following section, I will talk about the ways in which I made use of these approaches.

III. Writing methods

I began thinking of experience as stories we tell about ourselves the day I overheard my four-year-old son talking to himself about his life as he played alone… I have since forgotten that specific installment… but not the scene… Yet when I look on this scene, I am not only reminded that the past intrudes itself on the present. I am convinced that the child now a young adult, is more likely to recall episodes from his autobiography than any part he played in transforming events into his experience (Brodkey, 1996, p.150).

I have a similar experience of narrating an experience and of the discovery of the discontinuity between narration, self, and experience. A number of years ago in a creative non-fiction course,
I wrote about a really painful experience. I remember that as I was writing I deliberately altered certain sections of the story because, at the time, they were too painful to write and because there were bits of the story that I was unwilling to share with the class. After a few years, I went back to the story, remembering that there were things about the story that I had consciously altered. What I discovered shocked me. The written text as experience was exactly what I remembered. The bits that I deleted and altered were gone. I couldn’t remember what I had tried to keep from the page and classroom. I think that was the first time I had touched on the power of the written word: I remember that I crafted that memory, but now I don’t remember the experience before the written narration.

In Narrative analysis (1993) Riessman notes the ubiquity of narrative. She tells us, “telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity” (p.3). Yet, despite this ubiquity, she goes on to caution that not all experiences are turned to narratives. Noting that even though “respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, self and society” some events are not only difficult to narrate but equally difficult to speak. Referencing the work of Herman (1992) on trauma, she notes how an “ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from awareness” (Riessman, 1993, p.3). Exemplifying how certain experiences become unsayable, Riessman suggests that rape survivors “may not be able to talk about what they experienced as terrorizing violations because others do not regard them as violations” (1993, p.3). In a sense, this is about the interplay of power and discourse that make certain things sayable at a given moment and time and the ways in which violence becomes normalized through these practices (Foucault, 1995). There was something about the bits that I kept from the story that made them unsayable at the time.
Brodkey (1996) examines the sexual harassment narratives written by undergraduate and graduate women at the University of Pennsylvania. She echoes this sense of silencing or shift in narration. Brodkey notes how “women students position themselves in their narratives as disinterested bystanders” even though they are speaking of experiences that happened directly to them (1996, p.116). For Brodkey (1996) the narratives reveal that “women are trying to reproduce a version of scientific discourse by positioning themselves as narrators who, have transcended their bodies” (p.118). What this reveals is the ways in which these written narratives follow and conform to the scripts available to women researchers within the academy. Brodkey argues that as a result a pedagogical project that “interrogates the ways in which the sexual harassment narratives undermine the transformative potential of narration by effectively withdrawing their narrators from the conversation” is necessary (1996, p.115-116).

My reason for asking collaborators to participate in written form is informed by a similar imperative. One that echoes the ways in which trauma is often silenced and where what can be said and or narrated at a given time is organized and impacted by complex systems of power (Foucault, 1995). Because of my interest in community based research and the co-construction of knowledge, I wanted collaborators to collaborate by writing themselves into this dissertation. As a writer, myself, I knew the difference of participating in an interview where my voice and thoughts were recorded and what it felt like to bring these ideas together into a written text. The inclusion of the written text from collaborators inadvertently ended up excluding some people that did not want to write and felt fear around writing. So while I thought the written text would facilitate a more collaborative inclusion in this study, in some instances, it resulted in people feeling a lot of anxiety about participating and exploring their experience through writing.
In order to respond to writers and their expressed fears and hesitations around writing, I gave collaborators the opportunity to participate without writing and instead to participate in conversations and discussions. I wanted collaborators to have the opportunity to talk and write openly about their experiences of racism and racial violence and where possible to explore these experience through writing. In addition, I thought about the ways that academic text operates through social and discursive practices that often privilege white and middle class voices and silence writers of colour, and so I wanted collaborators to have work authored within an academic text. In light of this, and because of my experience in creative non-fiction courses, as often, the only person of colour, I wanted to create writing spaces where the experience of racial violence and oppression was not marginalized, but rather a central part of the writing space. This entailed the opening up of deliberate genuine spaces where collaborators could explore not just a racialized identity, but the intersectionalities of our identities.

This inclination towards writing was not developed collaboratively, and as I have mentioned, there were some collaborators that resisted writing. They spoke about the fear of writing and the ways in which writing felt like something they could never do, or didn’t want to do. Although I gave collaborators a chance to participate without writing, the emphasis on producing a written text was there and some collaborators spoke about how this made them feel uncomfortable and anxious. To examine this collectively and whether there was a relationship between fear of writing and shaming, I asked questions about the fears. And instead of thinking of writing as something that is done by a professional writer or by someone who has mastered all the rules, I asked collaborators/writers to engage in short bursts of freewriting.

My understanding of freewriting was shaped by my experience in writing workshops where freewriting is often used as a prewriting technique often to help writers overcome writer’s block.
and or paralyzing self-criticism. The technique involves writing continuously for a predetermined period (in our case 10-15 minutes). If the writer can’t think of anything to write the writer is asked to write whatever words come up, and if nothing, blah blah blah or I can’t think of anything. Emphasis is placed on the idea of finding flow in the writing and producing uncensored raw material or of becoming aware of the fears and anxieties that one may be experiencing in writing. During freewriting writers are usually asked not to focus on grammar or spelling and usually not to preplan what they will write (Goldberg, 2016, p.8).

Natalie Goldberg, an author with over 40 years of experience leading writing workshops and retreats, tells writers that “[t]he basic unit of writing practice is timed exercise” (p.8). She gives the following guidelines:

1. Keep your hand moving. (Don’t pause to reread the line you have just written. That’s stalling and trying to get control of what you’re saying.)
2. Don’t cross out. (That is editing as you write. Even if you write something that you don’t mean to write, leave it.)
3. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar. (Don’t even care about staying within the margins and lines on the page.)
4. Lose control.
5. Don’t think. Don’t get logical.
6. Go for the jugular. (If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.) (Goldberg, 2016, p.8)

In our sessions, I utilized some of Goldberg’s (2016) guidelines for timed freewriting: (1) keep the pen moving for the allotted time, (2) no editing, don’t worry about spelling, punctuation and grammar, and (3) try not to think and plan what you are writing. While I did ask writer’s to follow the energy, I did not suggest for writers to go for the jugular or to lose control. Cognizant that writing about shame and racism is already emotional, I wanted collaborators to exercise a form of self-care and to tread carefully towards shame. This meant that writers decided how far they wanted to explore shame and to have control and support of the value of knowing when to stop. In thinking about freewriting in relation to some of the ways in which writing is taught in
classrooms, what stood out for me was the emphasis on writing as a set of rules to be conquered or absorbed. Writing as a practice for connecting with the self, and as a practice for narrating and examining our experiences, with or without the need for perfectly polished pieces, rarely comes up in the teaching of the craft.

Writing as the practice of writing yourself and your experience into the world was some of the ways in which we framed the practice of writing. In talking about that I introduced the work of Junot Díaz (2007, 2013) and his writing on representation. Díaz states:

> There’s this idea that monsters don’t have reflections in a mirror. And what I’ve always thought isn’t that monsters don’t have reflections in a mirror. It’s that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves. And growing up, I felt like a monster in some ways. I didn’t see myself reflected at all. I was like, “Yo, is something wrong with me? That the whole society seems to think that people like me don’t exist? And part of what inspired me, was this deep desire that before I died, I would make a couple of mirrors. That I would make some mirrors so that kids like me might see themselves reflected back and might not feel so monstrous for it (Díaz, 2014 October 17).

In order to accommodate collaborators, and to provide different opportunities to write, this project incorporated three types of writing spaces: (1) mixed gendered writing groups for people of colour, (2) in person one-on-one writing sessions, and (3) private writing sessions where collaborators wrote on their own and either submitted writing to me through e-mail or text messages or sent me commentary on the writing process and the experience of writing. The incorporation of one-on-one writing sessions was used with writers who were not comfortable writing and discussing in large groups and preferred a more intimate process of gathering shame stories. Private writing-sessions were used by collaborators who were busy and could not participate in one-on-one writing sessions or in the group sessions. Writing prompts and free writing were utilized in all writing sessions with freewriting sessions running for approximately 10-15 minutes at time.
Mixed group sessions were composed of 1-6 sessions and involved two different groups of writers that met consistently every week for six sessions. One group extended our meetings to ten sessions because they wanted to continue to meet together, and then continued meeting together for a few months, and then members of this group formed a writer’s collective that is currently running their own writing workshops and creating spaces to talk openly about oppression and racial violence. Collaborators on this study were reminded at all times that although they had chosen to participate in this study which involved writing and discussions on shame and racism they could choose not to share their writing, not to participate in discussions, and to discontinue their participation from this study at any time. Shame was not defined but was framed through some of the experiences that I shared through personal narratives. This emphasis on choice to share writing was instrumental in helping writers gain control of the experience and trust the writing process.

I adapted the following guidelines of memory work from Onyx and Small (2001), who in turn summarize the writing approaches developed by Crawford et al. (1992). Phase 1 involved the use of a prompt and then utilizing freewriting to produce writing (sometimes memory) related to the prompt. While in the initial sessions prompts were developed collaboratively, as the research progressed specific prompts were utilized as pre-set prompts. In Phase 2, we talked about the process of freewriting and how people experienced it. At this point, if people wanted to share their work they were invited to do so (either in the one-on-one or group setting). Common social meanings around racism and white supremacy were discussed. Feelings associated with racism and oppression were talked about openly. Phase 3, as outlined by Crawford et al. (1992), which involved gathering the elements of each phase, and bringing them into discussion with the theoretical underpinnings of this research and with the wider academic literature, took place.
within the mixed groups, and in the one-on-one sessions with some of the writers, but was limited because of time constraints and did not take place with writers that participated in the process by writing on their own. In the case where collaborators were interested in this process and expressed an interest in continuing to discuss the work and the theoretical framework then these discussions took place often informally.

IV. Writing Prompts

As I mentioned, writing prompts became a critical part of writing sessions and discussions. During the first writing sessions, *racism feels like* was utilized as a writing-prompt. My aim in utilizing the prompt was to facilitate a way of writing about racism and shame as it is experienced through feelings and emotional states. “What is the taste?” I would add, during sessions, “The sound, the feeling -- the smell? Think back to an experience…” While this was effective with writing I did with my siblings and writers who have experience discussing issues of race and racism in Canada, it was not very effective with writers who expressed a very limited engagement with these issues. Contrary to my aims, most of the writing, from writers with limited understanding of systemic racism, resulted in abstract and theoretical writing that lacked concrete details and or personal experiences. The discussions that followed these writing sessions also tended to be largely abstract with writers positioning themselves as existing somewhere outside of racist experiences. It was difficult to integrate shame and humiliation into these discussions. Reflecting on this and the discussions that we had around racism most of the collaborators that wrote abstractly also spoke about not having opportunities throughout their

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10 Not the case for all writers.
academic careers or in their personal lives to speak and reflect on racism and how it impacted them.

From the discussions in the writing groups, it was clear that writers positioning themselves as existing outside of racism were mobilizing very specific definitions of racism that excluded their experiences as racialized people in Canada. In part, this was because of the ways in which they had been trained to understanding racism, but I would suggest that it may also reflect some of the investments that Brodkey (1996) noted in her work on sexual harassment. While writers defined racism through individual overt acts, they may also have been “reproducing a version of scientific discourse by positioning themselves as narrators who, having transcended their bodies, are then entitled to use their dispassionate observations” (Brodkey 1996, p.118). By positioning their racialized bodies as existing outside of racism, they were also attempting to position themselves as the white dominant subject that does not experience race as racism. So that if writer’s came with a critical awareness of racism then the prompt allowed them to go back to an experience. For writers who positioned themselves as existing outside the experiences of racism and oppression it was difficult to write about racism as more than an abstraction.

In response to these reflections and writing processes, I wrote my own poetry and shame stories to use as prompts during subsequent collective and one-on-one sessions, and as previously mentioned introduced writing from other writers. My hope was that a personal shame story might prompt others to feel comfortable exploring shame and as in the experiences with my siblings help us to contextualize shame. Some of these stories, I had already started to write as part of my dissertation. They were deeply painful and raw but they contained the hurt of humiliation and shame that I wanted to explore collectively. These were stories that I had rarely talked about or discussed with others. I noted how, in group writing sessions the prompts
(personal shame stories) created raw, personal narratives, poetry and discussions from the group that brought the collective experience of racism and oppression to the forefront. As one writer noted in our discussions, “The voice in the story is gentle and honest. The voice tells me that I can trust the writer. It tells me that if you are willing to share yourself like this then I know I can trust you.” I can also assume that because shame is usually not spoken about openly then my experiences – in written form and read aloud to others - disrupted the silence around shame and prompted others to explore their experiences of racism through the feelings of shame. Also, the specific use of freewriting facilitated a very honest exploration of shame.

V. Study Participants/Collaborators

Including my siblings, 24 people collaborated in this research. One person withdrew for personal reasons. My siblings who contributed to this project are three males and two females. They all attended elementary school in Canada. While five of my siblings were born in Latin America, my youngest brother was born in Canada and my youngest sister came here when she was one. In addition, five people participated in private writing sessions, while two separate groups of writers gathered and wrote weekly for 5-10 sessions. Both groups were made up of predominantly racialized youth, with one person identifying as white. All were under the age of twenty-seven. In total, one person identified as gender queer and another as fluid, the other collaborators were composed of sixteen women and seven men. Twenty-four of the participants are racialized. The research collaborators that were invited to participate in this study found out about the study either by word of mouth, contacts in the community and/or through social media.

11 J Kaur, personal communication, 2016
Responding to the high rates of school disengagement within specific communities in the Toronto, I specifically invited individuals who identified as members of Black and Latino communities for participation, but not exclusively, as participation was also sought from people of colour interested in exploring race and racism through personal writing. In addition, collaborators were predominantly young adults who attended primary and/or secondary school in Canada.

*Writing Groups:*

In addition, the shame stories that I explore in this dissertation were also shared within two writers’ groups made up of emerging and published writers.\(^{12}\) Pieces of creative non-fiction were brought to these writing groups for thoughts, comments and editorial feedback. The writing groups formed as a result of creative writing courses that we attended as students, at the continuing education department at The University of Toronto. Organically, students taking the writing courses ended up forming writing groups. After the courses were completed we spoke about wanting to continue working together in a writers’ group with the intended purpose of continuing to support each other’s work by workshopping our written pieces with each other. Specific shame stories were then carefully workshopped within these groups. The discussions and comments in these workshops also contributed to significant editorial changes, but more importantly, they became part of the strategy of developing a dissertation that could reach a broader audience. The demographics of these groups are racially mixed with one group made up of three white women and myself, and the other made up of four people of colour from diverse backgrounds three women (including myself), one man, and five white women. These writers

\(^{12}\) It is important to note that although there are a few writers that identify as academics the majority of writers (within the writing groups that I am part of) do not identify as academics.
are not included in this study as participants, as their participation was strictly in the editing process of text. The editing process with these writers groups involved discussions and personal observations and insights from the writers as well as reactions to the piece. I make mention of these groups here because of the important role they played in terms of reading my writing and giving careful and though provoking feedback that at times dramatically altered the direction of the personal narrative pieces that I have included here.

Bringing elements of my thesis to writers’ groups has proven to be a unique and powerful method in the writing and editing of this dissertation, as it has expanded the readers of this work to reach beyond my discipline and committee members and allowed for the incorporation of feedback from creative non-fiction writers both within and outside of the academy. This process of bringing elements of my dissertation to be discussed and carefully edited by different groups of writers, made me reflect critically on accessibility, narrative and voice in very particular ways.

In practical terms, this meant thinking about the accessibility of my thesis to people without a background in critical race or anti-colonial theories. Most importantly, it made me think about how shame stories affected people who read them. This is exemplified by a woman of colour in one of the writing groups who said: “The writing affected me. It made me think about me and the details and the stories that I try to hide from myself.”13 In the discussion, the writer spoke about the ways that shame had impacted her life and the ways in which she edits shame from her stories and erases parts of herself. This type of honest and open feedback helped me to remember the powerful effect that shame stories have on people. This speaks to the pedagogical implications of shame stories. Where safer spaces to explore shame have been negotiated

13 Writer’s group discussion with J. Kaur, 2015.
collectively, shame stories have the potential to transform ways of thinking and feelings about oneself. In analyzing the importance and power of groups in the recovery process Herman writes:

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity (Herman, 1997, p.214).

VI. Integrating the voices of the collaborators

In the process of writing and sharing the shame stories with my siblings, I decided to go back to the writing and look for ways to integrate feedback, insight and discussion into the original shame stories. I wanted to create a broader narrative around collective shame, and the ways in which it impacts listeners and tellers. For example, in the story, *Like You Remember*, which is in chapter seven, I read the initial story of me being laughed at in class to my brother. Then, once we spoke about the story and the shame, I went back and integrated some of his responses into the original shame story. I also integrated into the story some of the insights that came out in group conversations. The first part of the story in chapter seven, the discussion of intent and Juan’s response, is an example of this process of integration. It’s also a way of capturing a shame story in the process of being told and to incorporate the listeners and their feelings of shame into an older memory. This process of integrating thoughts and discussion into an older narrative incorporates the elements of co-construction and collective gathering of shame stories that are so fundamental to this process. As a result, a broader narrative is constructed from which to gather and examine colonial shame.

In these collective writing spaces, we were able to share our common pain and trauma and most importantly write ourselves as subjects of our own stories. The transformative possibility in
these spaces can be found in the possibility of understanding our social reality from our own narratives and the opportunity to experience ourselves and our knowledge as valuable. The framing of our narrative as valuable is not because it aligns itself with a particular theory or because it displays awareness and coherency in its written representation, but because it positions marginalized and racialized voices as knowledge holders, storytellers and most importantly, as writers, capable of writing their complex experiences of racism into the present.

VII. Towards an embodied writing process

This is me stopping to attend to shame because I am breathless. Can’t take a step forward. I feel something is squeezing my throat. It feels like I can’t swallow, heaviness on my head. A headache is slowly forming from the right temple. Heavy legs. Throbbing feet. Thoughts say, this whole thing is terrible. It has to be deleted (Journal entry, March 31, 2016).

Over the years that I have explored this topic, I have written, unwritten, and rewritten this part of the work so often that the written text has become integral to my process of writing a dissertation on shame. I say this at the same time that I am aware of how much time I spent not writing this part of my dissertation and disengaging from this work. Initially, I was unaware of what was causing this tension and the shifts from feeling engaged in writing to feeling overwhelmed. But it was through the awareness of a body disengaging that I became aware of the contradictory elements involved in this phase of writing this work.

How do I present a collaborative community based writing research project? I say this because although this work involved collaboration, collectively gathering and sharing shame stories, collaborative analysis and reflection, this final phase of bringing these elements together into a cohesive written structure involved solitary practice, individual choices, and negotiating with very particular writing formats, rules, practices, and styles associated with academic writing.
Because these choices did not involve the collaborators of this study, I struggled with concerns around authorship and the power of representing and authoring this work as an individual.

In trying to develop a way of working through these tensions, I was interested in Roxana Ng’s work (2000) on embodied learning where she explores journal writing and other forms that “enable the practitioner to be both the active subject and the objective observer of her thought process” (p.187). In part, I wanted to bring mindfulness and critical reflection not only to (a) the body that writes shame and (b) the bodies that collectively gather shame stories, but also to (c) the emerging researcher that gathers and authors a community based research project on colonial shame. As previously mentioned, this transition from collective to individual work was not easy for me. Bringing a critical awareness to the tensions of doing this work collaboratively, and reflecting on the moments where collaboration shifts allowed me to make space for the moments when I felt discouraged and exhausted. As a result, I had to find ways of allowing the disengaging body to be part of this work and to notice that often, disengagement came up in these tensions. This meant understanding that while my focus is on shame stories and how to flesh out what was/is being inscribed onto bodies, another part of this work involved a critical engagement with collaborative methodologies and transformative social change. While collaboration flowed in the writhing groups, discussions, and sessions, the translation of this work into a dissertation created moments of paralysis and self-doubt. Incorporating these embodied states as a part of fleshing out these tensions was particularly helpful. At this point, I was able to notice how I physically responded to reading particular texts, and also how writing in disembodied voice created a sense of strength at the same time that it created distance from shame. I argue that these insights would not have been possible without the use of freewriting, as a tool for engaging with the body that writes shame.
In writing this thesis, and finding the lingering pain and shame of early childhood experiences of humiliation, I not only realized the far-reaching power of humiliation but also, was able to reflect on the ways that I utilize denial as an attempt to distance myself from shame. I didn’t want a body that could not be controlled, a body that shook in public, a body that feared speaking up in class. In fact, some of my initial reasons for doing this work, and examining racism in school, came from the awareness of this fear of classrooms and a desire to control my body. In reflecting on these fears I realized my desire to have a body that did not fear speaking was also rooted in a fear that the shaking body revealed my inadequacies as a graduate student, and also, my out-of-placeness in academic spaces. In connecting with my body and its fears, I realized how much I wanted to be rid of the shaking body, as a practice of self-making, and in particular as a way of becoming the “good” student or the “right” body that could not be shamed. In doing this work, and writing collectively, and talking about shame with others, I was able to see some of the commonalities of experiences, and most importantly arrive at an awareness of shame – its power – and an understanding of the intimate relationship between systemic racism and shame.

The anxiety that I had around classrooms was also the anxiety that I had in writing this dissertation. These feeling states are in a lot of ways rooted in the way shame is operationalized to construct the “right” writing practices and the “good” writer and these positions are often deeply racialized and classed.

In designing the collaborative methodology, I thought a lot about writing and the ways in which writing practices and rules affect racialized bodies. In part, I thought a lot about how particular writing practices associated with “good” writing are used to shame writers who do not have access and knowledge to these literary practices and styles and are not able to reproduce them. In part, this also led me to think a lot about academic writing and the form, style, and voice that
is usually associated with “good” academic text. It made me also think about the ways in which I responded both emotionally and physically to the task of writing this work as an academic text.

In the process of doing this work I also enrolled in a variety of creative writing courses that allowed me to gain a deeper awareness of writing techniques and styles. In the process of gaining access to these highly stylized practices, I reflected on privilege and access and who has access to these advanced courses. I also gained insight in the ways shame circulates in these writing spaces, in particular, the ways in which writers and instructors take up writing and writers that display misuse or discomfort with basic grammatical rules and spelling. I noted how often writing was evaluated and measured not on its content or meaning but on its conformity and representation of these often racialized and class based written practices. As I’ve mentioned, asking writers to engage in freewriting and to throw out the rules of punctuation, spelling and grammar allowed me to think about the ways in which these practices are used to shame and create fear around writing. I utilized freewriting because it specifically challenges assumptions about writing as a display of techniques and focused more on the impact and insight of the work. My hope was that I would be able to integrate some of these practices into my own process of writing the dissertation.

