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Adriana de Souza Jordão Gonçalves

Silenced women in Joan Riley's fiction

Rio de Janeiro

2011

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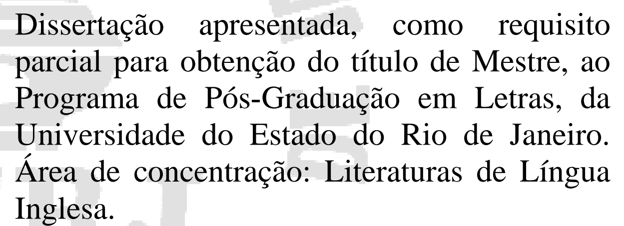

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Assinatura Data

Adriana de Souza Jordão Gonçalves

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2011

DEDICATION

To Julia, who, from inside my heart,
my dreams, and my womb, watched
the coming true of this project.

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For sharing with me her knowledge, her material, her afternoons and smiles, my heartfelt thanks to Maria Conceição Monteiro, the professor whose skilled and friendly supervising has made all the difference in the development of this project.

I am the history of rape
I am the history of the rejection of who I am
I am the history of the terrorized incarceration of my self
I am the history of battery assault and limitless
armies against whatever I want to do with my mind
and my body and my soul and
whether it's about walking out at night
or whether it's about the love that I feel or
whether it's about the sanctity of my vagina or
the sanctity of my national boundaries
or the sanctity of my leaders or the sanctity
of each and every desire
that I know from my personal and idiosyncratic
and indisputably single and singular heart
I have been raped
because I have been wrong the wrong sex the wrong age
the wrong skin the wrong nose the wrong hair the
wrong need the wrong dream the wrong geographic
the wrong sartorial I

June Jordan

RESUMO

GONÇALVES, Adriana de Souza Jordão. *Silenced women in Joan Riley's fiction*. 2010. 73f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2011.

Esta dissertação busca analisar como Joan Riley, escritora jamaicana que vive na Inglaterra, expõe e denuncia em suas obras a submissão feminina diante da opressão e violência sexual sofridas por mulheres negras. Objetivamos apontar a crítica ao papel dos discursos patriarcal e pós-colonial, práticas de poder que tornam o contexto social das mulheres representadas em seus romances propício para o exercício do jugo masculino, através da exploração do silêncio de mulheres vítimas de abusos sexuais. O necessário recorte do objeto restringiu a análise às duas personagens centrais dos romances *The Unbelonging* (1985) e *A Kindness to the Children* (1992), mulheres cujas subjetividades foram anuladas pela objetificação de seus corpos e a desumanização de suas identidades.

Palavras-chave: Discurso patriarcal. Silêncio. Corpo. Sexualidade.

ABSTRACT

The present work aims at analyzing how Joan Riley, Jamaican writer who lives in England, exposes and denounces in her work the female submission in face of the oppression and sexual violence suffered by black women. The objective of the study is to point out the author's criticism of patriarchal and post-colonial discourses, power practices which insert the women represented in her fiction into the proper social context for the exercise of male domination, through her exploration of silence of women who are victims of sexual abuse. The necessary cut of the object restricted the analysis to the two central characters in the novels *The Unbelonging* (1985) and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992), women whose subjectivities were made null by the objectification of their bodies and the dehumanization of their identities.

Keywords: Patriarchal discourse. Silence. Body. Sexuality.

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FIRST THOUGHTS

Vast – this procession of mistreated, deceived,
devastated, rejected, patient women,
dolls, cattle, cash.
Hélène Cixous

In the blackness, then, I have been erased,
I can no longer say my own name.
I can no longer point to myself and say "I".
In the blackness my voice is silent.
Jamaica Kincaid

Joan Riley

In the last lines of the introduction to her 1949 cornerstone book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir summarizes her goal to thoroughly examine women's situation; she announces her dispute as to the spread belief of the determination of women's destiny by biological or psychological discourses as well as her view of the fashioning of women as the Other and the consequences of such positioning. She adds:

> Then from woman's point of view I shall describe the world in which women must live; and thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way as, endeavoring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto assigned them, they aspire to full membership in the human race. (BEAUVOIR, 1989, p. xxxv).

As one looks back at the paths cleared by the women's liberation ideal since then, many are the conquests found: awareness has been raised, positions in society have been guaranteed, the sphere assigned to women has broadened; yet the achievements do not seem to have covered all women equally. The perspective of accomplishments is primarily related to white, middle-class, heterosexual women, leaving other individuals who also belong under the umbrella concept of "women" still feeling pushed to the margins and unspoken for.

Such is the case of black women, individuals who undergo a combination of oppressions different from those of white women, individuals to whom the universality of

experiences and the resulting bond forged among white women – and consequently their directives – do not fully apply. In "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism", first published in 1977 in the lesbian feminist literary magazine *Conditions*, Barbara Smith argues for the establishment of an "autonomous Black feminist movement [which] would open up the space needed for the exploration of Black women's lives and the creation of consciously Black woman-identified art." (SMITH, 2001, p. 2303). To the author, black women's existence and its representation in literature were invisible at that point, disregarded, requiring a body of black feminist critical approach that considered the politics of sex in addition to the politics of race and class, "interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers". (SMITH, 2001, p. 2304).

The goal of the present study is to analyze part of the work of one of those black women writers, an author who has devoted her lines to articulating precisely those intersections of the power relations of domination of black women under both race and gender yokes, an author who addresses the unique problems and perspectives of black women.