In one of the first creative writing courses that I enrolled in, I was asked to write about an experience in school. I went home and the story poured out of me. I noticed later that there was no need to plan or think about structure or language or to try to recall an experience. It was a process of just sitting down and writing the memory that came to me. This experience was strikingly different from the writing that I had been doing academically on shame, not just in style, but its physicality. During the time that I took this course I was grappling with writer’s block and fear of writing. Every time I sat down to write an academic paper, I felt nauseous or
physically heavy with fatigue. With personal narrative, although at times I cried as I wrote the memory into text, I also felt the ease of writing. In writing personal narrative I experienced myself as a writer. In contrast, while attempting to write academically, I experienced myself as not knowing how to write, as someone that needed to pretend to know or aspire to approximate a writer.

At first, I didn’t know what I would do with the stories or how I would incorporate them into this work. Often they poured out in written form, almost as complete pieces. It felt like I couldn’t type fast enough, like the memories were waiting to be written. I was surprised about this, first because I wrote about stories that I had attempted to forget, and had never written about before or dared to even speak about, but also because how difficult and laboured academic writing had been. I wondered what my body was communicating about form and language. What did it mean that the writing of the memories in creative non-fiction seem to flow out of the body, but attempting to analyze the text and to connect it with anti-racist work and critical race theories within traditional academic text felt exhausting and laboured. What did the experience of writing in the two forms reveal?

Despite my early experiences of talking about racism with my siblings, initially I felt a real risk in sharing these shame memories. At the time, I felt really vulnerable about exposing these memories attached to shame. At the same time, there was in me this real desire to share these written stories and intuitively the first people I had enough courage to share them with was with my siblings. In reflecting on this fear of sharing shame, I feel the risks were in the fear of re-experiencing shame. Often, when I read these pieces I would start crying in front of them. I noticed later that while my siblings responded with empathy and kindness, I responded with admonishment and anger at my pain. In part, I think that I wanted to know shame in order to
destroy it and I hated every time the stories and reading and sharing of stories revealed how vulnerable I still was to these past experiences of shaming.

In the process of sharing these shame stories, I reflected with my siblings on this desire to be over the pain and this sense of emotional pain associated to racism as a marker of weakness. I realized I was attempting to deny that racism had harmed me. I associated the harm with weakness. Sitting with those reflections collectively prompted others to talk about their own fears of ridicule and humiliation. These early experiments with sharing and talking through shame created a communal space for a collective examination of shame and racism. My stories of humiliation and my feelings of shame opened up spaces for different types of conversations, rememberings, and feeling states. Together we spoke about the kinds of identities and body-selves constructed and co-constructed through shame, and arrived at an understanding of shame as part of both our individual and collective experiences. These insights would not have been possible without the process of looking at shame collectively. As Herman, in her work on trauma, writes, “… the group as whole has a capacity to bear and integrate traumatic experience that is greater than that of any individual member, and each member can draw upon the shared resources of the group to foster her own integration” (1997, p.216).
Chapter 4
Memory, Narrative and Storying Shame

I find the question of memory and narrative a critical one. To be able to go on without cynicism and terror is what freedom perhaps means. It cannot be a “correct” or fixed memory with a final closure but perhaps the play of possibility can in a certain way offer a way of groping through the many layers of skin and bone. … Everyone knows that growth comes out of decay, everyone that is except perhaps those of us who get trapped in the decay and die with it (H. Ford-Smith, personal communication, 2011).

The relationship between memory and narrative strikes me as something at the heart of shame. For me, one of the important questions, which I kept returning to in the process of doing this work, involved whether shame could even be written when the dynamic of shame is to force us into hiding it. And to this I would add, if it could be written what types of processes and situations might contribute to a closer approaching to shame in narrative. What types of audiences/readers might lead to a transformative collective gathering of shame stories and what types of environments might end up contributing further to harm? The second line of inquiry involved more broadly, questions around how shame is mobilized to maintain racial boundaries and hierarchies and specifically how it is mobilized around white literary writing practices in school. In this chapter, I want to explore the relationship between shame and writing, not just the act of attempting to narrate shame stories, but specifically the impact of colonial shame on writing.

To be able to go on, as Ford-Smith suggests in the opening quote, without terror and to dig through memory and pain without collapsing, is also a question of how a dissertation on shame stories and in particular, how colonial shame stories can be written and shared within a white institution. It involves the question of how to explore colonial shame stories in a dissertation when shame inspires a movement away from itself, and as Ahmed (2015) reminds us “involves
an impulse to ‘take cover’ and conceal (p.104). In writing shame stories I have tried to examine the ways in which humiliation maps colonial shame onto bodies and the impact that it has on the formation and deformation of bodily and social spaces (Ahmed, 2015). My intention is to examine shaming in schools, not as a consequence of individual malice but instead to examine shame as a technology that is implicated and bound to the organization and regulation of bodies. This examination also involves a reflective inquiry on the process of writing a dissertation and the ways in which the imagined academic audience influences and impacts the body of the author and the text.

Although shame stories are in no way unique to my body or my experiences in schooling, by focusing on my shame, I am also not suggesting that these are the experiences of all readers or that all racialized students in Canada share these specific experiences of shaming. Rather, what I am alluding to is how the physicality of colonial shame is implicated in state making and how it circulates between and through bodies. In exploring the scripts embedded in shame, I am interested in highlighting shame as part of a colonial project, one that is bound to bodies, and the ways in which bodies are gathered and educated.

Of course, to some extent, the terror of going on that Ford-Smith alludes to, lies in the threat of reliving shame, through the attempt to write it. It lies in the fear that we may get trapped in shame or fall apart. For the years that I have been trying to set shame down into stories, I have felt lost, like I’ve been grasping in the dark. Sometimes, I only realize that I’ve stumbled onto something when the feeling states of shame rise like open welts from within my body. Once I have come close to shame, I have wondered what to do with the mess it makes of me and this is the tension inherent with working with shame: The closer I come to approaching shame the more I want to conceal it. The closer I come to feeling it in the writing the more I have an urge to
delete it from this work. This move towards concealment is as Ahmed (2015) suggests embedded in the dynamic of shame. In some ways, it illustrates the power of colonial shaming, in that it continually looks for refuge in a hiding place and moves outside of visibility. Ahmed (2015) tells us:

The subject may seek to hide … turn away from the other’s gaze, or drop the head in a sensation more acute and intense than embarrassment. In other words, the shame feels like an exposure – another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful – but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject to turn away from the other … (p.103).

In the attempt to turn away from the other the individual encounters the shame as existing inside and as part of the self and attempts to turn away from the self as a way of removing the shame. As Ahmed tells us, in the turning and rejecting of the shamed body, “I feel myself to be bad, and hence to expel the badness, I have to expel myself from myself” (Ahmed, 2015, 104). These attempts to expel “myself from myself” are lived in conflicting and complicated states that in the process of writing this dissertation on shame, for me involved states of disassociation, numbness, disengagement, and chronic fatigue. And as Ahmed reminds us, it’s not surprising that prolonged experiences of shaming and the attempts to expel self from self, “can bring subjects perilously close to suicide” (2015, p.104).

Shame stories left me feeling naked and exposed. They made me wonder what I was doing writing about shame memories for my dissertation. While writing this chapter, a memory comes back to me. I remember a moment in grade eight when our teacher, Mr. Smith14, asked our class to write about our most embarrassing moment. And I – the good student – went home and wrote fearlessly about shame. The next day Mr. Smith needed to step out of the class and wanted to

14 I use pseudonyms when talking about experiences in school to move away from the idea that racism and oppression is perpetrated by individuals and thus to avoid the figure of the racist, “as the one that can be charged and brought before the law” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 150).
leaving us entertained. He asked us to pull out our homework from yesterday. I went through my bag and pulled out my shame story. Once I had it on my desk I realized that I had made a mistake. Not only had I written too honestly about shame, but when I looked up I noticed that all the other desks were clear. When Mr. Smith saw my homework he asked me to stand up in front of the class and read it. He stayed in class long enough to hear my first sentence: My most embarrassing moment...

I remember standing in front of the class and feeling everyone’s eyes on me. I remember knowing that I did not want to read and relive shame in front of all the students. But I did. I read the whole piece because I didn’t know how to sit down and disobey. The impact of sharing my personal shame was all the more terrifying because I knew I was the only one sharing. Everyone’s shame was tucked away nicely as I stood there exposed. I know this story comes back for a reason in the moment that I am examining the risks and vulnerability of writing a dissertation on shame and the impact of the audience/readers on the ways in which shame is circulated and held in space. When I think of you, the readers/witnesses, taking up this text, and imagine a faceless and indifferent group of unknown academic readers, I have a similar feeling of exposure: All your shame stories are tucked away nicely as you read this and I feel as if I am risking safety by allowing you access to my shame.

Spoken aloud and in groups shame stories have the power to electrify a room: shoulders hunch as bodies shrink into themselves, eyes dart side-to-side not knowing where to look. “The very physicality of shame – how it works on and through bodies – means that shame also involves the de-forming and re-forming of bodily and social spaces” (Ahmed, 2015, p.103). A felt border is drawn between the shamed body and the bodies witnessing and circulating shame. At times, it has felt like I am taking a room of spectators to stand inside me. I feel this rot seeping out of me.
and multiplying itself and I lose track of my attempts to contextualize shame in and through colonial violence. Shame feels alive - a disembodied presence - and I am fearful that I am giving breath to something that I do not understand and have no control over. I have stopped the telling of a shame story midway terrified of what will unfold if I continue. There is again that question of safety and a sense of falling apart or into pain or a sense of recirculating shame by sharing a shame story. And a real risk of getting locked in a perpetual attempt to expel the shame that is trapped in me. In that process, because shame has sprouted roots in the deepest parts of me, I start to get caught up in the attempt to “expel myself from myself” (Ahmed, 2015, p.104).

I am most aware of the embodied experience of writing shame when I think about the impact of the audience on the writing process. When I imagine my siblings reading this dissertation it is different than when I imagine myself writing towards an imagined white institutional space. As Ahmed notes (2012) “[t]he institutionalization of whiteness involves work” (p.39). There is no question that academic text is historically rooted in the language practices of white, straight, academic men and that these practices are normalized as race-neutral language practices. These practices are embedded in both overt and subtle exclusionary practices, the work of institutional whiteness, that make specific dialects and language practices ‘wrong’ and of lesser value in relation to what is acceptable academic text. The experience of writing towards this imaginary and symbolic whiteness impacts me emotionally and physically. It impacts how I write and how I feel about writing. It is a felt practice that is most importantly lived within and through affect, and is shaped by my early experiences of learning to speak and write in English. Ahmed writes, “[c]omfort is about an encounter between bodies and worlds, the promise of a “sinking” feeling. If white bodies are comfortable it is because they can sink in to spaces that extend their shape” (italics in original, 2012, p. 40). As part of the grammar of colonial violence, affective
technologies of shaming move on and between my body through subtle literary and writing practices that maintain white institutional spaces. English as a second language speaking bodies, Third World accented bodies, racialized bodies, refugee bodies and foreign bodies experience these practices as a cacophony of felt borders that you are consistently brushing up against. And there is terror, fear, and shame functioning as gatekeepers of these academic spaces.

Ahmed (2012) writes of an experience in the academy. She tells us:

I am speaking of whiteness at a seminar. Someone in the audience says, “But you are a professor,” as if to say when people of color become professors then whiteness of the world recedes. If only we had the power we are imagined to possess, if only our proximity could be such a force. If only our arrival could be an undoing. I was appointed to teach “the race course,” I reply. I am the only person of color employed on a full-time permanent basis in the department. I hesitate. It becomes too personal. The argument is too hard to sustain when your body is so exposed, when you feel so noticeable. I stop and do not complete my response (p. 43).

This sense of not being able to language racism in institutional spaces exemplifies the ways in which whiteness silences and moves through bodies. In the process of writing a dissertation, I have consistently negotiated with this whiteness as audience and whiteness as felt border.

Writing towards an imagined academic audience that I not only feel disconnected from also places demands on the work and requires that I language my work in specific ways. “I have to consider”, my supervisor alerts me, “what the text needs in order to guide the reader along.” The reader is not my committee, nor the collaborators of this study, not my family, but a faceless imagined academic audience that may find some of these arguments unclear that may question some of my assumptions around colonial shame that may spot my run on sentence and intuit my outsiderness and feel they need to question this work on the basis of worth. Because I have no illusions about you and the impact you have on this work and the ways in which you are implicated in the writing of this text, then, I wonder, what do YOU need in order to follow
along? What do you need to know? And what comprises have I made along the way to include your imagined gaze and to meet your approval?

I asked a friend who is also a writer to speak about writing towards an imagined white audience. Kaur explains how the process of writing for a prestigious white literary magazine impacted her and her writing. She writes:

The essay took fourteen weeks to write – word count around 2,400. At the beginning I was just building on the framework of the essay and trying to understand what the essay was about for me (what I didn’t realise at the time was – it wasn’t me I was thinking of but the readers of the magazine) but as the weeks went by there was something else happening that I didn’t pay full attention to until I spoke it out loud. The essay sucked the life out of me; it was getting to a point where I had no energy left; it was as if the essay had depleting my energy. I suffered from lack of sleep I’d go to bed and toss and turn – unable to switch off from the essay (three or four times I fell asleep at the wheel when driving to work). When I gave myself a break and watched TV to relax, my mind would wonder to the essay and I could feel as if my chest was tightening – a couple times I actually thought I was having a heartache, and I’d think whether I’d be alive in the morning. I started to smoke a lot more than normal, increased alcohol consumption (some weekends I would have beer for breakfast), started to eat unhealthy food more than normal, stopped going to the gym and around February I started to have a rash and also my hands and feet started to itch.

I feel like I’m shutting out friends and family – I don’t have the energy or the desire to really make an effort anymore. I don’t want to go out; I don’t want to make an effort with anyone. I know I’m avoiding people, trying to think of excuses why I can’t do things. I’ve worked hard to start to feel like I’m worthy - but I let the essay in away destroy nearly all the hard work I put into me. Basically I’m back on the road of hating myself. Also I spent a lot of time crying because I felt like a failure as I wrote the essay.

I submitted the essay on the 11th of April – I haven’t look at it since because I feel ashamed and embarrassed by the essay because I know my written language is different from what they publish and then I start thinking how crap my piece really is. I can’t stop thinking and wondering if they have read it and what they thought about it. Even though I submitted the piece it still is having an emotional and physical impact on me– and now I worry I may not have it in me to come back and be me again.

The essay was about finding my voice, what the essay did was take my voice away. I haven’t really been able to write since then and I’m terrified that the magic I felt in my voice might have gone for good (Kaur, personal communication, 2016).
What is striking for me, in Kaur’s reflection, is the physical and emotional toll involved in the attempt to fit into this imagined white literary space and the ways in which it is lived within bodies, as experiences we must get over, or as experiences originating in us. The circulation of colonial shaming is a felt experience without direct origin or perpetrator. It reveals some of the ways that affective assemblages circulate and maintain white spaces. After reading my friend’s response I wondered about the physical labour of attempting to write towards an imagined white audience, and for the first time acknowledge the toll it has had on my body, the process of seeking approval and acceptance through and within a white institution. A few minutes later, Kaur calls to talk again about her piece and tells me, “I won’t harm myself just to be published”. And I wonder if there is a way to avoid this harm.

In terms of the written text, it forces me to think critically about voice, grammar, syntax and how in my own writing I am attempting to normalize and accept particular writing patterns in order to write an acceptable dissertation on shame and how this process impacts me. Similar to Kaur, there is emotional and physical harm in these attempts. In thinking critically about narrative and form, I return to some of the observations that I highlighted in the methods and methodology chapter (chapter three). I wondered about poetry and prose and what rhythm, repetition, and tone could approach and express that traditional academic text might restrain. I also started to question how academic text already presumed to be speaking to a particular audience and how this relationship between writer and reader impacted the way I was writing shame. In thinking specifically about writing towards or for a white institutional space there was for me a perpetual engagement with the feeling of out-of-placeness and the tension of feeling marginalized and silenced. As Ahmed tells us, the experience for people of colour in white organizations is the
experience of being treated “as guests, temporary residents in someone else’s home” (2012, p.43). It is not the movement of ease of inhabiting home and comfort.

At one point I try to explain to my Mom the impact of the reader on the writing process. I tell her to imagine that I was writing these shame stories for our neighbours (people I only say hello to on rare occasions) and how they would automatically impact what I would write and how I would write it. She shutters acknowledging that there is no way that I could write so close to the bone if they were my intended audience. This example allows me to approach some of the feelings that circulate in the writing of this text. By this I mean, specifically, this stage of bringing the different elements of this work into a body of writing that could resemble a traditional thesis. I don’t think I am exaggerating if I say that I experienced the writing through fear, and with the fear, that I and the work were not good enough, and/or not worthy of residing in academic spaces. These feeling were consistent despite the fact that my committee was made up of people that not only encouraged a different engagement with shame but were enthusiastic and supportive of this work. This is, I imagine, the felt practices embedded and implicated in maintaining white spaces and involves the physicality of colonial shaming.

The processes of writing this dissertation involved writing with these feeling states and borders and bringing awareness to how they manifested in the/my body. This allowed me to think critically about the relationship between the author and the reader and led me to think about how this relationship was connected to shame, as well thinking to examine the relationship between the shamed body and the witness. Because the witness is such a critical part of the dynamic of shaming, in that the witness threatens with the possibility of recirculating shame, then who I imagine is reading my dissertation on shame impacts how I write and what I write. If I imagine a faceless academic audience with the potential to witness and re-harm then I am guarded in how I
approach shame. And this guarding produces subtle and overt shifts in language, often, without conscious awareness. I know I am experiencing it when I can’t write and when I refuse to set words down or fear writing, but I am less aware of the subtle ways it impacts and takes shape in language I set down into written words. In thinking critically about audience and form, I found Ta-Nehisi Coates’ book (2015a), *Between the World and Me*, useful. In it, he uses the structure of a *letter* to his son as a framework for exploring the physicality of race and racism in America.

He writes:

> I write you in your fifteenth year. I am writing you because this was the year you saw Eric Garner choked to death for selling cigarettes; because you know now that Renisha McBride was shot for seeking help, that John Crawford was shot for browsing a department store. And you have seen men in uniform drive by and murder Tamir Rice… And you now know that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body… Turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations (Coates, 2015a, p.9).

In an interview on the CBC Coates spoke about the decision to use the structure and the form of a letter as device to write differently about race and racism in America and how the form allowed him to think critically about the audience/reader (Coates, 2015b). Coates noted that what the letter allowed him to do was to write in a very direct way and “be very clear about who [he] was talking to” (2015b). In addition, he notes how directing this letter to his son, as a technique, also allowed him to explore racism through emotion and to say things in the book that he had not been able to say before. This for me highlights the point that I have been trying to make in terms of thinking about the impact of whiteness as reader or audience and in particular how it impacts anti-racist and anti-oppression academic work. How does the whiteness as reader/audience already impact the thesis? For Coates, the letter form allowed a particular engagement with emotion and the emotion itself became a way of narrating the physicality of racism from father to
son. As Coates noted in the interview, one of the main ideas in the book is that racism is a physical experience for Black people. “It is visceral it is not theoretical or philosophical. It has to do, at every step, with you trying to find ways to safeguard your body” (2015a, p.9).

Once in a creative writing course, I received a comment by the instructor in regards to my work. She wrote, “Remember that writing involves a relationship between the reader and the author”. In her comments, she intended to critique the vagueness of my piece. In the text, I had written about the end of a relationship using abstract language and complicated metaphors. The instructor had no idea what I was writing about and questioned why I was writing about something and not letting the reader in. I didn’t know then, but now I would suggest that the reader/audience was impacting me and the writing, both physically and emotionally. This is also a question of what can be said/written at a given moment in time and how what is written and erased or silenced from the written text is mobilized through affect. Was it that I didn’t trust the reader with my pain or my full story? Was it the fact that the entire class was made up of white people and that, all year, I had been hearing stories that made me feel alienated and silenced? Was that I had been attempting to memorize language practices and grammatical rules that made me feel foreign and out of place? I wrote but all the details about the relationship were erased from the text and I wasn’t aware that I had done this. In fact, I had to reread the text a few times before I could admit to myself that most of my story had been erased.

In moments when I have found the writing of this work challenging, I returned critically to engage with the idea of audience, who do I imagine is reading this? In thinking about audience I am also thinking about form. Like Coates, I find that there are some writing forms that allow for a different engagement with emotion and different structures and forms that allow a different voice to emerge. While the letter form that Coates uses and directs to his son allows him to write
in a voice that speaks about personal experience and fear in a home/familiar voice, for me, I found that centering the audience as a community of people of colour and specifically as writing towards my family served as a powerful technique. In Coates (2015) work, I see a similar sentiment. There isn’t the sense that he is writing for whiteness as audience, the work assumes that you, the reader, not only care that Eric Garner was choked to death for selling cigarettes, but that the death and the impunity of the violence impacted you profoundly. I find this powerful in terms of thinking about the experience of writing, and the ways in which writing a dissertation is a felt practice either between a community of your peers and a space that you have always felt associated with or an experience through waves of unbelonging. Is it too obvious to say that writing towards a space that has historically taken up racialized bodies as objects of research impacts me physically, emotionally and spiritually?

The fatigue of writing towards whiteness as audience is an everyday experience for people of colour in white institutions. Ahmed (2012) writes about the physical wear on the body, and from her experience as a person of colour in white institutions, the everydayness of these encounters. She writes of her experience at a conference on sexuality, “that was a very white event” and adds that “this is not unusual for academic events in the United Kingdom whiteness is norm” (p.36). She notes that as a response to the white event a black caucus is set up “by someone in the organizing team that was an activist of color” (p.36). Although the space was set up for all participants of color, ten people turn up with four people identifying us white. Ahmed notes how white people justified their occupation of this space set up for people of colour, through different motives. Ahmed tells us that she “had expected this time and space to be a chance to talk to other people of color. It felt as if the one space we had been given – to take a break from whiteness – had been taken away” (p.37). She tells us that eventually the white people left the
space, some left aggressively, and some reluctantly and others with expressions of care. After the last white person left, Ahmed notes how “the black caucus became itself, such joy, such relief! Such humor, such talk! What I learned from this occasion was the political labor that it takes to have spaces of relief from whiteness” (p.37). Ahmed contends that “[w]e might become even more aware of whiteness as wearing when we leave the spaces of whiteness” (2012, p.36).

In reflecting on the impact of the imagined audience on the writing process, the text, the body of the writer and in particular, my anxieties around producing a legitimate academic text, I experienced a significant shift from seeing my feelings and physical responses to writing as originating from my own psychological states to an understanding of these anxieties as affective technologies of racism (Ahmed, 2015, p.9). This awareness altered the way I approached the desire to expel shame and expel “myself from myself”. Drawing on Ahmed (2015) I would argue that these anxieties around writing are the very boundaries that allow us to distinguish between ourselves, objects and others within the academy. It is through these feeling states that we can untangle the processes of world making and the “very surfaces and boundaries that allow all kinds of objects to be delineated” (p.10). In one example, Ahmed illustrates how “it is through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape” (p.24). She writes:

I stub my toe on the table. The impression of the table is one of negation; it leaves its trace on the surface of my skin and I respond with the appropriate ‘ouch’ and move away, swearing. It is through such painful encounters between this body and other objects, including other bodies, that ‘surfaces’ are felt as ‘being there’ in the first place (Ahmed, 2015, p.24).

I spend an afternoon reading academic theses in the library. My fingers brush up against the pages, eyes noting the red and black hard covers, body engaging with the explicit and implicit writing practices, the rules, the voice of the writers, and I feel lethargic and anxious and pull
away. The proximity between surfaces between my body and the object of the theses is also an encounter between my body, the library that holds the academic texts, and the University that allows and disallows work to become a part of its holdings. It leaves its trace on my surface (Ahmed, 2015, p.24). And hours later I am struck with the feeling that I will have to remake myself in order to produce a text like the ones that I have been holding. Using an analysis of emotions as affective technologies of racism, I argue that the anxieties around producing an academic text are not private states that originate in any one individual. These anxieties not only circulate within the encounter between object and bodies that make up academic space but they are also encounters that generate the boundaries that set aside “good” writing and “acceptable” academic text from bad and (un)academic writing. These encounters and the “intensification” of affective forms that circulate in these encounters are also coated in rich histories of domination and practices of exclusion and inclusion that maintain and generate the academic space (Ahmed, 2015, p.24). I would argue that these affective forms have a direct impact on the pervasiveness of disengagement by racialized students from academic spaces.

Full disclosure:

I am not a writer. I am not a writer. I AM NOT A WRITER. I am not a writer. I AM NOT A WRITER!
The writer is defined not just as the one that writes. Otherwise, why else, would people of colour consistently proclaim (in most of the writing workshops that I facilitated) that they are not writers? It begs the question who is the writer? What is writing? And how is this place policed and secured? And because writing is so intimately tied to literacy, that is reading and writing define literacy, then how do people come to identify as non-writers. This afternoon I talk to my friend about this. She is one to always align with the non-writer identity and to state that writing is not for her. When we talk about all the writing she publishes on social media, we wonder why that does not qualify her as an author or as a published author. We talked about all the insightful pieces that she produces on Facebook and why she is able to write on these platforms at the same time as she sees herself as not a writer. I suggest that the identity of the non-writer is a powerful instrument of domination that is embedded in the association of writing as a white upper class dominant space/practice, and secured and generated through the circulation of shame. In some ways the use of creative spelling, the informality of language practice and the associations she has on social media allow her to write without having to identify herself as a writer. In brushing up to specific writing spaces, she and the writers in my workshops fear and distance themselves from the identification and association to writer/writing.

To better understand each other, is the reason given, for the over determination of grammatical rules, punctuation and reliance on spelling as the cornerstone of literacy. Yet, over the last three years that I have been facilitating workshops, I noticed how shameful it is to not be able to define the verb in a sentence, and to mistakenly produce an improper, incomplete or run-on sentence. These writing practices are maintained through systems of shaming and are negotiated differently depending on space. In her book, Eats, Shoots & Leaves, Lynn Truss (2006) illustrates the implicit circulation of shame in the production of writing, but also the felt borders
around knowing and producing language practices and rules of grammar and failing to produce them. Through her critique of writing mistakes, she highlights the things that are in some ways invisible to me, a working class racialized woman. And slowly the ways in which my writing reveals my outsidersness to this literary club. In explaining the use of grammar, Truss utilizes the following example: “No dogs please,” (2006, p.81). I read the sentence as dogs not permitted. I don’t need the comma to understand the intended meaning. I also feel the red hot shame that comes with not knowing how to make the sentence “right”. But Truss, explains, “only one person in a thousand bothers to point out that actually, as a statement, “no dogs please” is an indefensible generalisation, since many dogs do please, as a matter of fact; they rather make a point of it” (p.81). There are countless examples in the book that speak to the one in thousand club, a wink to them, that they understand each other, and then shame directed at the ones who like me are staring at the sentence trying to figure out what makes something wrong, especially if I can understand it.

That these rules, as well as the definitions of a verb, are available online and to some extent accessible, and yet, that so many people have such a hard time learning and applying these rules brings up for me important question about operation of shame. In fact, the circulation of colonial shame is intricately bound to these rules. Shame for not knowing. Shame for not learning fast enough. Shame for never being taught. And its opposite. Pride for knowing. Pride for being part of the club. Pride for having access to places that will teach you these rules and for spaces that will reward you by publishing and circulating your writing. Pride for exhibiting your knowledge of these rules as practices of race making and pride for being able to use these practices with ease to denote your status to a club and move through academic and learning spaces with ease.
I accidently stumble on this mark of outsider status in Brodkey’s (1996) book, Writing Permitted in Designated Areas only. In an essay, Brodkey highlights a narrative from a student and identifies that the writing displays “difficulties with language” (1996, p.122). Because of these displays Brodkey surmises that the author is most likely “foreign”. I sit up and lean into the text to see if I can read the foreignness. Are there obvious difficulties in language that would lead me to a similar assumption about the status of the writer? After a second or third reading I find missing prepositions, and I wonder if I, a person that has grown up the majority of my life in Canada, and received all my education in Ontario, if I would display similar difficulties with language that would designate me as a “foreign” student, and/or outsider? And how it feels for the language to betray me when I think I must belong somewhere if not the place where I’ve lived all my life.

The following is an excerpt from a journal entry that in a lot of ways illustrates this process of engaging with the feeling of being an outsider to academic text:

More than procrastination, my body is running. It’s not just that I feel I can’t write this because I feel I don’t know what I’m doing it’s that I can’t do it this way. It’s that this way of framing the argument makes me feel like I am lying, mostly writing in a voice that is not familiar, attempting to incorporate thoughts to validate what I am saying (Journal entry, nd).

I breathe into these feelings. I can feel that I don’t want to do this, not because it’s hard or because it feels foreign but because it feels like it is cutting off pieces of me, or saying the only way to do this work is to shut parts of yourself up. The mistakes reveal something about me, not just grammatical errors, but also seemed to suggest a lack of awareness an inability to formulate an argument in the respectable manner (Journal entry, nd).

In writing shame, I thought a lot about a writer’s voice and my home voice in particular and in the section that follows I will take up this question of voice as it relates to the written text. But in the process of writing this dissertation, I imagined that I could write it in the voice that is closest to me. At first, I didn’t know why this was important, but I wanted the written text to sound like
the voice I use in conversation with my mother. I thought it was important because of the
dynamic of shame. I knew I could share my shame stories with my mother and that she would
not re-shame me. Now, I am more drawn to the question of why I would even think I would
need to write a dissertation in a different voice. And why holding onto the voice that sounds like
home was incredibly difficult in my attempts to conform to very specific language practices and
rules associated with a dissertation.
Chapter 5
The Writer’s Voice

The writer whose work is heard and whose work resonates with other writers and readers experiences not only the oneness of sharing an experience but also experiences the self as a writer, and the work as worth writing and perhaps, even as meaningful. As a writer, not only of this dissertation but in general terms what I long for in my work is to be heard and for my work to resonate with others. In some of the writing classes that I have attended over the years, when I shared experiences of racism in the form of personal essays, sometimes some writers responded by stating that they had a hard time connecting to the piece because it was not their experience, other times disinterest was communicated in the ways writers took up the piece and the comments/feedback they gave to me. Other times writers reacted with curiosity, and disbelief. In these moments shame circulated and enacted a felt border between the body that experienced shaming and racism and the bodies that were outside or disinterested in these experiences. Social and corporal space deforms and reforms as bodies experience me as Other. In the making of my stories on racism as strange or abnormal or outside of interest from the group, the felt border constructed not the conceptual idea of dominance but an internal feeling of exclusion and of being racialized, and of these identities as somehow being linked to the feeling of not creating meaningful and engaging work.

Recently, I asked a writer to speak about her experience participating in a writer’s workshop facilitated by me and aimed for people of colour. Her words explore some of the same anxieties I had in regards to writing and attending writing courses: the anxiety that my stories would be misunderstood or that I would need to constantly explain and rewrite things to please a white
audience, and most importantly that what I was writing would not be engaging or exciting. The following is an excerpt from an e-mail from the author. Saadi writes:

To write in collective spaces with only people of colour is powerful and can be life changing. First of all I had no idea that these spaces existed until very recently. Writing in itself can become a very individualistic practice, a lonely space, and all about the end result. I wanted to be part of a space where it was about the writing, and it was safe to talk about colonialism, race, gender, etc. without the questions or without people feeling insulted or defensive…To be in spaces with other people of colour writers where we can openly talk about power and the intersectionality of oppression can create beautiful and powerful pieces. Safety and language is such a key piece in allowing this to happen.\(^{15}\)

While doing this work, I noted how specific moments impacted me. In moments when I felt there was little interest and or excitement in my work I noticed how I lost energy in what I was writing and how I started to feel that the work was not right or not quite right, yet, and/or not worth writing. For me this connects back to the writing of an academic text, and forces me to think critically about the audience and how it impacts writing on shame and about the ways in which excitement and/or interest in the work by the audience/readers serves as an important example of the affective practices and techniques by which particular works are silenced in the academy or by which we learn to silence aspects of ourselves. In terms of writing, these feelings are anchored through ideas around “good” writing and value and worth associated with the academic text. The feelings are embedded in systems of domination that intersect with racial practices and privileges of speaking and the right to speak. One of the characteristics of whiteness is its ability to employ practices of inclusion/exclusion that are at once invested in white supremacy and embodied through emotional practices. Through these implicit affective forms the writer’s voice and text is impacted. In theorizing affect as a technology of colonial systems of violence, I hope to illustrate the importance of creating spaces to explore colonial

\(^{15}\) Saadi, S., personal communication, 2016
shame collectively, and the impact that audience/readers/form have on the voice and text that is in the process of being set to words.

The importance lies in the experience of schooling, and what was for me a process of erasure where so much of my schooling and the process of learning to communicate in Standard English can be understood as a process of race making. School was the place where I not only learned that there was a proper way to write and to speak but that this was not the English that I used at home or in my neighbourhood. Like many of my siblings and the children in my neighbourhood, we learned to switch in and out of our home voices and to see our home voices as having less value in school spaces. This was communicated in both the subtle and overt ways of grading and measuring our literacy, but also through acts of shaming that positioned a way of speaking and writing as having more value over others.

In a 2014 article, Irizarry and Raible utilize Fanon’s (1952) concept of epidermalization of inferiority to examine the operation of institutionalized racism within schools and its effect on Latin@ youth in the U.S. Referencing Fanon’s (1952) work on the psychological and affective damage of racism, the authors highlight how Fanon’s work examines the ways in which a racist colonial system positions the colonized as “inadequate while the cultural identities of the colonizer are exalted, resulting in feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among the oppressed” (Irizarry & Raible, 2014, p.441). Referencing the dynamic of these processes in schooling, they write:

Schools re-inscribe this racial hierarchy in multiple ways, some subtle, others more overt. Achievement gap discourses that continually reference the disparities in test scores and academic outcomes between students of color and White students, for example, tend to normalize the performance of White students, holding it up as the gold standard. On a whole, students of color continue to be reminded that they do not measure up (Irizarry & Raible, 2014, p.441).
In my early years in schooling, I spent a lot of time petrified of my voice. I had what I thought was severe terror of public speaking and as a result spent a lot of time in silence. Now that I’ve spent time narrating these early experiences and exploring them collectively through shame, I can sense how the fear of speaking was also connected to the fear of revealing what I perceived were the inadequacies in my voice and the racialized communities that my voice was connected to. These felt practices of race making also reveal the direct impact they have on voice.

“Of all the effects created by writers,” writes Roy Peter Clark, “none is more important or elusive than the quality called voice” (Clark, 2008, p.112). This sentiment on the value of voice is echoed by writers, writing instructors and books about writing that emphasize the importance of connecting and valuing the writer’s voice. Pat Schneider explores this idea of voice in an article titled Original Voice, Original Genius (2013). In it, she writes about an experience where she was invited as a writer-in-residence to a “prestigious” school in France. She tells us:

The ninth-grader in whose home I lived proudly showed me his perfect Shakespearean sonnet written in Shakespearean English. But when I tried to get him to write in his own voice, he was terrified. He wouldn't even try. An entire roomful of teenagers -- in fact, room after room -- would not try. Finally, one girl was brave enough to risk reading aloud what she had just written. Halfway through she broke into tears (Schneider, 2013).

This inclination to hide behind a reputable voice and the fear or terror of revealing ourselves in our writing is something that speaks a lot about safety and how shaming is circulated in schooling practices. Why were the students that Schneider taught so afraid to write in their own voices? “Room after room -- would not try.” What did they think would happen if they wrote in their own voices? In Schneider’s example, it was Shakespearean English that the students were taught to value and to aspire to mimic instead of the value of writing in their own voices and through their own experiences. Voice is, after all, the ability to make seamless the techniques that allows a reader to read a text and feel as if she is hearing the author speaking to her. What is
the value that we gain from making students feel that they have merit only when they sound like Shakespeare and not like themselves? Voice is the storyteller that makes the art of writing feel like a live conversation between the writer and the reader. It allows the exchange of complex information, but it also allows you to hear and approach a recording of my sound.

I had an experience early on in my academic career that had a profound impact on my writing voice. In a meeting with a professor, I was told that my writing did not meet the standard of good academic writing, and that if I wanted to be a writer, maybe I should pursue that dream outside of the academy. Months later, I wondered why I did not ask what aspects of my writing fell short of producing good academic text. Despite the quality of the writing that I had submitted to this professor, I felt the voice that I was writing in, at the time, was the closest I had come to writing in my own voice and this was extremely valuable to me because of my conscious effort not to erase parts of myself in order to produce academic writing. The idea that this writing was not academic enough translated for me as a failure – if my voice did not belong in the academy then maybe I didn’t either. Sometime after that moment, I also had a reviewer for an article that I had co-written respond with admonishment that the text contained alliteration. The assumption was that good academic writing was free of rhetoric. Both experiences circulated very specific feelings about my voice and its association with legitimate academic text: What I felt was out of place. I felt my writer’s voice and my abilities as a writer were actually inversely related to my pursuit of academic writing.

These assumptions around academic and non-academic text have made the writing of shame difficult. Like the brave girl in Schneider’s (2013) workshop that broke into tears after reading in her own voice, days after writing my introduction and including a shame story, I feel the heaviness of shame and terror. I search for authors to validate what I am doing. For ways to
show that this pursuit has merit. But in the exploration of shame, shame and sickness crawl out from my body. As written the shame story impacts me. Days after writing shame, I feel tired. And then, I am glad not to be finished with this work and to have the opportunity to remove these bits of me from my dissertation – which I do. Why would we risk being authentic in our academic writing when we are taught not to value our voices? But also as I continued to write I also found the safety that came in nuance and abstract language and in relying on writers to say what I did not want to say or did not want to risk saying. I say this knowing that for the most part, my section on theoretical frameworks feels removed from me, safer than the chapters that follow where I am writing about my experience in the voice that approaches the way I speak to my family.

*How to go on* or through shame encompasses not only literary devices, techniques, and forms and structures but also this real fear that Schneider explores - the fear of a writers’ voice. For a while, after these experiences, I felt myself disengaging from school. It was not a rational response to feeling out of place; it was a physical response. I started to feel sick and tired every time I had to go to my department. Months passed and I could not physically bring myself to meetings. I also stopped writing. Full stop. I could not finish writing papers that were due. Intuitively, I imagined that I was experiencing writers’ block and felt the weight of the words of my professor and felt shamed and responded by feeling bad, and wanting to “expel myself from myself” (Ahmed, 2015). The risk that I had taken to attempt to write in my own voice felt like it had exposed me for not being *good* and then I was not *good*. These associations were not conscious, the link between good and bad and race and me, were felt experiences that translated into a body that wanted to sleep and a body that refused to write (Ahmed, 2015).
What follows is a personal essay that narrates the embodied experience of disengaging. The inclusion of this essay arrives late in the production of my dissertation. Although this text was written a number of years ago and workshopped in writing classes and then read publicly, I never thought of this piece as something that would be a part of my dissertation. At the time that it was written, I was not just contemplating quitting; I physically could not write, and for six months pulled out of any engagement with my thesis and this work. Time did prove that I could find the energy and desire to come back to this work. But despite the process of returning, disengaging forms an important part of the process of writing a dissertation as a woman of colour in a white institution. In part, the personal narrative that follows encompasses the fears associated with writing and the written word, fears of being humiliated and physical responses to approaching memories of shame, but most importantly it documents a process of embodied reflection towards disengagement (Ng, 2000).

The writing of the essay also signals for me a critical shift in my work, and an awareness that even though I had spent years highlighting the impact of racism on the body and attempting to connect it to the experience of disengaging, I had not expected it to happen to me, and when I did start to feel it, I wanted to be rid of it. It was through a process of using journaling and freewriting that I noticed that every time I attempted to push through a body that demanded a full stop and a pulling out of the work that I would fall deeper and deeper into fatigue. The shift signaled my own awareness of the ways in which I understood my physical body disengaging as something shameful. It was an approach that devalued the ways fatigue was communicating a body worn down. This shift meant for me centering the experiences of disengagement as a coping mechanism to racism.
Engaging in a felt practice of research allowed me to write the moments I experienced fear and disengagement and allowed make space for the sensations of these physical states. Bringing an embodied reflective practice to the writing of this dissertation (Ng, 2000) allowed me make space in this work for the sensory experiences of fear, shame and humiliation not just as a past experience, but reflective of how it manifested in writing practices associated with the making of a “good” dissertation. And to reflect on my illusions of escaping shame and instead, and this was transformative for me, to make room to feel disengagement and locate my fears associated with the ways in which disengagement is socially constructed, understood, and felt through bodies. In a sense this was also about understanding the relationship between disengagement and shame and disengagement as a physical response to violence or toxic spaces and the ways in which we have been trained to take up and respond to a body that is disengaging.
Disengaging

Dr. Mulloy asks about my PhD while he’s scraping my teeth with sharp instruments. He has to take his gloved hands out of my mouth briefly so that I can explain. It’s May and I have a few weeks before I submit a draft. I need a conclusion, but I am so close to finishing that I am smiling when I announce to Dr. Mulloy that “I’m almost done”.

Dr. Mulloy has been my dentist for over ten years, and twice a year for the last 8 years, he’s heard all the different iterations of my work.

I know that I’ve never been this close before.

After my cleaning, I stand in front of the large reception desk and wait for Anna to give me my next appointment. Dr. Mulloy walks towards me and reaches for my hand. He holds it gently and squeezes it as Anna stands on the other side of the desk and tries not to stare at us.

This touch with bare hands feels odd, not just because his hands feel sweaty and make me think of his gloved hands in my mouth a few moments ago, but also because of how happy he is. “Good luck,” he says. “I know you’ll finish. The next time I see you, you’ll be done.” He locks eyes with me and then releases my hand to give me a thumbs-up. And I am breathless as I walk down St. Clair towards the subway. It feels good that my dentist is rooting for me, but also makes me not want to see him again in six months - in case I’m not done.

***

A few days later, I wake up sweating with Dr. Mulloy and his handshake on my mind. I see him smiling at me and nodding with certainty – he believes like everyone else in my life that this thing, this thesis I’ve been working on for the last 8 years is about to be finished.

I start to feel sick like someone is sitting on my chest.

I can’t breathe.

***
A few days later I’m having dinner with a friend and the conversation shifts to my thesis, and then the obvious question of when I’m going to finish.

“It feels like I’m close,” I say. “Sometimes I feel like I’m close to finding something extraordinary about the shame and humiliation …”

She leans towards me, mouth slightly open with the expectation that something brilliant is about to come out of me. I know that she cares deeply about my work. And so, I am slow to disappoint her.

“But…” I say. “But the last couple of days it feels like I’m nowhere. I’ve been writing and collecting shame stories, and now I feel so lost.” I sigh. “It feels hopeless.”

“Of course, it does,” she says nodding at me. “You’re trying to approach shame with intellect and WE both know it doesn’t operate there.”

I nod. I don’t tell her that I’m scared. I don’t tell her that now that I am so close to finishing, I start to question the work. I don’t know why I started this and I’m not sure if there’s any value in sharing other people’s shame. I don’t tell her that a part of me wants and needs the stories to burn that I don’t want to be connected to them, and now that I’m so close, I don’t want to hand them over.

***

My deadline is fast approaching and I wake up with heaviness pushing against my chest. I sit in front of my computer but can’t write, don’t want to. It feels unsafe to commit anything to the written word.

I start to feel guilty for telling people that I was close. I start to feel like maybe this last bit is not going to happen. I feel like I’m drowning.

***

Days before my deadline, Mom and I are sitting at the kitchen table. I take a long deep breathe before I tell her. First, I say that I want to explore other things. I tell her that I feel like
this work is collapsing me into something I am not and then I tell her that I’m sick of shame that I want to write happy stories.

After all my words, she pulls her body away from me and tightens her jaw.

“If you need help finishing it, why don’t you get help?” she says.

“I don’t need help!” I say.

“Why don’t you rest? Take some time off. Get energy. Don’t think about it, right now.”

“I don’t want to take time off,” I say. I don’t need to rest. I want to quit. I want it to be over with. I don’t want to think about it again.”

I start to cry. I want her to say it’s ok to quit and that she supports me regardless of what I decide. I want her to say that the thesis doesn’t matter that the money I spent the last 8 years doesn’t matter, that the PhD doesn’t matter. I want her to say that what matters is my health my sanity. I want her to acknowledge that I’ve never quit anything before and that maybe this quitting is important to me. But she doesn’t. She and all the others that think they are offering me support, they continue to push me even though I ask them not to.

The work is important, they say.

You started something, you should finish it, they say.

It always feels the hardest when you’re at the end, they say.

All PhD students experience this, they say.

It’ll feel good to finish, they say.

But I stop writing. I toss some of my favourite articles into the blue recycle bin in my room. I circulate an e-mail where I tell friends that I’m selling some of my books. I stop thinking about shame.
And slowly I sit and breathe in the relief that comes with quitting\textsuperscript{16}.
It’s important for me to write that I had no intention of coming back to this work and that during the time that I have been working on this dissertation some of the most brilliant racialized women of colour that I know struggled with similar issues and walked away from Masters and Doctoral programs. This struggle, the experience of disengaging is not often represented in dissertations, either in the methods or in the narratives. I think about this when my supervisor suggests that I read a dissertation on racism produced in my department. She adds, “It took her a long time to finish it.” But this experience is not reflected in the thesis that she wrote on the experience of racism. In a sense, it is as if we are fantasizing about studying racism as object existing outside of our bodies. But disengagement from academic spaces is for me an important response and effect of systemic violence of schooling that both contributes to the disengagement of racialized people from schools and silences multi-vocal narratives that challenge overcoming narratives of disengagement.

Advocating on behalf of racialized and marginalized students for me means advocating for curriculum that supports the nourishment of a critical conversation of classroom practices and situates the conversation of disengagement within a colonial lens. Broadly, this means engaging with multivocal narratives of disengagement that explore the far reach of colonial strategies of shaming and the impact they have on bodies. Specifically, it means not approaching disengagement as something that we need to fix by engaging bodies, but as a physical response to the trauma of racism. And as such, to make spaces for students of colour to speak about the ways they are feeling out of place, or silenced and to develop strategies to respond collectively.
In thinking about the body’s relationship to voice I keep returning to something one of my writing instructors mentioned in one of her classes. Ayelet Tsabari\(^{17}\) spoke about her personal experience of learning to write in English as an adult and how at one point she had mastered it but yet moved so far away from her authentic or original voice that the act of writing had become arduous. It was little things at first that she had been critiqued on that she conceded to rid herself of. Her writing had been accused of being too sentimental, of including too much backstory, and she had stripped these things from her work thinking that they were somehow inferior things that were disconnected from her. She could dispense of these things, she thought or train herself out of that writing. She got to a place where her writing was grammatically perfect, but where she did not want to write. “I didn’t enjoy writing anymore,” she said in our class. It was one of her mentors who noticed that in her pursuit of good writing she had lost parts of herself. Tsabari realized that these things that writing instructors had critiqued about her work were deeply connected to her experience and her way of seeing the world.

We met up one afternoon to talk further about voice and its link to the body and the ways it gets taken up in writing. I suggested that race and gender and her particular location in the world was linked to these things that the instructors wanted to strip from her writing and that they experienced as outside of good writing. She spoke again about the pain of being labeled as too sentimental and how instructors critiqued her for writing too much backstory. I had similar experiences of feeling out of place in writing classes and feeling that what I wrote was too emotional or exotic or strange for the predominantly white class. There were things I wanted to write that I edited out of my stories because I didn’t want to feel strange. I had a feeling of being

\(^{17}\) Ayelet Tsabari (יֵאֵליֶט צָבָראָי-Ayelet Tsabari) is a Canadian writer and the author of the debut story collection **The Best Place on Earth**.
an outsider and feeling like no one would connect to my experience or my work. In a recent article, Junot Diaz talks about this out-of-placeness in relation to race and racism in MFA programs. He writes:

It’s been twenty years since my workshop days and yet from what I gather a lot of shit remains more or less the same. I’ve worked in two MFA programs and visited at least 30 others and the signs are all there. The lack of diversity of the faculty. Many of the students’ lack of awareness of the lens of race, the vast silence on these matters in many workshops. I can’t tell you how often students of color seek me out during my visits or approach me after readings in order to share with me the racist nonsense they’re facing in their programs, from both their peers and their professors … As always race was the student of color’s problem, not the white class’s. Many of the writers I’ve talked to often finish up by telling me they’re considering quitting their programs. Of course I tell them not to. If you can, please hang in there. We need your work. Desperately (Diaz, 2014, April 30).

In a sense, I feel Tsabari not wanting to write after being stripped of parts of herself and students of colour wanting to quit their MFA programs is a reflection of how the body responds to the feeling of being silenced and indicative of the experience of inhabiting a racialized body and moving through white spaces. It is a question of whether there is a place for our full selves in the classroom and whether our voices are valued and respected. When I think about Tsabari’s experience with voice and my own experiences with disengagement, I feel that in trying to move so far away from my voice in order to arrive at the place of good writing I was at risk of moving away from me and rejecting not only the way that I sound, but the sound of my mother and my grandmother and the ways they stitch words together into stories. This language is framed by colonial histories of violence where our Indigenous languages have been erased and replaced by colonial tongues, but where, there are traces of survival strategies and ways of conceptualizing the world. Why we disengage is sometimes because of the work involved in attempting to mimic dominant language practices, and in that, there is an inherent rejection of ourselves and our sense of who we are. The physicality of disengagement is a body that is being pushed out and there is emotional and physical work in the attempt to stay in places where you cannot fully
be yourself and there is labour both emotional and physical in attempting to learn within colonial spaces.

The excerpt that follows is an excerpt of an e-mail conversation with a friend that was studying in my department during the time that I worked on this dissertation. The e-mail follows lengthy conversations where we met for lunch after class and spoke about racism and disengagement. In thinking about disengagement as an embodied response to racism I invited her to have a conversation with me about disengagement through e-mail, as a way of incorporating her written voice. What follows is an excerpt from that e-mail exchange. To clarify, the sections that begin with (A) are Ahmed’s response to my question.

**Q:** I was thinking about the ways that we perform in school through humiliation and oppression, and in this context (toxic spaces) how it isn't safe to be fully present, and how one needs to learn how to disassociate. But how the expectations are still there and work needs to be processed and produced regardless of the toxicity of a space and the damage it may or may not be doing to the body. So work is produced from a disembodied space, from a place without a heart, passion, desire, love and even interest - from a place that's already demanding that parts of you shut up for safety or self-censorship because the full you is not acceptable.

I wonder if you can talk more about this... whatever comes up. Like, who is this productive self that doesn’t include the creative spirit?

**A:** I've been thinking about this pretty much nonstop though, because after we talked, I had a week of classes all talking about what kinds of final essays we needed to write and then I spent some time planning out my reading week. Then reading week came and I couldn't make myself do any of the work. I couldn't even go near my computer to write for fun or play games or do emails or anything. It was really terrible, and very much part of a destructive pattern I've been in since entering grad school, where I deal with being made to produce work on messed up terms by avoiding, and justifying my avoidance by disengaging through drugs and alcohol. I've noticed that the classes that really challenge me and engage me are the ones where I am free to explore
my position and approach, that are about growing and learning rather than working for the academic industrial complex.

A: But it’s also so ingrained, this destructive pattern, that it’s hard for me to say if it’s something that is outside of who I am now, or is part of who I am (after all, it’s my reaction) or will forever be a part of who I become. It’s so insidious, because resisting the need to build that Other Othered person to do the work “they” want you to do is against the work ethic we are raised with as immigrants and people within a capitalist system. But you cannot resist it. I believe that, because I always thought I wasn’t resisting it, until I realized that maybe the problem with me isn’t that I (as a fucking phd student on a prestigious scholarship for godsake) am a lazy good for nothing but that I’m not into becoming the person I need to be to do the crappy work I’m being made to do. I meet people all the time - my colleagues, the students I'm TAing this year, my sisters - who get so deeply hurt and angry and sad when authoritative bodies reject the work they want to do in favour of soulless, institutionally approved work, usually done by white bodies (and minds). And my littlest sister is in elementary school, but this is still a problem. She recently got a B- on a paper she wrote about why the Indian Act needs to be revised because she wrote about peoples experiences rather than legislation. Anyway, I see these things happen, and experience them myself, but I always felt a sense of "well what do you expect" when people get sad about it. I was always like "this is what oppression looks like, we already know this". I believed that I was putting my head down and getting through, picking my battles and on my way to something better. I think it’s pretty clear now that that's not the case. It's like we were saying the other day...we all experience this and internalize and deal with the constant devaluation of our work in different ways, but denying that this is happening helped me get my scholarships but also started to eat away at my capacity to be creative, to take risks, to work with passion...to see any part of myself in the work I was doing. It made it necessary for me to smoke and drink as much as I do so that I would be too exhausted to speak up and fight back in a fight I know that I will lose at this point.

A: Still, though, I don’t think this tells the whole story. The whole story is probably untellable. (Ahmed, excerpt from personal communication, 2014)

I find so much meaning in Ahmed’s words. Specifically, the ways in which educational practices are embedded in practices of race making that have physical, spiritual and emotional
impact on the ways bodies are regulated and organized. In the attempt to learn better writing or 
good academic writing a writer can lose a sense of her own voice and learn to devalue her sense 
of self. Refashion an acceptable self and in the process make the kind of compromises that 
Ahmed speaks of which involve amputating parts of ourselves. In a sense, I argue that the 
amputation of parts of ourselves happens through the attempt.

*There is no other person that sounds like you,* I now tell the students in my writing workshops. 
*And your voice, the way you choose and place words together into stories, is something that you 
will have to value and protect.* I say this to them because I am aware that you can move so far 
away from yourself that you no longer know who you are and I want the writing students that 
take my workshops to value their voices and their experiences and the ways they write 
themselves into stories.

Because I was familiar with the sound of my home voice I wanted to make sure that I was aware 
when I was moving towards it and when I was rejecting it. My body disengaging became a 
powerful tool for embodied reflectivity on the feelings of shame associated with voice and self 
(Ng, 2000). Often, disengagement signaled shifts in writing where I felt silenced or inadequate 
and where affective shame was circulating. It signaled my body coming up against a felt border, 
and associations with writing and publishing as linked to whiteness. My body’s physical 
response to:

- Writing as a race making
- Writing as white
- Writing as becoming
Writing as negating

Writing as accepting white dominance

In conversation with Hilton Als, Junot Diaz explores this process of race making and the erasure of people of colour from the written text. He writes:

We’re so erased. …If you’re a person of color, if you’re a woman, if you’re from a poor family, if you’re from a rural family, if you’re from a family who worked like dogs and never got any respect or a share of the profits - you know that 99 percent of your stories ain’t been told. In any fucking medium. And yet we still have to be taught to look, and to tell our stories. …Despite the utter absence of us, it’s still an internal revolution to say wait a minute, we are not only worthy of great art, but the source of great art (Diaz, 2013, In conversation with the New Yorker’s Hilton Als at The Strand, NYC).
Chapter 6  
Mobilizing Strategies and Creative Disruptions

In this section, I want to explore the attempt to language colonial shame and racial violence within or for a very particular type of writing and audience. In part, this chapter is framed by my earlier discussion on the impact of whiteness on racialized bodies, and the ways in which practices of race making are circulated affectively. I want to explore this in the sense of the edge of language or when language runs out. Thinking about the moment that Ahmed describes in the academy where she was attempting to speak about whiteness to a questioning audience and then ran out of language (2012, p.43). This running out of language, for me, speaks of the labour of attempting to bring critical race discourses into white institutional spaces, but also to the ways racism operates in the realm of emotion and the ways emotion gets taken up, at times, suspiciously, in academic spaces.

In writing this section, I’m drawn to the idea and feeling of ease, the sitting down in a comfortable chair and letting out a long breath, to find refuge from exhaustion and fatigue. In writing this section and attempting to examine these strategies, I am also aware of how challenging it is to attempt to strangle hold and evaluate them. In part, weaving through these diverse processes was an attempt to find the power and energy to write this dissertation and the strength to write it the only that way that I could write shame.

In trying to find a way to write this dissertation, I participated in and explored several creative projects before, while, and in spite of, engaging in academic writing. These projects included: (a) photography; (b) playwriting; (c) creative non-fiction; (d) poetry; and (e) trampoline. While
creative-non-fiction and poetry became integral parts of the process of gathering and sharing shame stories, as well as chapters within this dissertation. I want to examine how these processes directly respond to the experience of attempting to write for or towards whiteness. Non-writing and disengaging formed critical parts of the processes of engaging in this work. Because of what these processes allowed, I want to explore them as disruptions of the supremacy of academic text. I am interested in highlighting their potential for critical race work on student disengagement, and the potential that they hold for students struggling with disengagement.

I make the distinction between writing and academic writing to highlight some of the distinct features associated with Western academic text that I have been discussing in previous chapters: tone, rules of citation, formal language, and audience, that set it apart from other forms of writing. But this is not to suggest that writing creative non-fiction or poetry is somehow free of these writing practices and associations with whiteness. In fact, I would suggest that if I was studying poetry within the academy that I would encounter similar physical responses and disengagement to the study of poetry and the production of poetry. In fact, I think I would even fear to associate myself with poetry. What creative non-fiction and poetry represent is not the space outside hegemonies of whiteness but very particular evasions or distractions or ways of decentering whiteness as audience within my department and particular field of study. In essence, what allowed me to explore colonial shame with ease in these forms is that I did not at the time that I was engaging in these forms imagine that they would form a part of my dissertation. In fact, as authors have argued I would continue to experience similar experiences of silencing and shaming. In utilizing these forms to continue to think through the operation of

\[\text{\footnotesize 18 With the exception of the play, but in that case the play was also disruptive because it would be difficult for my committee to evaluate a play with the same rigor that they might approach a traditional academic text.}\]
shame this allowed me to continue my research and to experience the writing of stories and poetry with ease outside of the gaze of whiteness and towards an audience that I was specifically centering as family and communities of colour. This allowed me to think about colonial shame in ways that I had not been able to before. What these processes illustrate is the creation of a safer space outside of the evaluative gaze.

In this chapter, I am interested in highlighting these processes of working through disengagement as a respectful way of engaging with body that is harmed and worn from moving through white institutional spaces. These different modes of approaching shame were centered on engaging with my body not as a separate and subordinate object to be used for the task of writing, but as pivotal part of the process of writing shame. As I mentioned in chapter three, Memory, Narrative, and Writing Shame, embodied reflectivity allowed me to approach disengagement differently (Ng, 2000). Instead of seeking to categorize or measure sensations, I tried to find ways of examining my reactions to these physical states. These processes allowed me to incorporate breath into the practice of writing shame. Incorporating the breath, and weaving photography, poetry, creative non-fiction, and the physicality of shame has allowed me to centre the body in this work and to bring awareness to the ways in which my body holds and circulates shame. It has also allowed me to bring a closer awareness to the narration of shame and what it means to set shame down into stories, both inside and outside of the academy.

Talking about the relationship between language, syntax, and the ways that language and syntax effects how we perceive ourselves and our place in the world, Goldberg (2016) asks readers to take a sentence apart and to scramble it. She asks readers to arbitrarily scramble the words as if “[n]o noun or verb has any more value than the, a, and” (italics in original, p.67). Her aim in
asking readers to do this is to bring awareness to how language structures impact how we situate ourselves and see others. She tells us:

Our language is usually locked into a sentence syntax of subject/verb/direct-object. There is a subject acting on an object. “I see the dog” – with this sentence structure, “I” is the center of the universe. We forget in our language structure that while “I” looks at the “the dog,” “the dog” is simultaneously looking at us. (Goldberg, 2016, p. 68)

Goldberg goes on to write, “[w]e think in sentences, and the way we think is the way we see. If we think in the structure subject/verb/direct-object, then that is how we form our world” (p. 68).

By using the breath in the writing process to bring awareness to the processes of writing a dissertation on shame, I was able to see some of the ways I wrote the body that disengaged. I should also add that my attempts to label and explore these feeling and physical sensations through writing were not always possible. First, because often when my body was triggered and feeling shamed or disengaged the last thing that I could do was sit still in front of a desk and write. Often I had to just focus on breathing and or physically leave the space where I was writing. In the processes of breathing into shame, I discovered that it was only when I attended to shame with breath and asked it to stay as long as it needed to, that it dissipated. When I invested all my energy in resisting it and tried to push myself to continue writing, often, the physicality of shame intensified. As a result of this approach, when I experienced anxiety instead of continuing to write and ignore these feelings, I would stop and breathe, and if it was possible tried to write the thoughts that were circulating and the feelings states. Sometimes, this meant getting away from the computer and writing in a journal other times I needed to be outside and write. The following is a piece written in the moment that I was experiencing anxiety around writing this section:

I’m lost; I don’t know why I’m doing this. What’s the importance of attempting to approach it: the heat of shame in the body, the voicelessness that shuts me into place, the pain that rises through the chest and overwhelms. I can’t tell if this is different from
This journal entry exemplifies the subject and object divide that Goldberg (2016) explored in her example of *I see the dog*. I wonder who is the *I* that is approaching the shame? *The heat of shame in* body is written from a disembodied place. Who is experiencing the heat? In the first sections, I write as if I have no body or as the researcher observing the body in shame. In the bottom half, I am feeling hollow, empty and numb. I question why I am writing shame? But not who is writing. In the text, *I* is positioned as the subject that is examining the body as object, and shame as object to be known. The text ends with the fear around re-experiencing shame through the witness/reader exposing the work.

Not merely putting the body to the service of doing this work meant openness to the physical body engaged in the experiences of disengagement. Engaging with shame writing through journal writing allowed me to see these subjective positions and how often this attempt to narrate as if I was disembodied triggered the feelings of out of placeness and hollowness. Like journaling these creative projects allowed me to continue thinking through the process of writing about racial violence and shame in an embodied way, one that incorporated the multiple ways my body responded to working with shame (Ng, 2000). These creative strategies were also ways of dissipating my fear of failing, fears of failure grounded in a physical and emotional understanding of academic writing as implicitly structured through white middle class literacy and language practices and fears that I would have to remake myself in order to produce this work.

What follows is a series of photographs taken in January of 2013. Thinking visually was a way of complementing the process of writing shame and evading the potential failure of not producing “acceptable” academic text. During the time the photographs were taken I was not
writing. While the photographs are a way of strategically attempting to displace the primacy of
Standard English and academic writing as the only way of engaging with this work, they are also
a visual record of the ways in which I continued to think and work with ideas around colonial
shaming and schooling and the impact that it has on bodies of colour. This brief meditation on
disengagement offers a limited view of the multitude of practices and work that a student may be
engaged in without necessarily seeing the creative engaged/disengaged work as valuable
academic work.
Leonarda Carranza - Making Masks, 2013
Photography: Digital black and white
Leonarda Carranza - Making Masks, 2013
Photography: Digital black and white
Leonarda Carranza - Making Masks, 2013
Photography: Digital black and white
Leonarda Carranza - Making Masks, 2013
Photography: Digital black and white
"Making Masks" is a compilation of photographs taken and manipulated in January 2013. For me, the photographs represent some of the complex ways bodies utilize masks to absorb, respond, resist, conform, and complicate the everydayness of racism and oppression. They remind me of Halloween and the feeling of becoming just a child and not a child of colour, and going through my neighbourhood and receiving candies from white neighbours without the feeling of rejection and out-of-placeness. They also speak to the desire to approach whiteness as practice of self-making. Masks are one of a variety of meaning making systems that are related through their ability to conceal and distort the face. They bring us in direct contact with the eyes. In these photographs, I find the eyes difficult to avoid and resist. “Making Masks” is inspired by the idea of measuring based on the visibility of race and reflects on the desire and attempt to mask racial identity, in essence, to hide. The photographs also made me think of masks as survival strategies or coping mechanisms.

This series of photographs were taken in my home. The subjects are my nieces and the work is collaborative, in that the masks that my nieces are wearing were created by them as part of an afternoon arts and crafts project. I was struck by the masks and more so by the ways the masks shifted their physical appearance, making them seem much older and bolder than their usual demeanors. I think of these photographs as a visual record of the process of working on shame and as reminders that writing on shame and humiliation came first, by way of photography, poetry, conversations and playwriting and last my academic writing. Like a lot of the writing and work that is now an important part of this dissertation, when I took the photographs I didn’t imagine that they would end up becoming a part of this work. In that sense, the making of the

19 Originals in colour modified to black and white.
photographs took place without the pressure to produce an acceptable text and are now included to highlight alternative ways of writing shame, and also represent a moment of disengagement from school. I find it interesting that this is what disengagement looked like for me, and that it involved an attempt to avoid the scrutiny and evaluation, but that it also reflected a persistent commitment to engage with the work. When writing this I am reminded of a conversation I had with a professor during my first year in the graduate program. She questioned whether I truly wanted to be there and whether I had a commitment to the work. I remember she told me that I had to be willing to always be thinking about race and racism even outside of school in order to engage at this level of learning. I remember walking away feeling harmed, I wondered how she imagined that I could ever get away from race and racism. Now when including these photographs, I realized that the moments where I disengaged from my program or department did not, mean for me disengagement from what I feel passionate about and what is meaningful for me. In fact, I continued to do the work, but in different forms. I include this here because I think it’s important for students of colour struggling in schools with disengagement to value their bodies and their processes of responding or reacting to toxic spaces. I include these mobilizing creative strategies here because this is what disengagement looked like for me: It looked like photographing masks.

*Playwriting*

I remember my supervisor, in passing, suggesting that I should write a play about humiliation. I don’t think she meant that I should write a play as my dissertation, but suddenly I thought that was the only thing I could do. After our meeting, I sat for hours in front of the computer thinking how does one write a play about shame and humiliation? How to frame it? Who are the characters? Would it be based on actual experiences? At one point, I realize I could write
anything. The play could literally be about anything. And there was exhilaration, and fear, and freedom in that. Despite not being trained as a playwright and not taking formal classes in playwriting, it was easier for me to sit down and write a play than to write the introduction, methods, and results of this study. In thinking now about why the play as a written form became so engaging, I think about the ways it evaded critique and evaluation. My supervisor had not studied theatre or playwriting and so how could she critique or evaluate a thesis written as a play. In the process of writing the play, I wrote about humiliation and shame in the context of work and this for me was something really important that I hadn’t touched on before.

The script opened for me conversations about the ways in which shame not only circulates between and through bodies in classrooms, but also, the ways it is held and carried within bodies both within and outside of schooling. The play is a meditation on the long term effects of racism in terms of how we see ourselves and our abilities and our place in the world. It also reflects the ways experiences of shaming in school circulate and move through bodily and social spaces. It makes me think of a recent conversation I had with a co-worker where she spoke about being a young woman of colour and growing up in Peel and not having an experience with racism. I brought up her educational background, her experience, and her expertise at work and how she was one of the least paid people in our organization, and we spoke about the ways in which our department was populated by over-educated, brilliant women of colour with years of expertise and yet in a lot of ways underpaid and under-employed in our organization. Centering the experiences of shaming beyond educational spaces towards work spaces allowed me to think about the ways in which shame facilities the movement of whiteness into the background and the invisibility of racism. And how shame makes it difficult to notice and speak about racism.
In writing the play I thought about the precariousness of work, I thought about the work that was available to me at the time of writing the dissertation, as a PhD candidate, and the ways I perform the internalization of shaming by undervaluing my skills and knowledge. The legacy of colonialism and trauma means our bodies carry intimate and visceral knowledge of oppression and through the play I created scenes as a way of becoming present with the sensations, thoughts, tensions and aches of racism. Although I do not include the play here, I wanted to talk about it as a process of engaging and thinking critically about shame.

The play is written through a series of scenes where the main characters are being interviewed for positions. Throughout the play the characteristics are caught up with the search for employment and in the last scene of the play the characters talk directly to audience, asking for work. What I intended in the play is to signal this power in giving and taking away access to work, and the struggle that most of the collaborators in this study spoke about in terms of finding employment.

Poetry

As mentioned previously, poetry was a really important part of the collective writing process. Often I wrote poems because I couldn’t find writing that captured and explored shame and humiliation in the way that I sought. What I wanted to explore in the pieces was the way shame operated as an anchor point for the production of whiteness and the way it moved through bodies. In terms of thinking of poetry in relation to writing, it is interesting to note how easily I could produce poetry about humiliation as opposed to chapters in my dissertation. The poetry, similar to playwriting, allowed me to experience writing as something that flowed out of me, and was often energizing, as opposed to the laboured, time consuming process of writing an
academic text. Often poetry created more questions and entered into relation with bodies and shame in a more nuanced way.

The following poem was written as a prompt for one of the writing groups. In the writing I intended to facilitate a way for collaborators to focus on the physicality of racism.

*Bit by bit*

Bit by bit and step by step
Grandma teaches me
About colours

And I learn the texture of indifference
What it feels like not be wanted
or embraced or her

Not to sit on her lap

And bit by bit and step by step
she teaches me

Not to expect a smile

I don’t go to her when I’m afraid
I don’t ask for her when I’m sick

And bit by bit and step by step

She teaches

Like the mothers and grandmothers that came before taught her

And bit by bit
And step by step

I learn about colour

After finding this ease in writing, I wondered if I could write this dissertation as a series of poems. For me, *Bit by Bit* is an effective piece because it makes me feel the process of learning racialization through felt practices of exclusion. It presents as process of negation. Colour is something she teaches through feelings. It shows how whiteness manifests through bodies: *I don’t go to her when I am afraid*. The phrase allows the reader to engage with the body of a child
White becomes a marker of meaning through affect because it is the place where comfort and trust are given.

In my first public reading of the piece I broke down in tears and could hardly get through each sentence. My mother and a few of my siblings were in the audience. Several people from the audience approached me and told me how much the piece had touched them. Equally, in writing sessions when I used the piece as prompt it facilitated writing about racism as emotional pain.

**Trampoline**

The following is an excerpt from a personal essay that I wrote about the experience of trampoline in relation to fear. It’s titled *fear*. It took me really long to realize why it was important to write about trampoline as a creative disruption. For me, slowly that it was important because it allowed me to write about the experience of feeling a body that was moving through space with ease, often, engaging in what felt to me as terrifying movements and yet feeling completely engaged.

This was strikingly different from the feeling of moving through classrooms. Through trampoline, I experienced my body as energetic and powerful. This I take to be more reflective of my coach’s practice and abilities as an educator rather than as something that is particular to trampoline. I include this personal narrative on the experience of fear and trampoline to illustrate the differences felt experience from classroom to gym. In the classroom, there was very little engagement with emotion, and in the gym, we engaged directly with fear. The feeling of being supported was so palpable. In this way, fear became less about me and more of an energy that circulated when we placed our feet on the trampoline and it was my coach’s keen awareness of the presence of fear and his approach to making it safe to engage with it that helped me face fear in order to learn things that I would never imagine that I would be capable of learning.
I write about trampoline as a creative strategy for becoming aware of the physicality of living within a colonial system, but also for the ways in which I experienced learning as thrilling and exciting and taking place through the body. It also allowed me to approach and work with fear. I started off this section by stating that every Monday I had a meeting with fear and that is precisely how I experienced it: Often all Chris had to say was that we were flipping and my palms would start sweating. I would start thinking that I didn’t know enough that I wasn’t ready that something terrible could happen, and I then I had to breathe with those feelings and stay with the fear, tucking into myself as I flipped in the air. Being more with the body also meant accepting a mind that was continually questioning my movements in the air. It meant breathing into physical and mental fears.

Valuing these processes meant centering the body in this work, and bringing reflection to this body, not as a subordinate part of this research, and not as an object to be studied, but as an integral part of this work. This meant reflecting on inherited ways of running from shame or attempting to resist shame or suppress it, as social practices. It involved exploring how the body as constituted through complex relationships between the historical, emotional, and physiological experiences of racism and shaming. By bringing these practices into conversation with the process of writing shame, I was able to approach a different engagement with shame.
Fear slowly weaves back into my body, threading itself into the inner layers of my stomach. I wake up nauseous. I know and recognize this feeling. I wonder if it is expanding. I wonder where it is taking me.

***

Monday in trampoline class, I feel the pulse of fear approaching again. I jump on the trampoline and stare down at the net. The feeling grips my shoulders and makes my legs heavy. Everything in my body is yelling: GET OFF. I tighten my hands into fists and continue to jump with my shoulders contracted and face looking slightly down at the net. I want to make sure that I am safe so I keep staring down.

Chris notices the clenched fists.

“Breathe”, Chris says and then approaches the net, stiff and alert. I know this is because of the fall three weeks ago. He is standing by the net in case I fall again and I try not to think about it. I tell myself to breathe. I try to smile. I try to remind myself that I am supposed to be having fun, but all my muscles are stiffening and then for a second I see myself again falling head first.

***

After class, as Zahra and I walk up St. George, I notice the panic, still inside me, heart punching into chest, short shallow breathes, as we walk towards Fresh on Bloor Street.

After we place are orders, I lean over the table and cover my face with my hands. I tell Zahra that I am out of breath with fear.

“I can’t stop thinking about the fall. I keep seeing the ground approaching in slow motion and I have that feeling in my stomach of dread and then I am out of breath.”

Zahra takes off her glasses and cleans them on her top. “Your body went through something, something traumatic,” she says. “It’s going to take time for it to trust again.”

***
As I drive south on Spadina towards the Gardiner I feel the fear creeping around my shoulders and the shortness of breath. I try to hush my body into calmness. *Shhhhh, nothing is happening, right now. I won’t hurt you again. I promise. It’s ok. Nothing is happening now.* I keep speaking gently and breathing until I feel it lifting. And then I’m back to driving with one hand on the steering wheel and I notice the sky, the pastel blue and pinkish colours make me smile. I take a long in breath and then exhale slowly. And then notice I am crying.

At night, in bed, I think about something else that Zahra said, about trauma. “It’s possible that it’s not just the fall. Trampoline could be a place where old and new traumas collide.” I close my eyes. I think of my four-year-old self and wonder how often I must have felt panic, how often I experienced terror, how often my body had to find a way around it or through it. I feel sad for that little girl. I think of her, as I close my eyes.

***

Thursday, I have a strange dream about spiders. Hundreds of spiders crawl in and out of my mouth and over my eyes. I’m on my bed, and as I try to move away from the bed my face gets caught in the spider web. I feel my face as it brushes over the softness of the web. I wake up and I’m standing in front of my bedroom door with my hand on the light switch. I am sweating and shaking. Once I realize I am dreaming I have to check the bed for spiders before I can go back into it again.

For three nights in a row, I have the same dream and wake up in the same spot with my hand on the light switch, sometimes crying, sometimes gasping.

On the third night, I look up the meaning of spiders. I find two that I like. One suggests that spiders and webs are about feeling trapped, about the feeling of being out of control. The second suggests that a new network is being formed and that the spider is there to teach patience, so that we learn of the work it takes to build a web, only to have it destroyed, and have to rebuild one again.

It takes looking up the meaning of spiders for the dreams to finally stop.

The week after, I am back on the trampoline.
“I feel like I can’t do it. It’s impossible. I feel like I am too weak,” I say all this hoping he will tell me to step off the trampoline and give myself more time.

“But,” Chris says while he rubs his hands together with a smile. “Today is the day you get to do impossible things.”

I stay on and jump. My palms are dripping with sweat and I feel like I will faint.\(^\text{20}\)
Chapter 7
Ugliness and Shame

You don’t know if you are pretty until you read a Cosmopolitan article that invites you to measure yourself. You are twelve and eager as you follow the instructions. The writer does not tell you that you need to be white or skinny but the article does say to look at your profile in the mirror and to check for straight lines. You can, if so inclined, bring a ruler to your nose to make sure it is perfectly straight: Good profiles and symmetry are signs of great beauty.

When you find your crookedness in the mirror you feel defeated. And so you spend years pressing on the bridge of your nose because you want to be beautiful.

***

You don’t know all the parameters of beauty until someone tells you, you are ugly and then it is like he has made you and you do not know what to do with yourself. Suddenly, it is so obvious that you are hairy and bulgy and dark brown, with a gap between your front teeth.

No matter how hard you try to run from his words and reinvent yourself it is as if he has put a stain inside you and it seeps out onto all your surfaces.

The concept of ugliness stings more because it is your brother who says this and because in his eyes you can see that he believes it. And because since September he has been making excuses not to walk with you to school and you know now, that he is ashamed of you, and so you tuck that ugliness away into yourself.

And you sob for hours the night he tells you, you are ugly.

***

You Don’t Know If You Are Pretty was produced during a collective writing session that utilized freewriting. This collective writing took place in a writing space for writers of colour facilitated by me as part of my work as community health worker. Unlike other pieces of creative non-fiction that I wrote, I had not workshopped this piece in writing groups. Instead, after writing the
piece in the freewriting session, I edited the piece quietly, at home. While most of the creative non-fiction pieces in this dissertation were shared with my siblings as a process of collectively sharing shame stories, I noted how instead of sharing the piece I stored it away. I wonder now if the choice not to share this piece and not to workshop it with writing groups had something to do with the proximity between ugliness and violence. Ugliness has a way of being dangerous. I remember the ways in which my brother treated me different as he witnessed the ways in which my body was taken up in Toronto playgrounds and classrooms. It was dangerous to associate with me, dangerous to have such proximity to ugliness and the ugliness that I carried.

A few months ago, aware of the ways in which I was holding this piece and the shame and fear associated with the experience of being ugly, I brought, You Don’t Know If You Are Pretty, to read as a prompt with a group of high school students. In the session, I told them that our theme was beauty and how we come to see ourselves in relation to these concepts, and the impact that they have on us. I was interested in what types of writing and conversations would be prompted by the concept of ugliness and my writing of it. In response to the prompt participants wrote openly about their experiences in school. They also spoke about the ways in which social media made the performance of beauty and the engagement with beauty a daily encounter. One student spoke about the ways that students remade themselves to be perceived as beautiful and how painful it was to be linked or associated with ugliness. The following excerpt included here with the permission of the author, exemplifies some of the ways that the prompt and the theme of ugliness facilitated an exploration of the intersectionality of oppression, through the felt experience of beauty.

There is a girl
I hate
I loathe
She’s here
She’s me

So round
Short
Dirty Hair
Wearing
Clothes from Zellers
From the sales
Rack for $5.99

Her Muslim mother wears her
Multi coloured hijab
and speaks loudly
Over our learned politeness
And she’s ashamed
Ashamed of her difference
Ashamed of her Mother’s loud hijab
Her loud voice

All the white girls in school who
Own cottages and go skiing during Christmas Break
They buy all their clothes at Suzy Shier and Dynamite
And all the white boys
Who walk past her and go to play basketball
And talk about all the pretty girls with
The best boobs and best smile
And it’s never her

All her white classmate wearing
Beaver canoe and singing
Kris Kross, Maestro Fresh Wes and watching
Fresh Prince of Bel Air

Who can’t even trace their ancestry
Because they’ve been here for generations and
Generations
Their parents were born here
All their lives so different from mine and I still long
To fit in
Be popular

And I can’t find the confidence and the words
The strength inside me
That’s used and bored
Inside me waiting to
Stretch out, to be born
To be the weapon that loves me
And saves me\textsuperscript{21}

Saadi’s poetry weaves between class, race and religion and allows us to feel how ugliness moves in and through these sites with an affective impact on bodies and the ways they feel about themselves. In the piece, Saadi experiences herself as outside of desirability because of all the ways in which she is outside of whiteness. Saadi’s piece exemplifies some of the ways whiteness and wealth are intricately tied up to beauty and illustrates how ugliness is not only associated with poverty, lower-class, working class, lack, and deficiency but also the ways in which it circulates shame. The ideal body in my youth was the white, thin, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class, abled body that exhibited wealth in style and access to trendy clothes and cars and an upper-middle class lifestyle.

I include You Don’t Know If You Are Pretty here because I have been searching, unsuccessfully, for a number of years for a way to talk about the ways shame and beauty intersect with race, gender and class. In You Don’t Know If You Are Pretty, I attempt to approach the ways ugliness sticks to the surfaces of bodies (Ahmed, 2015). How does a body come to inhabit the place of ugliness? And what does ugliness generate? In a sense, I would suggest that ugliness involves the performance of disgust as well as the feelings of pain and shame. Ugliness, pain, disgust, and shame “create the very surfaces and boundaries that allow all kinds of objects to be delineated” (Ahmed, 2015). Beauty and ugliness also provide a way of seeing how shame circulates between bodies.

The next section is a lyrical essay titled, Tongues\textsuperscript{22} that examines shaming in relation to race, language, and culture. Different versions of Tongues were initially workshopped in writing

\textsuperscript{21} Salma Saadi

\textsuperscript{22}
classes and then in several writing groups. This version evolved as a result of feedback and comments that I received from workshopping the piece with several groups of writers. I mention this again to emphasize the importance of writing groups on the writing process of these pieces and to highlight the ways in which writing happened both in solitary practice but through collaborative processes.

A version of Tongues was published in 2016 issue of Room (see Carranza, 2016).
Mom says she doesn’t know how to twist her tongue in half.

“It’s genetic,” you say as you fold your tongue and stick it out so she can see it. You are sitting at the kitchen table in the house in Brampton. Mom is sitting in front of you. The light from the window is in her eyes and every time she tries to fold her tongue it falls flat like a tortilla.

At some point, Mom gives up trying. Her tongue gets tired.

***

Mom says she always wanted one of her kids to partner with someone that spoke Spanish.

“You don’t know how hard it is,” she told you one summer as you sat outside on the beige lawn chairs. Her hair is long with bits of grey around her face.

“It’s strange for me to live here,” she says to you, in Spanish. “In this place where people will always ask me to repeat myself and where it will always feel like I’m stumbling with language.”

You ask her if she ever thought of going back.

“Noooooo!” She presses her lips together and shakes her head from side to side.

You think about Mom’s best friend Maria who bought a condo with her husband last year and moved to El Salvador, and all the other Salvadorians that packed up their places in Washington, Montreal, and Hamilton to move back to a place where they are not Salvadorians or Latinos or immigrants where they can speak freely without translating and where they have no accents.

“This is home now.” she says and looks down at the grass.

And you think how could home be a hard place where you feel left out of language? You wonder if YOU could stay in a place where you were constantly asked to repeat yourself.
You remember the first word you ever heard in English. Your family had just arrived in Toronto. You were staying in a hotel downtown.

You are standing by the bed when you notice the cleaning lady waving and speaking to you. All you hear is gibberish. So you stare at her, frozen. You are 6. Your mother is standing by the washroom. Close enough so you can, if needed, run over and grab her hand. The lady has light brown hair and a wide smile. Although you have given her no indication that you will respond, she is patient with you.

Mom tells you that the lady is saying, “Hola”.

You don’t know why but the lady and her sounds frighten you. You stand in silence until the lady turns around and leaves the room.

To learn a new language you have to be willing to fail. You have to move the tongue into unfamiliar shapes and places. There are risks in these movements: Eyebrows might furrow. Eyes might glare. Faces might turn away. The payoff is always in the possibility of reaching between languages and understanding each other. It doesn’t always work and some places and spaces and faces are harder than others.

You remember kids laughing at you in grade three or four because you couldn’t pronounce the TH sound in word *three*. You didn’t know that you had to place your tongue between your teeth to make the TH sound. So when you tried to say the word three it sounded like *tri*.

You learn the feeling of rejection when you try to speak in a different tongue. Sometimes, you think this feeling is like hopelessness and it gathers in the deepest parts of you.

When you and your siblings came to Canada none of you spoke or understood English. After a few months, you and your siblings start to go to school and you start to learn different
words and then phrases and then you are singing the Canadian anthem and Christmas songs about Jesus. And yes, a lot of the words are mispronounced and sometimes unintelligible but you are all picking up the language and it is fast and Mom is working long days at a factory making antennas and she is tired.

And while all of you are busy learning a new language, she is being left behind.

***

Mom says she never feels confident in English. Even after 30 years, she says she feels out of place like she’ll never know enough to move through it with ease.

Yet, you’ve seen her fearlessly approach strangers.

Mom walks through the streets of Brampton and talks to the grocery clerks, to young people waiting at bus stops, to the secretary at your niece’s school, and to anyone who will talk back. She’ll ask strangers about their partners, their children, their work life, and their dreams. Through these conversations she learns intimate details about the people in your neighbourhood.

At first, you don’t have an interest in speaking with strangers. You think people that approach strangers are either lonely or needy. Your boundaries sometimes shoot up when strangers approach you. This all changes after you spend a summer in El Salvador. In El Salvador people behave like Mom. Strangers approach you like you are a lost relative and they ask you about your life and your family and openly tell you stories about their lives and loved ones. You find this closeness both uncomfortable and comforting. It is as if they are erasing all your boundaries, but when you speak in Spanish they ask you where you are from. You feel like your tongue betrays you. You have spent too much time away from this place and this language and so you try to keep quiet so that no one thinks of you as an outsider.

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You know there is an older tongue that runs like a current through your Spanish. It reminds you that not all was as peaceful as you imagined. In your twenties, you learn about the 1932 massacre in El Salvador and about the killing of thousands of Indigenous people. You wonder about your grandmother who was 8-years-old when the massacre occurred. You learn
that in El Salvador people stopped identifying as Indigenous after the massacre and that many mothers and fathers stopped speaking Nahuatl to their children. It was not safe. To survive, tongues were forced to make different sounds.

This awareness, in your twenties, makes you feel distant from Spanish. You know you arrived at your mother tongue by route of colonial violence. And you know that there was an older tongue that was uprooted and silenced through massacre.

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There are many people that dismiss Mom as soon as she opens her mouth.

As a child you watched Mom try to communicate in English. You watched as people dismissed her. In front of you Mom turned childlike sometimes growing red with shame. At times, it felt intentional like they didn’t want to take the time to hear her like she was a burden like she was making their lives more difficult just by opening her mouth and trying to speak. It felt strange to watch Mom be so inadequate to not have the skills to communicate like other Moms.

As a teenager, you sometimes got embarrassed, took a few steps away from her while she spoke. Sometimes you stared down at the floor and waited for it to be over. Sometimes she got upset and yelled. No one ever kicked her out of the bank or grocery store, thank goodness. You don’t know where you would’ve stuck yourself.

Over the years, you noticed how Mom has shifted from all these dismissals. She sometimes doubts herself, pauses when she should step in, waits for you to help her when she could help herself.

Now you are not patient with any dismissals. Sometimes, your anger explodes and you have no control.

“She’s trying to tell you that she needs to cash THIS cheque and deposit THIS one.”

You speak to them like they are idiots because they are hurting your mother.

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In your thirties, you realize you also feel out of place with this English tongue except for you, there is no home in Spanish to fall back to.

You remember that in grade four you recorded your voice to hear the Spanish accent and there it was thick as the tongue that made it. You quickly erased the recording because you hated the sound of you.

Inside you wish language felt neutral or like nothing. You wish you never knew unbelonging. You wish you didn’t obsess over these things. You wish you didn’t think of language like home or like displacement. You wish you didn’t know the feeling of being left out or of being pushed out.

But you do, and English feels like an object you are borrowing or like something that belongs to someone else and at any moment they can ask for it back and tell you to “Go back where you came from.” So you realize you also know what it is like to be out of place and to be betrayed by a tongue that refuses to twist itself into the right shape.

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On a trip through Central America, you learn that there is a different language hidden in your Spanish tongue. In Nicaragua, you ask someone to pass you a guacal and they stare at you blankly. You ask again and point to the container on the sink and they ask you what language you are speaking. You say Spanish because you do not know that the word guacal is in Nahuatl. Later you will discover that you have Nahuatl words embedded in your Spanish, words like chocolatl, coyote, tomate, aguacate, and so you feel like someone has hidden something precious in your tongue.23

Learning English as second language

What I wanted to explore in this piece was how ugliness is embedded in colonial shame and the idea of disposable and unwanted bodies and how it weaves through experiences of learning English as a second language, and of falling outside of the frame of desirability. In creating this piece I wondered about the shame of learning English as a second language and the resulting fear

23 End of lyrical essay.
of writing in English and the ways in which whiteness and white entitlement is produced in the English as a second language learning experience. As a child who learned English as a second language, I have memories of being ridiculed and laughed at for mispronouncing words. I also have the feeling of always being behind and never feeling fully at home in the English language. There are shifts and movements my tongue and mouth refuse to make and sometimes can only make temporarily and quickly forget. These pronouncements are taken up productively in classroom spaces and corrected. These corrections rely on an understanding and awareness of belonging.

As a student, not only was I terrified of the process of writing and specifically of making mistakes, I also felt the weight of these mistakes as signs that proclaimed or exclaimed my out-of-placeness. Their and There, your and you’re, passive voice and active voice were a source of stress, because of the shaming associated with not understanding, knowing, and not being able to reproduce these distinctions. Shame and fear of ridicule made the learning and memorizing of these grammatical rules difficult and a source of embarrassment.

Recently at a writing workshop for immigrant and refugee women, the facilitator, Renee McPhee invited participants to explore creative spelling in our writing. Some of the women in the workshop were newcomers and had a hard time expressing themselves orally in English. The use of creative spelling was a way of moving away from policing the English language and moved away from shaming mistakes.

As I mentioned before, I also ask writers to suspend the urge to correct or to fixate on correct spelling or grammar. People in the workshops sometimes smile and laugh or look at me with disbelief. As a result of the facilitator’s use of creative spelling, I have incorporated this phrase into my writing workshops as a way of challenging the overemphasis on spelling and grammar.
as the only way to define good writing and to give permission to spell creatively. “That far too many who could do not learn to read and write suggests that they fail to see anything of value in most definitions of literacy… The sad fact is that in too many quarters literacy is defined as reading, and reading as a matter of learning to comprehend and then follow instructions” (Brodkey, 1996, p.4). But literacy is rarely defined or understood as writing as a way of talking back, responding to what excludes or silences you or writing as a way of approaching how a system moves internally into bodies. The process of impeding the power to write yourself into the world, that is impacting literacy, is in fact, a process that secures domination and the privileges associated with it (Leonardo, 2004).

In my work, I wanted to explore writing as a way to give breathing space to those of us who feel threatened by the fear of making mistakes. I have also become more aware of the ways in which spelling mistakes and grammatical errors are taken up in conversations and writing spaces. Usually, people bring up the sign of spelling mistake as a sign of sloppy work or as a sign of disrespect on the part of the writer. I also notice the shame that circulates in me when I spot a mistake in work that I have circulated. Most recently, I noticed how uncomfortable I became after noticing my misuse of you are in a text message. Intending to compliment a writer I had texted her: you’re writing is beautiful. When I spot the mistake hours later I feel the ripple of shame through my shoulders and back. Hours later I keep looking at the text. I realize there is no one external to me shaming me. In this moment shame circulates at my own calling. This is the way my body has been trained to respond to writing mistakes: with shame. When I speak to my sister about this she tells me, she does something similar. She avoids saying a word that she can’t pronounce properly. “I try to use words that I am confident I can pronounce,” she tells me.
The writers that collaborated on this study also expressed a fear of writing and of making mistakes and of being ridiculed for not knowing. Most commonly people introduced themselves by stating, “I’m not a writer,” and then often, as the workshop progressed, added that they’ve spent a large part of their lives journaling and writing stories, but that they did not consider themselves writers. In the collaborative space I wanted to disempower grammatical rules, and spelling, and make sure people knew from the start that I was a “bad” or a creative speller and that I was ready and willing to make grammatical errors publicly in the interest of writing. As a result, of incorporating writing into this dissertation I also had the pleasure of attending a multitude of creative writing courses and workshops. I paid close attention to the ways in which writers and instructors reacted to spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Some writers and instructors took pleasure in pointing out mistakes and laughed joyously at them. Others ridiculed and humiliated students for making “basic” mistakes or for not knowing. Implicit was the idea that the writer knew the rules of grammar intimately or ought to know them and that those of us that could not memorize or absorb these rules could not be writers or should not even attempt to write.

Tongues is an engagement with this idea of English language, as first of all a “wanted” language, a highly sought out language, a valuable asset and as something that must be performed in strict awareness of rules and “proper” pronunciation. In the process I’m also asking what the idea of English writing as grammatically perfect serves and produces in classrooms. It is also an exploration of how these ideas around the supremacy of the English language and the idea of perfection associated with the written text play out in classrooms and how these experiences serve to silence students and to circulate shame in Canada. And in my case, and for most of the people on this study, it is about how people absorb a fear of writing and in particular, a fear of
associating the self with a writer. Specifically, in this section I question how narratives on the experience of learning English as a second language can create a shared understanding of student disengagement. And a shared understanding of the feelings associated with racism and white supremacy in the classroom.

To learn a new language you have to be willing to fail. You have to move the tongue into unfamiliar shapes and places. There are risks in these movements: Eyebrows might furrow. Eyes might glare. Faces might turn away. The payoff is always in the possibility of reaching between languages and understanding each other. It doesn’t always work and some places and spaces and faces are harder than others.

Here I was thinking of the ideal way of learning a language and that is that it should be about learning and not about the fear of failing. Implicit is the sense that learning a language can feel playful and does not need to be soaked in shame and ridicule. In saying that some places and faces are harder, I was thinking about the classrooms where I was ridiculed for my accent or for my mistakes. It also makes me think of academic jargon and how it is used to shame. In writing this dissertation, I feel like I’m looking over my shoulder wondering if I have written anything wrong or used inappropriate language. I feel there are big risks in writing. There is a sense, for me, that the language of the academy is also about trends, and catch words and how it makes the ones that don’t have access to this language, journals, graduate lectures, classrooms feel inadequate.

In the piece above I also wanted to capture the multitude of ways that English created a divide between my mother and her children (me). We picked up the language faster and learned how to strip our tongues of certain movements, but her work and the circumstances of her life kept her at distance from English. One of the toughest things around this piece is remembering that shift from the mother that was the knowing adult to the mother that could not speak and needed to rely on us for basic communication. As children, we learned quickly how to laugh and ridicule accents and made the learning twice as hard on all of us. I have memories of us mimicking my
mother’s accent and of asking her to repeat herself because we “couldn’t” understand and I know this made her feel very small and so far away from us. As children, we knew there was power in English and “right” pronunciation and we strived for this.

Most recently, I read an excerpt of Tongues in a writing workshop where I was facilitating. Initially, I had intended to read a section, but found the piece too painful and felt myself too fragile to read the entire excerpt. As I was reading, I skipped over the section where I talk about not being able to pronounce words. It wasn’t a conscious choice but as I was reading I had the sense that I would cry. I kept thinking of how scary it felt to make mistakes and to not know how to make myself pronounce the word in the “right” accent-free way. The following is what I read:

You learn the feeling of rejection when you try to speak in a different tongue. Sometimes, you think this feeling is like hopelessness and it gathers in the deepest parts of you.

When you and your siblings came to Canada none of you spoke or understood English. After a few months, you and your siblings start to go to school and you start to learn different words and then phrases and then you are singing the Canadian anthem and Christmas songs about Jesus. And yes, a lot of the words are mispronounced and sometimes unintelligible but you are all picking up the language and it is fast and Mom is working long days at a factory making antennas and she is tired. And while all of you are busy learning a new language, she is being left behind (Carranza, 2016).

In response to this excerpt, I asked writers to write for ten minutes. They were instructed to use the excerpt as a prompt, but to feel free to write whatever came up for them, and most importantly to discard any concerns for grammar or spelling, and to feel free to make mistakes. I set the timer and we wrote for ten minutes. With permission from the author, I am including an excerpt produced during the ten minute freewrite. I’m including it here because it captures succinctly some of the processes that I am intending to describe that is, the collaborative sharing of shame stories and the conversation that arise in written form between writers.
What is English? A forced upon, a hard rock, it pinches you in places that hurt most if you don’t know it.

All the phrases: Learn English, Speak English, it will get you places. But those places are full of damaged people, self-doubt, of working life, adaptation and citizenship ceremonies where we are supposed to feel grateful and happy to be part of this country.

English dominates the air. It’s a giant blanket so large I almost choke… Every word I could not spell became all my failures, every punctuation mark I forgot, coloured me in my inadequacies.24

In this piece, Saadi captures the shaming and humiliation that permeate the learning of English as a second language, but also this process of gathering and sharing stories. I write a piece and share it with the group and the group responds in writing. Saadi writes, “The box outside the English language is vast and undervalued.” Another writer responds, “The class is much different from home/ The accent still can be heard in your speech/ Many others think this is funny/ Causing you to push it down deep.”25 In this workshop we spoke about the experience of feeling silenced by “right” pronunciation and the fear of being laughed at, and we communicated this through the pieces we wrote. What collective gathering of shame stories allowed us to see was the ways we were made to feel that our language, and our ways speaking were things that could be ridiculed. While all of us had experienced different forms of shaming and humiliation around “right” pronunciation, we also spoke about the ways in which the experiences made us feel isolated and alone, all the while acknowledging how difficult it is to open up these wounds in a public space.

As I write this my mind keeps returning to a recent experience I had in a classroom. Currently, I am facilitating writing workshops for newcomer women in Mississauga, Ontario. This program

24 Salma Saadi
25 Shawayne Dunstan
is taking place in partnership with an elementary school and a community health centre. The women that attend the writing workshops are all racialized, women. In the writing workshops, we look at the experience of migration and of displacement and explore through writing some of the feelings of loss, disappointment, hope and despair.

Recently, as I went to set up in the classroom where I facilitate I found the room was occupied with bags, coats, and computers. Since there was no one in the room, I tried to figure out who was taking over our space and what this meant. Would we have to cancel the session or would we still have access to the classroom? Thirty minutes later when I returned to the classroom I found the classroom full of people. I opened the door and asked if they would be in the classroom much longer and a woman who was giving a presentation told me that they would be using the space for the entire day. I told her we were running a program in thirty minutes in this classroom and that we had booked the space. She looked at me blankly and said, ok thank you, and signaled me to close the door and leave without giving me a sense of what would happen to our workshop.

A few minutes after I had entered the classroom a woman came up to me and asked me what time I needed the to use the space. I repeated the same thing I had told the group that the program would be starting in a few minutes. The woman was standing beside the principal of the school. And upon my answer, he nodded and asked how many people were in the workshop. I told him that it was around ten participants. Then he walked away. A few minutes later when I returned to the classroom, I saw through the window that the presentation was continuing and that no one was making any attempt to leave the room. I opened the door and announced that our program was starting and then noticed that the principal was in the room. He signaled me to another room by pointing with his chin then added, “Use another room.”
When he said this I felt my face grow red. I walked into the other classroom and began to set up, but in my head, I kept thinking why he couldn’t have told me that he was assigning us a different room. And why he said it in a way like we didn’t matter. In a sense, he was reading me like he read most of the participants in the workshop. We are all immigrant racialized women and in a sense displaceable. Displacing us from a classroom was a way of constructing us as the objects he could move at his will without apologies or explanations. In fact, there was nothing else communicated between us. There was no sense of wrong doing on his part as our bodies were read as a collective of Otherness.

I’m writing this because the feeling states of shame are still in my body as I write. I keep repeating certain scenes in my head and ripples of shame enter my stomach and shoulders. I’m also narrating the experience here because I am wondering if it might be useful to engage with a fresh experience of shame in order to understand how shame circulates in classrooms, even though this occurred three days ago I am still experiencing moments where the entire incident replays in my body and mind through physical sensations and thoughts.

In response to this experience, I tried on several occasions to mindfully approach the feeling states that the experience brought up for me. I felt shame and anger, and indignation. I experienced the shame as discomfort in my body, heat on my face, increased heartbeat, and shallow breaths. The act of moving the writing workshop that is attended and geared towards racialized newcomer women is an act of humiliation. In it, there is the physical pronouncement of who has a legitimate right to use the classrooms in the elementary school, and who has the power to displace and decide who can use the space. The blatant disregard of racialized women’s bodies is also accomplished through the way the displacement was communicated. This is the way that shame is circulated. Everyone that sat in that classroom knew that they were
occupying a space. They also saw the racial and class divide between the participants in the writing workshop and the mostly white occupiers of the classroom space. In witnessing the ways in which our bodies can be moved to make room for them they secure white entitlement to the classroom spaces and to the school. These strategies produce the occupiers of the classroom as the legitimate identities that can take up space and displace ‘others’. But most important they secure white identities by circulating shame towards the racialized bodies that can be legitimately displaced. In the process, they are able to sit comfortably in the pleasure of whiteness and its legitimate identification with schooling and school spaces. These strategies rely on the classroom as identity making spaces (Razak, 2002). They create a distinction between us and them around the legitimate and illegitimate use of space and the right to displace, but also circulate the feelings associated with disrespect, disregard, and white entitlement.

I’ve been sitting with these feeling for three days now. I acknowledge that as someone who is educated on the principles of anti-oppression and anti-racism and who is studying the circulation of shame, I have access to a language that can “unmap” the ways in which race is being constructed in classrooms and schools (Razack, 2002). The white male principal makes his superior identity felt through, not only the student body population, and their families, but also through the racialized female community workers that coordinate and develop programs in the schools space. In the translation of this experience into a narrative and in exploring this shame through story, I invite others to think of ways to resist and challenge the ways in which shame is circulated in classrooms, and also to disrupt the ways in which displaced colonial shame circulates between bodies.
Chapter 8
Collective Gathering of Shame Stories: ABCs of Racism

In this section, I present writing that was produced in response to the prompt, *racism feels like.*

The writing that populates this section had very specific participants and writing methods. These writers are people I have known personally, if not all of my life, then for a large part of my life. With these writers, I have been engaging, for years, with issues of race and racism, and more broadly with discussions around systemic oppression. The relationships that foreground these collaborations cannot easily be reproduced or replaced.

Over my dinner table, in restaurants, at schools, at each other’s homes, through e-mail and via text messages, we have throughout the years spoken about our experiences with racism, sometimes, sharing these experiences with each other for validation, sometimes in shock and rage. I have spoken about this in the methodology section but it’s worth elaborating on it here: These conversations and these interests predate my dissertation. When thinking about whom to engage with on this question of humiliation and shame in classrooms, in the first phases of writing, I deliberately chose people who had been thinking deeply about issues of oppression in their own personal work and lives and were personally invested in anti-racism and anti-oppression work. As a result, the writing that was produced is not a reflection of the writing prompt and/or the opportunity to talk about racism, but a reflection of the deeply thoughtful and reflective means in which the writers had been contemplating issues of oppression in their own lives for years prior to this research project.

In addition, for the writers, this was not the first time that they were engaging collectively with these issues. What is really important to highlight about the writing and these discussions is that even though speaking about racism and oppression had been a part of the writers’ lives, this
collective sharing, of stories and experiences, is for me an important vehicle for the exploration of shame. In my past experiences of oppression, we have at times taken time to develop strategies and think through ways of properly caring and support ourselves and each other. These important relationships framed for me a key step in trust-building, which was necessary in the early stages of this work and critical, in my steps towards looking more closely, not just at experiences of oppression, but at the ways in which I had internalized systems of oppression through acts of shaming. The solidarity and deep trust in this group cemented the attempt at constructing safer ways of gathering these experiences and looking at them together. I say this because I don’t think I would have been able to continue to look at shame in collectives had I not been supported in these initial gatherings and felt safe to do so.

The written texts that are included in this section were in some cases developed while writing together in in-person meetings, sometimes over my dinner table, in parks, and cafes, in other cases, the writing was developed by the writer in their own time, at the spaces that they chose, and submitted to me via e-mail or text message. I present the individual pieces of writing as a collage in the form of an alphabet, as a way of returning to the storytelling frame that my mother used in explaining racism to me as a child. The ABCs of what racism feels like is not a complete list. It represents a work in progress that I imagine can serve as a pedagogical tool for talking about the felt experiences of racism within loving community spaces. I say loving because this work requires a lot of trust that cannot be built overnight.

While all the writers were not present in the same room having these discussions with each other and with me, these discussions were taking place at similar moments in time. So that, I was thinking about what I had recently received from an author via e-mail, a few days before engaging in a collective writing session, and then carrying that e-mail correspondence and
writing session and my work, with me to dinner for another conversation and/or writing session. At times, at least in my head, these conversations were taking place with each other.

Like all the collaborators in this study, writers decided whether to use their names or pseudonyms. This was a personal choice for some and some cared deeply how they would be represented and needed to be anonymous while others expressed less of a concern with authorship and anonymity. Initially, I had wanted writers to be featured in this work with their real names, thinking that in allowing each to be represented as a collaborator and author I was, somehow, disrupting the researcher and participant relationship. I had not understood how much we would want to be distanced from these experiences and how I would appeal to and rely on anonymity as a way of distancing and allowing me to engage with my own writing. As a result, some of the names listed in this section are pseudonyms and some are the writers’ real names. In any case, the names that are listed in the text are the one’s chosen by each writer to represent themselves.

With very little prompting the writers in this section brought the experience through the body and explored how racism lives for them in flesh. In combination, these voices represent a complex picture of the multifaceted attack involved in racism, an attack that is emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual. They also represent this process of gathering and sharing shame stories.
Sometimes, it felt like school was holding us, hostage. I wanted to be around people my own age, and there was no way to gain access to them, but to go to school. I’d stay away as long as possible, sometimes missing a day or two and then couldn’t resist much more. At times, it felt like it was holding learning hostage. There were so many things I wanted to learn: art, drama, gymnastics, soccer, painting, drawing, film, photography, French, Italian, grammar, politics, geography, volleyball, and creative writing. So many things I was craving. So many things I wanted to understand. But there was no way of gaining this information at home, and no money to pursue other forms of learning.

I heard today, that in private schools in Toronto some kids are learning robotics in grade four. Sometimes, I feel really bad for that little girl that was craving to learn. I never imagined that what I swallowed in school would be so severe and would take me so long to undue. I never thought they’d give me something that would be so hard to remove from myself: self-doubt, a sense of not belonging, and of not being wanted.

I’ve been thinking about learning environments that might have felt different. I still believe that it would have been better to have known, for the principal to have been honest when we walked over in the 1980s to register for Catholic school. I wish he would have stopped Mom at the door, not even offered her a seat. I wish he would have told us that he and the teachers that he employed had no interest in educating, brown lower class Latino children and that more than that they had an investment in seeing us fail, that we were disgusting to them, something dirty to throw out. In hindsight, we would have thanked them. It would have been a glorious day. It would have saved us years of confusion and self-doubt.\(^{26}\)

\[ F \text{ is for Flight} \]

It feels like fight or flight. In my body, this has always manifested as my legs starting to shake (just as they would in the presence of danger). It is complete focus-capturing, by ungrounding and simultaneously losing consciousness of the surroundings and subtleties of myself, others and

\(^{26}\) Amalia
life. Depending on the context, it can feel like an annoying weak weight on your body with no concept of its own fragility. In these cases, the “annoying weight” can quickly evolve into a volcano of emotions demanding expression. If this expression is not possible the feeling once again changes into a claustrophobia, hopeless, and disappointment in self.

Experiencing racism is like a giant drum infusing your vessel with more and more negative, powerful energy with every hit/moment left un-criticized or challenged. Even worse is to watch a third party being emotionally attacked by racist ignorance. Those situations begin as pain. Pain through empathy, and develop into a protective rage.

Racism can also show delayed symptoms (like a car crash) and hours, days, weeks later can feel like something suddenly emptying your solar plexus, abducting my will power.

Racism can fill my body with a loathsome bitter, resentment toward myself especially when the “racist attack” originates from someone I had perceived as wiser. 27

\[ C \text{ is for Community} \]

It feels like absolute loneliness, no support, no community, no belonging. It feels like hot shame, the colour red, heat radiates through the body especially the face. I don't want to be looked at, want to hide my face, I feel small insignificant. The eyes are powerful, don't want them looking at my shame. Feel weak, powerless, energy drained, cannot speak. If I make a sound I can destroy or be destroyed. Something in my throat and chest that is constricting. Don't want to be in this place no more. I feel gaged, want to escape, nowhere to go. 28

\[ N \text{ is for not good enough} \]

Another incident, I remember clearly was when I was a teenager. It was winter and freezing cold outside. There were two bus stops on either side of the road. It was near the end of the line for the bus where it went around the block, so you could get on the bus at either side of the road ... I remember seeing the bus coming on the other side of the road, so I crossed the street, got on the

27 Leo Carranza
28 Juan Carranza
bus and paid my fare. I went to the back of the bus and sat down. The bus went around the block and came back to the other stop where I could have also waited for the bus. I remember the driver walking to the back of the bus and angrily telling me in front of the other passengers that I needed to pay another fare and he wasn’t paying for no “paki” to take a ride around the block. I remember being afraid, embarrassed and feeling not good enough or equal to him. At that time, I knew what “paki” meant, I was ashamed for being called it and I felt embarrassed because I felt that this was my fault. I paid the extra fare. I found out later I didn’t do anything wrong. 

_T is for Took_

Feels like crying. You know that kind of crying that you do when there’s a death, that kind of hollow emptiness that expands right into and through your chest. It feels like heart punching into chest, blood pulsating, turning red, wanting to hide. I don’t want you to know you’re doing this to me. It feels like shame because you have this power to hurt me, and because I can’t contain this body, can’t keep it under control, can’t keep it quiet, and it feels like what’s the use of all this knowing. When what you do to me can slip into the unconscious where it is free to roam and find refuge in me. Where it gets a hold of me, and where I can’t fight anymore.

It feels like fatigue, this heavy body that I can’t carry anymore.

Feels like anger shooting up my spine, and then a drain, like there’s a hole somewhere and I’m leaking out.

Or like they took something from me and I’m never whole again.

_D is for Dread_

Racism to me feels like dread and or stillness. I’ve had moments and or conversation with people who I just knew were gonna say something messed up. Either because of the language they were using or because I literally expected no better from the person. That’s when I feel dread – cause I

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29 Robert
30 Amalia
know it’s just a matter of time before they relax and/or forget themselves and let it rip. I had a conversation with one woman who would look at me and pause before identifying a race. i.e.… so I went to that store, you know the ones owned by those….coloured….I mean blacks….

It’s the pause that’s telling and that always puts a feeling of dread in my stomach. It’s like she’s testing the water. ‘Is she going to take offence?’ ‘Did she flinch when I just said that?’ and if I show no outward response right away it’s taken as an unspoken permission to say whatever messed up comment they like. Like I’m being excluded from ‘those’ people cause clearly I’m nothing like them. She feels comfortable talking to me after all – so what more proof of her acceptance of me do I need?

I use to react to that feeling of dread…before it could take root I would jump in with a slick mouth calling them on their ignorance. I would put them on the defensive and have them backpedaling until they physically ended the conversation by walking away. But this approach tended to get me labelled the angry black female in the office regardless of the tone of voice I used. For a while I embraced the title cause it meant people wouldn’t talk to me crazy cause they knew I would have a response for them. So while in some ways it was liberating – professionally it was limiting.

Racism can also feel like surprise – much like a sucker punch to the gut: Unwelcome and unexpected. It can have the same effect as dread – it can immobilize you. Keep you frozen in the moment, wondering if it really happened, if someone was that bold. When it occurs in the workplace you filter through disbelief and then attempt to temper your natural reaction – anger. Except in the workplace your anger can be used against you so you have to temper it… strangely enough make it more palatable to the person you’re responding to.

A is for Angry

I experienced many other incidents of racism when I was a child. The majority of the time I felt, fear, sadness, and not worthy of the respect of the people that were causing the oppression. I always felt that I was not good enough or equal.

31 Isabella Black
As I grew older, I noticed that racism began to change. It was no longer in your face or blatant like when I was a child, but it was still there. People were still said and did racist things, but it was more subtle. For example, I find people at work claiming to be not racist and saying racism no longer exist, but they make comments that show otherwise. I find a lot of the people are against employment equity because they feel that it is discrimination against them. A lot of my Caucasian colleagues feel that employment equity is reverse discrimination. I get a lot of comments like minorities need to suck up the racism experienced in the past and people should be hired based on qualification. When I tried explaining that employment equity is based on qualification, they say that it’s a lie and the majority of the people that work for us are minorities. They are not willing to see that minorities work in the lower paying positions and much of management is still dominated by Caucasians. When I hear this, it makes me angry and bitter against them because they do not realize how hard most minorities work, the struggles they experience to gain status. I find that people in management make racist comments to me about people in my own ethnic groups or other ethnic groups.

A lot of times, their comments to me begin with “I am not a racist, but”. I have heard comments like the city they are living in is becoming a “little Pakistan,” and that they need to get out. I have heard lots of comments about blacks and crimes. As an adult, these comments demonstrate to me that the dominant race still has all these stereotypes about minorities, although they are more careful about who to talk to about it.

I no longer feel afraid, although I do sometimes feel embarrassed because when they talk to me about these things, I feel like I am accepting their views instead of having the courage to challenge it.

I find myself feeling angry and bitter when I experience racism now. As I have children, I am attempting to challenge the racist view of people instead of accepting them.  

32 Robert
**O is for Over and Over and Over again…**

You want things to be steady. You want things not to move. It’s so hard to be constantly hit by the same thing over and over again, and yet, we don’t get to know it, to know it as a being as an energy. To know it, or a bit of it, would mean to admit that it has a life force, it has the ability to create, to move between people.

The scenario: I enter the bus. I pay my fair. I remember—almost abruptly—that I have forgotten to get my transfer. Up until this moment the world is moving as it should. And as I turn back I feel it, things are about to change. I ask the bus driver for my transfer, and he says NO. He tells me I didn’t pay my fair, and that I should pay first before I get off. I did pay, I say. I try to argue, but my money has slipped out of the visual landscape into that boxed crevice at the front. No way to unprove what the bus driver thinks he knows about me. What he believes he reads by my image, my colour, my race, my gender, my baggy clothes, my long hair, my accent, the way I move through the world, it tells him something about my value, my ability to pay. The anger builds in my stomach. It compounds and multiplies with the thoughts that start to circulate: I don’t have any more money. Just enough to pay the fair, not enough to get off and board another bus.

Some part of me decides that I (We) must take what he refuses to give us, what rightfully belongs to me, to us. I have paid my fair. I deserve my transfer. We need to get to work, the voice adds. Then I see myself reach for the transfer and the bus driver reaches for my hand. I pull away and grab the entire stack. And then the bus driver calls the police and closes the front door.

And then I’m back in my body, and I can feel that there are choices. The police is coming. I will have to explain. It will be my word against his. My word against his. And at this moment I will have to choose.

Bus driver lets the rest of the passengers know that the bus is out of service. People are exiting from the back doors. I need to make choice, stay or get off. Stay on or get off.³³

³³ Leo Carranza
In that moment, I wasn’t part of the family. She was ashamed of being with me cause of my race. I felt like a ghost and the person next to me felt it too and he had power over me. I wish that she understood what she did and that she would sympathize with me cause it makes me feel like I don’t belong in this world.\textsuperscript{34}
Chapter 9
Like You Remember

When your brother Juan and you talk about the three years you both spent in Catholic school in Toronto he says that he would love to go back to confront the teachers. St. Charles has become this mythical place in your stories of childhood. Sometimes, you think that you’ve given this place too much space in your collective memories. Sometimes, you feel like all your other experiences of racism feel dwarfed in comparison.

“I want to see it in their faces,” Juan says.

Juan doesn’t say what he’s looking for. You don’t ask. Secretly, you think you already know what it is. There’s a part of you that still wonders if it was their intention to hurt you. And another part that wonders why intent even matters.

Would it hurt less if they said it was unintentional?

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When you are six you move from Mexico City to East Toronto. At this time, your family is made up of two boys and three girls - all under the age of twelve. After a few months you start to speak and understand English. Mom is working at a factory and so she falls behind. She can’t communicate with landlords or phone companies and so you and your older sister Elizabeth, start to help with translations. You don’t remember if you offer to help or if Mom asks or demands.

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35 Insight that came out of collective discussions.

36 Intention came out of collective discussions.
You don’t remember if it was stressful or difficult to move between languages, but you do remember feeling like you wanted Mom to hurry up and learn so that she could do it herself.

Even though you experience racism before St. Charles you don’t know where to put these older memories or why St. Charles felt so different. There is always that element of shame and St. Charles definitely did it differently.

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You remember that you liked the old public school and the old neighbourhood in East Toronto. On some weekends in the summer Mom took you and your siblings on the bus to the beach. In the winter, your older sister Elizabeth would take all of you across the street to the library. You remember these memories fondly.

***

Early memories play games with you and you wonder now, what you are deliberately keeping from yourself. You start to remember moments: hazy memories of being stared at on busses and the subway, the feeling of being animal like with eyes gawking at you.

Then there is the incident with the ESL teacher.

First he kicked you and most of your siblings out of the ESL class then, as your brother tried to leave, he pulled him in and closed the door. Inside, on his own, your brother later tells your Mom that the ESL teacher tried to hurt him. You are six and your brother is eight when this happens. You have foggy memories of sitting in a big room with Mom, Dad, the principal and Marie (Mom’s French Canadian friend) who is translating. The ESL teacher is in the room too.

Years later, you ask Mom what happened with that teacher. She doesn’t remember everything only that he said it was a language issue that he had been playing with your brother and that you all misunderstood.
You ask if he was suspended or fired. Mom tells you that he didn’t teach you or your brothers or sisters again. And you think, “How was that enough for everyone?”

***

Because you are interested in St. Charles and why it plays such a critical role in your imaginings of schooling you ask Mom about the move to North Toronto, the neighbourhood that led you to this school.

Mom tells you that you moved from the East end because the landlord was selling the house and then because Dad decided to look for more affordable housing, to save on rent so he could have more money for other things. You don’t know what he intended these other things to be. Mom doesn’t know either. All you do know is that he didn’t think about you or the rest of your siblings or what it might mean to leave your school and neighbourhood, and have to start over again.

Initially, Mom thought you would sign up to the local public school, but Mom’s Canadian friend insisted that Mom sign you up to Catholic school instead. At the time of the move, you don’t know the difference between Good Friday and a regular Friday. You have never been to confession. You don’t know what to do with a rosary and you have never felt the wafer taste of sacramental bread melting in your mouth.

Regardless, Mom’s friend does the paper work, and in September, the principal walks you into a new classroom and introduces you to your grade four teacher, Mrs. Gratta.

***

A few days ago, you search through boxes in your closet looking for class pictures. You are looking for proof that Mrs. Gratta existed. You find her in a small brown box with class pictures from different years. You collapse onto the carpet in your room then watch her in disbelief, scanning her from head to toe. You had started to believe you wouldn’t find her, but here she is sporting her black framed glasses, curly 80s hair and pressed lips, eyes piercing through the camera.
At eight, you are a designated translator for some parent teacher meetings. You attend several meetings that sometimes, awkwardly, are about you, but on occasion have to do with your younger brothers. You feel messy and sweaty when you have to hear teachers talking about you.

On the first parent-teacher meeting with Mrs. Gratta, Mom brings you in to translate.

You sit beside Mom on the chairs in front of Mrs. Gratta’s desk.

“She’s easily distracted, and she has a hard time focusing,” Mrs. Gratta says without looking at you.

You blush, and search for the words in Spanish. You remember Mrs. Gratta wearing her usual rectangular glasses with black frames. When you start to translate, her eyes shift like strobe lights from Mom’s face to you.

And you start to question if you are translating the words right? You hear the words leave your mouth. You shift in the chair. You hadn’t known these things about yourself. You didn’t know how Mrs. Gratta knew them either.

You wonder if she has been taking secret notes about you all this time. How did she figure things out without the need to speak to you? You don’t remember her calling on you or standing by your desk to check how you might be coping with the move. You don’t remember her trying to help you make friends by introducing you to other children. In her class, you feel invisible: You eat lunch alone. No one speaks to you.

After that first parent-teacher meeting, Mom doesn’t say anything to you. You want her to say that she doesn’t believe Mrs. Gratta. You feel embarrassed to have her come all this way to hear these words about you. You need to hear that she knows you’re more than “easily distracted” but Mom doesn’t say anything.

***
When you remember the feeling of being laughed at sometimes it makes you turn red, sometimes your palms get sweaty, and you start to feel like someone is sitting on your chest. You wonder why they made it so hard on you. You wonder if there is something inside you that they can see that makes you disgusting.

***

A few months after that meeting, Mrs. Gratta announces that you will be watching a movie. You don’t remember what she tells the class whether she announces the movie as something about Native people or a movie about the residential school system in Canada.

The movie plays for a few minutes before you hear a boy calling out from the other side of the class. You turn towards him and catch him staring and pointing at you.

“Hey,” he says, “That’s Leonarda”.

As you look away from the boy and back at the movie, the class erupts into roars of laughter. You look up at Mrs. Gratta and find her grinning with the boy. They laugh and laugh for so long that Mrs. Gratta has to stop the movie.

You don’t understand what is funny. You don’t know how the boy knows your name without ever using it and how everyone else knows he’s referring to you if they never spoke to you. You thought you were invisible.

Frozen and hollow, you sit in the chair.

After a long while, the laughter dies down and Mrs. Gratta starts the movie again.

***
You sit with your brother Juan at the kitchen table in Brampton, and hand him the story of you in Mrs. Gratta’s class to read. He’s the first of all my siblings to read the story. You look outside for the few minutes it takes him to read it. It is winter and the trampoline is covered in snow. You feel like jumping.

After Juan reads the story he looks up at you and shakes his head. “It’s really great,” he says and he looks away.

“You know, I didn’t know I was Latino,” he says. “I didn’t even know what Latino meant before we went to that school. I just thought I was human, and then they called me a nigger and I didn’t even know what that word meant.”

You stare at your hands.

***

Maybe when they read this they will say you were too young and too sensitive maybe you were all traumatized from the war maybe you didn’t really understand “Canadian” culture and misunderstood and misread everything maybe you have chip on your shoulder and maybe it was all in your head and nothing really happened like you remember.

Analysis of What You Remember

I carried this experience of being laughed at for a long while not sure how to hold it, but holding it still. For years, I never talked about it. Didn’t tell my mother what had happened, feared that it revealed a truth about who I was, something everyone could see and could laugh at, but which I

37 This scene was later added to include discussions with my brother. His response to the story is here as well. After reading about my experience in Mrs. Gratta’s classroom he shared some of his experiences which I include here with his permission. This conversation speaks to the alienation we felt from these experiences and how much they impacted us.

38 End of Like You Remember
wasn’t aware of. I feared my family would laugh too if I told them, feared they would get the joke, and enjoy it without me. This would not be the last time that I would be called upon to bring this particular kind of pleasure. There would be moments when I was asked nicely to laugh along with my ridicule, and moments when I did.

*Like you remember* is combination of several narrative threads; it takes the form of a lyrical essay and it explores ideas around laughter and pleasure as they relate to race and racism. It is also, as previously stated, composed of a personal shame story and elements of discussions and collective storytelling that took place for a number of months. *Like you remember* integrates different processes of the collective storytelling methodology. It is a story that was remade in the telling and sharing of the story. This serves the purpose of moving the experience outside of an individual experience and into a collective shame story. Inserting my brother and his reflections into my childhood memory shifts the feel of isolation. In this new version, it makes me feel I wasn’t alone in the experience of being laughed at.

What still strikes me about the story and the memory of humiliation, is the laughter in this moment: the sheer pleasure of a belly laugh, the coming into a collective awareness of something ridiculously funny and the process of getting the joke. Yet, what does the laughter in this moment secure? Here, I don’t want to merely emphasize the effects of naming certain bodies/cultures as jokes, I also want to examine how that happens, and how that happens within a particular discourse and through shaming. I want to ask questions about what kinds of bodies are being secured in this moment, and how they are being secured through laughter.

For a long time, I wondered how the naming of my body as visibly associated to the Native body translated into humour. How did nine-year-olds living in Toronto in the 1980s know this to be funny? The students and the teacher came to this moment with very specific ideas about Native
people and Native bodies in relation to the ways that they saw and situated themselves. And as I have noted, these associations are not only produced discursively but have a history of being generated and sustained through acts of violence. This is not to suggest that in all spaces the associations would generate laughter or that intrinsically the idea of Native identity is a source of embarrassment or ridicule, but to examine how the associations that the students and teacher relied upon to construct laughter was intimately working through hegemonies of whiteness.

If we pretend that the laughter is existing in a vacuum then, there is nothing to challenge, nothing of any significance is happening, except that I resemble someone in a movie, and that, that happens to be a Native actor, and students have found pleasure in coming into a collective awareness of this resemblance. Yet, if we contextualize this moment of ridicule within a white dominated educational system where Indigenous people are imagined and constructed through the lens of inferior and violable bodies then this gathering of collective awareness on this resemblance and the laughter can be seen as embedded within a colonial project (Smith, 2005).

Linking colonization and education, Cote-Meek (2014), in her work analyzing post-secondary Aboriginal studies classrooms exposes the “extent of racism that Aboriginal students confront and negotiate in post-secondary classrooms” (p.11). Noting that the extent and impact of racial violence are especially “profound and painful in mixed classrooms where the narrative of ongoing colonial violence is discussed” (p.11). Cote-Meek explicitly links everyday racism in classrooms “to longstanding and ongoing colonial experiences” (p.11). She writes: “mainstream education for Aboriginal peoples has always been and continues to be a part of the colonial regime – one that is marked by violence and abuse” (p.10). As Andrea Smith so succinctly reminds us, “the history of mutilation of Indian bodies, both living and dead, makes it clear that Indian people are not entitled to bodily integrity” (2005, p.10).
The humour is then a part of a complex racial and colonial history that produces and sustains white supremacy. The students and the teacher came to know themselves or affirm their non-Native identities through the experience of shared laughter. The getting of the joke, the participation in the laughter becomes a way of accessing a proximity to whiteness. The “affective technology” relies on the construction of exclusion and the circulation of all the messy feelings associated with being excluded: shame, anger, betrayal, feelings of hopelessness, feeling cast-out, of not belonging, and for the students laughing at, this performance becomes a bonding ritual, a way of celebrating an identity worth performing (Hook, 2005; Razack, 2002). The collective identity that laughter is bonding together is also a collective body that can claim legitimate citizenship and a particular relationship to Canadian colonial history. And it is this facility with mobilizing violence through emotions that makes humiliation difficult to unpack and to situate as one of the most insidious aspects of colonial violence.

I am being laughed at. I am being shamed. As well, race is being inscribed onto my body, race as something that separates me from the collective student body, and that connects me to a racialized body that has a history of being colonized and violated. “Through such strange encounters, bodies are both de-formed and re-formed, they take form through and against other bodily forms” (Ahmed, 2000, p.39). The students and the teacher came to know themselves or affirm their non-Native identities through the experience of pleasure and laughter of casting out my body and the Native body (Razack, 2008). Pleasure works in very particular ways, not only to delineate the borders between Native and non-Native, but also to create the space of belonging and un-belonging. The pleasure and shared laughter brings individuals together into the space of belonging. The colonial violence that narrates this encounter is situated in already knowable identities of both the colonizer and colonized. And the perception that I visibly resemble this
body of a lesser person is the joke. Therefore, how humiliation shapes the very contours of the classroom and the borders between who gets to claim citizenship and belonging, and who does not, are mapped onto bodies through shame.

Hey, that’s Leonarda,” not only works through multiple associations, that is, the naming of the body as the body of the “Other”, but also through embodied encounters with my body. We, the students and the teacher encountered that “abstract idea” of the “Other” in several ways. The associations work through several affective practices: the laughter of that moment was but one incident, my (in) visibility in the classroom for the entire year, my grades were another, the teacher not calling on me was another, the alienation of playing alone in the playground was another, and these multiple moments heightened and affirmed not only the marking of the body of the Other but also, were practices tied up with nation building. So that at the moment when the video of the residential school system was played, the student could take some certainty in exclaiming what was already known and concealed (Ahmed, 2015). Laughter and pleasure became a way of bonding in that space of belonging to Canada and it becomes a colonial exercise rooted in delineating the right to citizenship and belonging. It becomes the pleasure of racism and of the production of whiteness. As Ahmed reminds us, “[e]motions are … not only about movement, they are also about attachments … what moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place … [that] connects bodies to other bodies” (Ahmed, p.11).

*Like you remember* takes up the theoretical frameworks in this dissertation, through a lyrical essay that narrates the felt experience of exclusion. It supports my argument that shame is part of the mechanisms through which exclusions and inclusions are produced in service of maintaining white dominance.
Chapter 10
Conclusion: Fear

Ever since you can remember, you have felt terrified of classrooms. You have a memory of wearing a checkered brown dress and standing in front of the class in grade three. Your hair is in two braids. Since you spent the summer playing outside in shorts and tank tops, without sunblock, your brown skin is darker. But you don’t know this difference then, you only notice it now, when you look at class pictures from that year.

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You are not the first person to be called up to the front of the class. She is calling students one-by-one. And when it is your turn, you carry yourself and your loose sheets to the front. You stand looking down at your sheets and then the sheets are fluttering in front of your chest and you are shaking, full body trembling, cheeks and lips out of control, nervous system gone haywire. The classroom full of students gawks wide-eyed. Your feet are frozen on the spot where you placed them and you are voiceless. All the language has been sucked out of you. Everyone in the class stares at you like you are a strange animal. When you get home you do not tell Mom what happened. You are afraid of how she will see you and so you push down the feelings and memories of that day.

***

This story of the girl that was terrified of classrooms is a memory that I have only recently started to craft into story. I had to admit that a part of me existed that was terrified before I could approach the memory of shaking. I didn’t like to remember the shaking girl.
The fear stayed with me through adolescence and adulthood. In response, I tried to deny the feelings of terror that surfaced when I entered a classroom: I couldn’t answer questions, or participate with others. I imagined that strength meant erasing the first signs of terror and the memories of the girl shaking. I caught myself crafting stories of a ME that preferred to sit quietly, an introvert. I told a story about a ME that was a good listener: a story of ME that only spoke unless absolutely necessary, a thoughtful person. Because I felt like the fear of speaking and the uncontrollable shaking tainted or marked me in a particular way, I started to craft stories that denied or erased bits of me.

In ‘The Faraway Nearby,’ Rebecca Solnit writes about the power of stories. “We think we tell stories,” she writes, “but stories often tell us … The task of learning to be free requires learning to hear them, to question them, to pause and hear silence, to name them, and then to become the storyteller” (2014, p.4). What slowly revealed itself to me in the process of crafting these stories was not only the desire to be free and ‘get over’ the experiences but also the denial and attempt at erasure. Inside the memories was a hurt that I did not want to feel and a shaking body in public places that I did not want to be connected to. I did not want to know that I experienced this kind of terror. In my attempt to move away from the feelings associated with terror, I also attempted to erase the experiences that birth this feeling, in the process, obscuring what these experiences produced in the classroom and how they continued to be productive. The making of the experience into story is important because of what it allows. The work of framing my bodily experience of classrooms into a story about terror is significant in that it prompted awareness. First, this awareness led me through the shaking body and second, towards an inquiry into bodies out of place. What does it feel like to be out of place? What does the perpetual feeling of non-belonging do to bodies? The crafting of my experiences in connection with terror becomes the
base of an inquiry into bodies, and bodies out of place, an inquiry that begins with a body
shaking out of control.

Is terror an exaggeration? Maybe. It is possible, that ever since I can remember, I have not felt
terrified of classroom? Maybe I should say that I was afraid. Is fear more accessible?
Believable? Is fear less dramatic? Can you identify more readily with fear and shyness than you
can with terror? But then what kind of classroom are we talking about? And who am I talking
about? Who is the YOU that is not understanding the relationship between classrooms and
terror?

I am aware, as I write this, that there are multiple ways that I can craft my memory of
classrooms. I could tell it in the third person and create some distance: For as long as she can
remember, she was terrified of classrooms. She stood in front of the class with the paper in her
hands and could not speak. There are different ways to begin and end and limitless choices in
details and chronology that the craft of narrative affords. That I was afraid of classrooms may
also not be entirely true. Is it an exaggeration? Was it a general fear or a specific circumstance
within classrooms that I feared? Was I just afraid of speaking in front of groups? Was I afraid
of being judged or laughed at? Was I afraid of the consequences of speaking or of what I might
reveal if I spoke?

As I write this I go through report cards in grade school. I’m searching for a narrative in the
evaluations that may reveal my fragility and confirm the story of terror that I am crafting. But
instead, I find kind words from educators. No mention of shaking, as I remember it. No note for
parents that reads: poor Leonarda shook terribly in front of the class today. We are after all
living through and inside stories: The bits of stories we are told of who we are, the bits we hold
and retell, they matter. “[O]ut of all this,” writes Solnit, “comes your contribution to the making
of the world, your sentences in the ongoing interchange. The tragedy … is to be silenced in this
great ongoing conversation” (Solnit, 2014, p.192).

I wrote a paper in graduate school in defence of silence, my silence. I was tired of being forced
to participate in classrooms, terrified every time we had to introduce ourselves, worried I would
lose control of this body again and reveal too much of me. I had one professor in graduate
school demand that every person in class had to speak in every class, bare minimum, at least say
one sentence. I remember one by one everyone started to speak. I was so nervous about
speaking that I could not think of anything to say or listen to what others were saying. I was also
angry at the imposition. Why should I speak just to speak? Perform speech because he demands
it of me and because he is responsible for evaluating and grading my learning. Five minutes
before the end of class I was the only one left who hadn’t spoken, I remember the professor
looking at me, and giving me the cue that I was next. I looked away and let the time pass. I kept
my silence. The asking for oral participation does not take into account the technology of
shaming and the ways in which silence has been imposed onto bodies.

Stories not only make worlds, as suggested by Solnit, they also reveal the world that is in the
process of being made. I crafted a story about fear and terror and some parts of the story are
being left out. Conveniently I am stitching together experiences that confirm the fear. I am not
writing about leading workshops or teaching drama to students or running summer camps. The
story, of the girl that shook, is a new story. It is one I did not even try to tell when I was busy
crafting a confident, intelligent and professional self. The shaking girl who fears public speaking
did not fit into the ways I was constructing myself. I have the memory of the grade three class
staring at me in shock and I did not want to be that thing that is absurd and strange, ever again.
“Out of all this comes your contribution into the making of the world” (Solnit, 2014, p.192). Some stories are told, and retold and explored and refashioned in multiple ways. Other stories are silenced and forgotten. I wanted my dissertation to serve as a platform for the sharing of shame stories. I wanted, in particular, stories from bodies that have been out of place and silenced; stories of unsayable, unnameable shame; stories that show the movement of structures inside, through and between bodies. If feelings, as Ahmed (2015) suggests, are the way structures slip inside our flesh, then stories are the way we seep through feelings, and cover and uncover what they are doing there inside of us. Quite a few things got inside me that day in grade three when I shook uncontrollably, one was the idea that silence was safe, and the other was shame for shaking, shame for having a body I could not control, shame for a shaking body, shame for being stared at like a wild animal out of control, shame for being different. And I wanted nothing more than to unhinge that shame from my body.

That there is a colonial history that underpins this shaking body is only something that I have recently come to understand as arriving by way of massacres and genocide. Inside the legacy of violence was an older shame that crept deeper into that shaking body. In El Salvador, where I was born, there was a massacre in 1932. That year, the government murdered thousands of Indigenous people. Over time, the story got told, retold and then untold. First, the government defended itself against insurgents -- not Indigenous people -- and then the government defended itself against communists -- not Indigenous people-- the newer versions of the story erased the Indigenous massacre and the genocide of Indigenous people that took place in 1932. It also erased the colonial violence that Indigenous communities were resisting. During the massacre, and shortly after, Indigenous communities were afraid of being murdered by the state. People hid for days, and weeks, and when the survivors finally emerged they employed different
survival strategies: Some parents stopped speaking their native language, most stopped dressing in their traditional clothes. Slowly a story got told, and untold, and retold, of the massacre of 1932.

Now there is El Salvador, this place where I was born, where the majority of people are mestizo and not Indigenous, and where there was a massacre in 1932 where radical communists were killed. The erasing of a people from the story is productive. The shifting of the characters in the story from Indigenous to rebels, to communists, served to erase the identity of the survivors of the massacre and the colonial violence that continues to erase Indigenous people. Now we are all Salvadorians. In the 1970s when the government started to murder people again, again it was “communists” and my family was forced to flee. And our passports say that we are Salvadorians and we do not belong to any Indigenous communities. We speak Spanish. And when I came to school in Toronto and kids ask me if I am Native and laugh at me because to them I resemble an Indigenous person, I don’t know how to respond because we are Salvadorians and Dad says there are no more Indigenous people in El Salvador. And when I’m sitting in class and everyone is laughing at me because someone says I look like a Native girl I am so confused. I don’t know what to think. I am Salvadorian and there are no Indigenous people in El Salvador.

The forgettings and mis-rememberings within stories, they matter. The bits that you leave out of the story they matter. When I try to erase the experience of a girl that shook in classrooms, I did not know that a deeper story of a me and a family and a people we are connected to had already been erased. The little girl had stage fright. She was shy. She was afraid of public speaking. She needed to learn to face that fear. This story of stage fright does not include race or racism or the experience of being laughed at or shamed or humiliated or the erasing of a culture and
language or the experience of displacement. *She had an accent. She was different. They made sure she felt different.*

I remember one summer I tried to talk to my 9-year-old niece about racism and she threw her hands up in the air like she’d already given up on the madness. “But it doesn’t make any sense,” she said. “But seriously, what does colour have to do with jumping on the trampoline?” The neighbours, children her age, had only a few minutes before told her that only light skinned people were allowed on the trampoline, and because she had darker skin she could not jump. And I was equally lost, and not able to explain who was responsible for this or why our neighbours, children of colour, were so invested in this madness. I was angry, but my niece seemed annoyed. She told me the experience as the dumbest thing she’d ever heard, *can you believe how stupid this is?* Years later, when I asked her if she remembers what happened that day she tells me yes, but the details are murky or at least different in significant ways. In the newer version, it was the neighbours that were not allowed to jump on the trampoline for reasons she can’t remember and it is my niece that intervened, and then they all got a chance to play and everyone played that day, and race and racism and the feeling of being left out it is all erased from the new story.

Like all memories and the stories we tell they are alive and shifting. Sometimes, I think shifts reveal more about the ways we ourselves are transforming. My uncle used to tell me this story about my grandfather. He used to say that as punishment, my grandfather would force my uncle to carry my father on his shoulders. Then my grandfather would force my uncle to walk and he would hit him with a belt on his calves. Uncle would say that the weight of my father on his shoulders was the real torture and that he couldn’t even feel the hits with the belt. For years, I heard the same version of the story -- Uncle carrying my father -- and then a few years ago a new
version of the story emerged. It surfaced at a time when Uncle was in a loving place with my dad. Uncle and I were sitting outside on my porch when he started to tell me the story again, but this time it was my father that carried my uncle on his shoulders and no matter how much my grandfather hit my dad, Dad was not defeated and he continued to carry my uncle. My Uncle teared up when he told me this new version. I was shocked. How could significant details be so different?

At the time, it made me doubt the integrity of the teller. In exploring mis-rememberings and forgettings, I now think, maybe I never really paid attention to who was carrying whom, or maybe my mind misremembered the details. It is also possible that the carrying of brothers happened in multiple occasions and sometimes my father carried my uncle and sometimes my uncle carried my father. Somehow, I’m drawn to the idea that maybe the story shifted because now in his later years, Uncle was feeling supported by his older brother and he needed a memory that could feel as if it was always like this: hence a new story emerged. In the telling and writing of the different shifts in these stories have I altered the way that it can be told and retold? Can it continue to exist in its shifting forms even as these interpretations exist? What should be clear is that now in this form the versions of the stories are frozen and that this process of freezing stories and capturing them in written form allows us to see what is being erased and what is being constructed.

In my nieces version of the trampoline story, no one is left out, and maybe this is the way my niece intends the story to be told and forgotten. Nothing of great consequence happens on that summer day. Kids are left out and then they are let in. This isn’t a story of race or racism, but a story of child’s play. And my niece emerges as the hero of the story. She is after all the one that negotiates so that all the kids can jump on the trampoline but because nothing of particular
importance happens in this story it is also meant to be forgotten. My niece may grow up to say that she never experienced racism. It becomes the familiar story: “In my neighbourhood kids of different backgrounds played together. We didn’t see colour.” In this way, stories readjust the timeline, reinventing the past and the present. And that, in part, is the power of stories: we are actively constructing through time how we feel about ourselves, each other, and the world that we are making. That particular narratives are erased from the timeline is part of the mis-rememberings.

   But YOU leave pieces of you out
   Large slabs of concrete
   missing
   from structure

   willingly
   unwillingly

   With or without
   you swallow

   think that everything that happens is caused by you

   You feel
   You feel

   responsible
   responsibility

   shame
   centers you in quietness and fear
   Burning sensation in chest
   Wet palms
   Heart racing

I. Recommendations:

I left the shaking girl and the fear of classrooms out of my stories for years. I left shame out of my stories. But after starting this work, I found myself exposed to shame stories. People – upon hearing about my thesis topic – would stop me mid-sentence and share with me a story of being
shamed in a classroom. I heard so many stories that I wish I had room and permission to explore them all in this dissertation. These stories frame this dissertation as it is built from these tender places that hold shame. Despite the diversity of storytellers, the stories of shame and humiliation were quite similar. Stories say: You are not good enough. You do not belong here. You are less, deficient, inadequate, unworthy, incapable, of lesser quality. I realized that if shame is one of the mechanisms through which structures implant themselves into bodies then we need to attend to the operation of shame within and through us. The stories become the ways in which we bring awareness to the ways in which shame moves into and lives inside us not only as individuals but as a technology of colonial violence.

In thinking about recommendations I am drawn to this email exchange and the words of my friend whose dream was to work in schools. Ahmed writes:

And this is the heart of my problem. I want to work in schools. I want to work to make schools different, to make them a place where multicentric knowledges are valued and enacted and where Indigenous students are centred and Black students are safe and valued. I see schools as sites bursting with violence and possibility, but to do any of the work I want to do, I need to pass in a white professional environment. That means more than making a few political compromises here and there. That means being fluent in a language and culture that is inherently alienating to me. It means building a person who can write those terrible essays, write grants, draft reports, understand and analyze statistics, speak in terms that make decolonization legible to a system that says Native students are too insignificant to even be of statistical note to them. How do I do this? I wonder if the compromise is that, like my parents did for me, I need to amputate a part of myself to try so that a handful of younger people won't have to. I wonder if that's a reasonable gamble (Ahmed, personal communication, 2015).

Throughout the years that I was engaged in this work, I often fantasized about this last stage of writing or instead of fantasized - I should say, feared this last stage. In those years, I was certain
about only one thing, that I could never write this dissertation. Often, I would get so much anxiety that I would imagine that I would need to contract someone to coalesce all my disparate thoughts, the writing of collaborators, and bring them into a form that could be acceptable to my department and university. I realized only recently that I had never imagined myself able to complete this and that similar to Ahmed I imagined that this process would mean I would have to “amputate parts of myself”.

While engaging with shame, I have met so many students struggling with disengagement and during this time, some collaborators left school and went in search of work. Most recently, when people heard that my dissertation was written and that an examination date was set, some people approached me with curiosity and quietness to ask questions of how I got to this place of completion. In these approaches, there was often, from women of colour, fear that they would never reach this end. At times, along with fear I could feel hints of shame. One woman asked me softly what I thought about her particular situation. She was in her fourth or fifth year, of a PhD program and had yet to complete her comprehensives. In her particular program, as in mine, examinations should take place by the third year of study. She looked at me expecting shock or scrutiny. I told her I had also not done my examination in the expected time. I told her what I’ve learned from this study, that often people of colour engage in difficult work and often when you are doing difficult and emotional work, the expected timeline does not fit. And this is what is important that we speak more of.

One of my key recommendations, after exploring the process of storying shame, is an invitation for people of colour who are struggling with disengagement to write about it. And in particular, I would urge people of colour to write about their experience with disengagement from academic spaces and to look for ways to include the process of disengaging into their academic work in
order to make the reality of disengagement more visible. There are risks in writing about this, but the inclusion of an embodied reflection on disengagement (Ng, 2000) would make for richer dissertations. My experience with disengagement took me to creative writing courses where I explored the experience of disengagement through creative non-fiction, poetry, and in particular through the lyrical essay. It created opportunities to facilitate writing spaces where people of colour could collectively explore the experience of racism and its impact on our bodies. At the time, I did not think I would include the experience of disengaging into my dissertation, but this is what I think is most important. The dissertation becomes richer when we gain an understanding of the context in which racialized students write, do not write, and/or disengage from writing. In particular, for women of colour and trans women of colour, it gives a shared understanding of the physical toll of working in white institutional spaces and the direct impact it has on bodies. We need to have more language for the intersection between racism and affect and for this, these personal narratives on disengagement are vital.

It would have been really valuable for me to know when I was sitting in the library, reading these large, intimidating, polished bodies of work, that the student who wrote them, struggled with disengagement and/or how they experienced racism in their own bodies while doing this work, not as a footnote, but as a part of the context in which we develop our work. It would have been really important to read about the struggle to produce a dissertation as a person of colour. That this process is portrayed as seamless and as an individual process of gaining knowledge and understanding, I think does people of colour a disservice. In order to complete this dissertation as a racialized immigrant woman living in Canada, it wasn’t about gaining an awareness of the rules of citation or the mastering of formal language structures associated with my department. For me, it meant facing the shame collectively of racial injury, in order to attempt to language
the terror that had been formative in my early years of schooling. Approaching this terror through the lyrical essay and poetry did not only bring shared awareness of the impact of racial violence but also brought value to this process. It allowed for the public naming of colonial shame and the development of critical analysis of how shame is socially constructed within the tenets of a white settler nation. Publicly gathering and exploring shame allowed for what Boler (1999) calls for her in work (on the power of emotions) is for the need reflect on emotion, but in this case, shame in particular, “not as “natural,” or “private … but rather as reflecting learned hierarchies” (p. 112).

The pieces that were produced and what they communicated to the collaborators of this study, and what they allowed was the most valuable part of doing this work. I have not written this before because it is in some ways quite obvious but also deeply moving. However, through the process of storying shame collectively, I have gained community and family. There are now women who are sisters to me, and where there is love between us, and where I feel loved and valued. I had known community and family before this work, but that group of close loving people had not expanded in years. This work allowed me to think critically about love and loving communities and how vital this is for anti-racist and anti-oppression work. So that even though the work began with racial injuries and spiritual scars, the gathering of shame collectively within loving spaces allowed me to think and feel the possibility of communal healing, as embedded in a process of collectively gathering shame.

The people that participated in this study as collaborators and editors of this work, did not only take part in sharing shame, they also participated by commenting and analyzing the shame narratives, and at times, were deeply moved by and about the nature of shaming. For me this is what is fundamental about collective gathering of shame stories, and that is, that there is the
possibility of healing. I started my work of shame wanting to understand systemic racism in Canada, and the impact that it has on racialized bodies. What I gained and I hope others gained from this work is a deeper understanding of how we can talk about affect and racism in this moment.

My doubts, fears, and writer’s block - in attempting to complete this dissertation - are symptoms of the learned self-hatred that white settler nations produce and pervasively circulate for people of colour. In some ways, I had to consistently remind myself that this was true and that it wasn’t a personal failure or deficit, but an effect of being educated in a white settler nation and learning my place was in this racial hierarchy. Struggling with language is an effect of racism. But also when arriving at language through poetry and/or creative non-fiction, it is also difficult to trust that this counts as legitimate scholarly work.

While I recognize that maintaining a split between academic and non-academic writing is problematic and in a lot of ways dismissive of the work by women and in particular women of colour who have challenged these imagined distinctions, it is also a physical and emotional boundary. By this I mean, that I have lived the experience of having my work silenced or challenged for not being academic enough or “good” enough. So that, at the same time that there is this rich scholarship that utilizes personal narrative and poetry and that I can rely on this work for referencing and for clues on how to examine and value the politics of emotion, (Anzaldua, 1987; Boler, 1999; Lorde, 1984). The existence of this scholarship does not insulate me from coming up against this felt border that says no or challenges particular parts of my work that utilize emotion and personal narrative to explore emotion. So again even though I can return to Lorde’s work and attempt to “cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes” (1984, p.37). I struggle
with validating this process in this context where as Boler notes “contemporary educational theories tend to distance themselves, ignore or denigrate” emotions” (1999, p.108). And where this “denigration,” Boler warns, “is rooted in the deep-seated bias against feminisms and emotions” that privileges reason and truth and is visible in “differential funding status and reputations” and in the hierarchy that associates emotions with “femininity, ‘soft’ scholarship, pollution of truth and bias” (p.109). This makes incorporating a critical study of affect through personal narrative and poetry more challenging, not only because it is difficult to write shame, but because there are risks in associating with “soft” scholarship.

In the context of racism in Canada it is also difficult to write about self-hatred and doubt in the context of systemic racism and not feel at risk for doing it. Canada’s narrative of a peace keeping humanitarian nation is also lived in the body through accusations of being ungrateful for critiquing Canada’s pristine white narrative. While doing this work, people would often respond with shock and disbelief that these narratives of racial violence and injury could have taken place in Canada. One of the biggest myths that the project of nation building in Canada perpetuates is this myth of a peaceful non-racist nation. To make sense of the some of the narratives of racial injury people would often respond with disbelief, “but this doesn’t happen, here”, “I’m so surprised”, “this hasn’t been my experience”, then check the date of the particular piece and if it took place in the past, suggest that it was something we overcame as Canadians. Against this pervasive denial, it is difficult to feel at ease with our stories of humiliation and racial terror. It makes it difficult to even attempt to language something that people do not want to hear and that will be vehemently challenged. That so many of the collaborators of this study felt fear of writing and do not want to write, is a response to this hostile denial of the everydayness of racism in Canada and the ways in which it impacts our bodies and makes us feel silenced.
In writing this, I also have to say that it is difficult to explain these narratives and experiences of racial violence. It is difficult to break them down into thinly sliced and easily comprehensible sections. In some places, I felt the questioning of the work was also a strategy on the part of the reader to resist something that was particularly challenging for them. In thinking about this questioning or need for explanation from the reader, I am reminded of an interview between Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich where Lorde (1984, p.88) is speaking about the struggle to language and the struggle to attempt to provide analysis or explanation of her poetry. Lorde writes: “I have a difficult enough time making my perceptions verbal, tapping that deep place, forming that handle… and documentation at that point is often useless” (1984, p.105). For me this was the area where I needed to really understand this process of attempting to language shame, and that is, that it was an attempt and that at most what I was hoping was that it could communicate something of that familiar place of childhood racial injury, mostly to someone who had lived it as a child, and knew it in some ways without language. In a lot of ways, this process of writing about these early experiences of racial injury was in “that sense of writing at the edge, out of urgency not because you choose it but because you have to, that sense of survival” (Lorde, 1984, p.107). In the attempt to critically take up this work through analysis, I felt like I was not helping the reader, and at worst “provid[ing] a screen by which to avoid concentrating on the core revelation, following it down to how it feels” (Lorde, 1984, p.104).

In conversation with Lorde, Rich talks about her resistance to some of Lorde’s writing and her demand for explanation. She writes, “There is a piece of me that wants to resist wholly … what I can’t afford is either to wipe out your perceptions or to pretend I understand you when I don’t. And then if it is a question of racism… the differences in our ways of seeing” (1984, p.106). It is only after reading this response about the complicated ways that the demand for explanations can
represent both a need for clarity and resistance, that I realize I have been strongly resisting the explanation or analysis of my pieces, sometimes because I am annoyed that the reader doesn’t feel it, and sometimes because like Lorde I feel it robs the piece of something vital. In a sense, because I am navigating through the attempt to bridge the experience of racism within a white settler nation through shaming, and similar to Lorde, I can feel there is something about what the poetry captures that has the essence of the experiences of childhood, that I resist the analysis.

I share chapter eight with my sister, the collective piece on what racism feels like in Canada, and ask her if she needs me to analyze these experiences in the context of shaming and its operation in a colonial system. She questions the need for this, but I am also aware that I avoid this because in the attempt to put the experience into linear blocks or into a narrow analysis I move away from the feeling and “all I had was the sense that I had to hold on to these feelings” (Lorde, p.88). Speaking about the context in which she wrote the poem, Power, Lorde explains it is in response to a police shooting of a child and news of the police officers acquittal. Lorde writes, “I was driving in the car and heard the news… I was really sickened with fury and I decided to … jot some things down… because I felt so sick and enraged and I was just writing, and that poem came out without craft” (1984, p.107). I realize that this context that Lorde provides adds something vital to the piece that thickens the emotion for me and so I attempt to explain.

In the collective piece (chapter eight) there is one written by my youngest brother, titled, O is for Over and Over again. The piece is painful for me to read. Do you need to know this, to understand? I have used it as a prompt in writing groups to talk about the experience of racism in Canada. Most times, I have to stop myself from crying as I am reading it. I feel like I am just saying the obvious by writing this. But when my brother writes about the encounter with the TTC and the police I am so close to tears because I know the texture of these encounters. I know that
he is at risk of losing his life that Black and Latino boys and men often end up dead or beaten in these encounters. I know there was the possibility of losing him in that moment – and when he writes about the choice to stay on or get off which implies running, I know this is a life or death choice that he is making. And he is a teenager, who is just trying to get to his job.

And I ask my sister if I need to explain this to the reader, and she says NO from deep down in her stomach. *It’s so obvious*, she says and it was obvious to me because I could feel the pain of losing him and the injustice of losing someone who is just trying to get to work. Yet, in writing it here, I feel like I am in some ways finding language for that feeling of humiliation that is also at once, always steeped in physical violence and the threat of death. And this gives language to the lump in my throat and all the crying I’ve been doing these past few weeks because of all the recent police killings of Black and Latino men^39^ and because what world is this – even though I know this is what racism feels like in Canada. Because what does it mean when people respond in shock when I talk about racism in Canada at the same time, that the public transportation system, the artery of the city is physically dangerous for Black and Brown bodies. *Do you understand?* Setting this down into words allows me to say what I haven’t been saying about shaming and humiliation in schools and that is, that the physicality of racism, also means that our lives are in peril, that the risks are not just emotional and spiritual injury but that they involve the threat of death.

In writing this section, I also went back to consult with my siblings who have been such a fundamental part of this work. What do you think this section should say? I asked almost distraught because things were due and I needed to write this section, but I was resistant to set

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^39^ Here I am writing specifically about the murder of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling.
things down in this manner and instead wanted to write a poem or a story as a recommendation. Together my siblings spoke about the importance for gathering spaces for people of colour in schools, and of the importance of surrounding themselves with support: *taking classes with people who have your back*, and finding places where you can talk openly about racism and the impact it has on the body, and a move towards a de-valORIZATION academic spaces as the only sites of knowledge sharing and production. Most importantly, they emphasized the realistic understanding of schooling and what it means to attempt learning in a white settler nation in the context of what it has historically meant for Indigenous people and people of colour in Canada.

To this I would add, for students struggling with racism to try writing the experiences down into stories or poetry. In attempting to language the experience of moving through white institutional spaces in Canada, and attempting to grasp and find language, I am aware that at times my writing falls apart and that the analysis falls short of approaching the aim of this work. I take full responsibility for these shortcomings, as they are not reflective of the collaborators of this work. It may not be the scope of this work to be able to formulate the exactness of this experience, but perhaps only highlight the oppressive nature of these spaces and their toxicity. What I hope this work was able to show is that shame in the context of Canada’s educational system, is not a “private or natural” emotion, but rather reflects the circulating of racial literacy and the process by which we learn our racialized roles. What I call for in this work is for women and trans women of colour in particular, and for people of colour and Indigenous people in general to articulate and name colonial shame and to critically and collectively analyze shame in the context of living and learning within a white settler nation.

What I have been able to draw from the methods is the transformative quality of collective gatherings of shame stories. Writing these shame stories, setting them down on paper felt
dangerous, I sometimes shook when I read them publicly, I felt sick and fatigued weeks and sometimes months after sharing the work. But a lot like a healing touch often I felt a deep sense of relief after revealing and shaking uncontrollably in these spaces. My focus in this study has been on expanding our understanding of student disengagement to account for the affective experiences of racial violence. It would be difficult to understand my experience and response to classrooms without the shame stories, the context in which racial literacy developed and moved internally through my body.
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