Joan Riley, born in 1958 in St Mary, Jamaica, moved to Britain in 1976, where she attended the universities of Sussex and London, later working actively as a social worker, a professional field which provided the author with an inside view of many of the issues later dealt with in her novels. The first Afro-Caribbean female voice to discuss in fiction the hard experience of the black immigrant woman in England, Riley enters the literary scene in 1985 with the publication of *The Unbelonging*, a work followed by three subsequent novels, *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), *Romance* (1988), and *A Kindness to the Children* (1992). Along with Briar Wood, Riley co-edited a collection of short stories and poems centered on the topic of exile and belonging, *Leave to Stay* (1996), a book to which she contributes with her own short stories as well.

Many are the topics discussed in the layers of her poignant writing: the racial problems faced by the black immigrant in Britain; the isolation of the diasporic; the still lively echoes of colonialism and the patriarchal discourse in the political, cultural, and social situation in Jamaica; the oppression and violence suffered by black women inside and outside their communities; these women's difficulties in finding definition; their subjection to a social order which relegates to women an inferior role.

While Riley's work aims at provoking such wide-ranging questionings, her plots carry similarities, repetitions of triggering facts to the narratives developed, recurrences in the representation of the oppression suffered by women. Out of her four novels, three have their plots around the silence of female protagonists in the face of the brutality of sexual abuse

coming from members of their own community, women whose acknowledgement of their positioning as lesser in a male-oriented social order gagged their mouths, thus crippling their subjectivity, ripping off their possibilities of aspiring to what Simone de Beauvoir described as "full membership in the human race" (BEAUVOIR, 1989, p. xxxv).

To the purpose of this study, two of these works were elected, *The Unbelonging* and *A Kindness to the Children*.

The Unbelonging

In his *Postcolonial Imaginings*, David Punter classifies Riley's *The Unbelonging* as "the most consummately appalling of British texts of the diasporic […], an agonizing masterpiece, […] a novel that has never received its due share of praise or criticism because […] the materials in which it deals are too painful for the reader, whatever his or her cultural positioning." (PUNTER, 2000, p.163).

The novel tells the story of Hyacinth, a Jamaican girl who, at the age of eleven, is sent for by her father, an immigrant living in England; at the host country, she faces violence in two different spaces, the racial and post-colonial issues of difference in the public sphere, and the brutality of her vile father in the domestic sphere. In addition to the prejudices she actually encounters in the host country, the girl has problems accepting her own self as black, demonstrating along the narrative the incorporated racial ranking deeply rooted inside her identity, a color-gradation view of value, therefore making her fitting in the new culture even harder. Besides her difficulties in surviving the exterior world, at home Hyacinth faces a man whose internalized humiliation and anger at his condition of oppressed is turned into viciousness and passed over to her.

A citation from English writer Laurence Edward Alan "Laurie" Lee's 1959 novel, *Cider with Rosie*, "Incest flourished where the roads were bad" (RILEY, 1985, p. 49), is emphatically included by Riley in her novel. Those ringed words in a book left behind by a cousin also molested by Hyacinth's father point in the direction of the grounds of the father's behavior – the internalized degradation of the colonized and the humiliating experience of the Caribbean immigrants which generate perversion in the male subjects, who, marginalized, are prone to replicate on women and children the violence and indignity they themselves go through.

Hyacinth's father constantly beats her up; the measure of his rage, and therefore the violence of the beating, is conveyed by what the girl calls "the lump of his anger" (RILEY, 1985, p. 14), the erection he has whenever he spanks her, subjugation of the weaker transmuted into sexual arousal; Hyacinth does not understand what the bulge in his trousers means, except for the fact that the bigger it is, the harder she will be punished. The father eventually tries to rape her, causing her to run away to the world she fears so much, the world of white people.

The indelible imprint of violence and terror attached to sex, the aftermath of her father's abuse, will soon emerge in her life: as an adolescent and young adult, Hyacinth is unable to have any kind of intimate relationship, burying her sexuality, negating her desire. Erased as a woman by her father's actions, erased as subject by her incapacity to deal with difference and her skin, Hyacinth shuts herself inside a constructed fantasy world, the dream of returning to Jamaica, where, in her vision, she will be able to be happy again the way she was as a child. She remains paralyzed at the mirage of belonging, locked inside the closed frontiers of her own body, crystallized as a child, deferring existence to the idyllic homeland, the surrogate mother where she finds comfort and shelter from the pain experienced in the world of men.

A Kindness to the Children

While racial issues are extensively explored in *The Unbelonging*, in *A Kindness to the Children* they are left to the background scenario and characters; it is the process of engendering in women the mute acceptance of a subordinate role, the dependence to men and their approval, as well as the incorporation of labels which lead to guilt and silence, that are emphasized by Joan Riley in this narrative.

Sexually molested as a child by the pastor of her congregation, taken to silence by his effective prescription of guilt and sinfulness, Jean erases the conscious recollection of the event, which repressed, haunts the woman in the form of internal voices she takes as demoniac, of disconnected images of a child who bleeds under a blood-red cross, of feelings of loneliness and self-depreciation. The pain and void whose cause Jean cannot identify lead her to alcohol, to promiscuity, to difficulties in relating to her own children; although the traumatic episode eventually comes back to her memory, Jean is incapable of ridding herself

of the pain and absence, sinking further into silence and insanity, surrendering to the total degradation of her body and mind, and ultimately to death.

Jean's death becomes the complete erasure which carries Riley's denouncing words of an oppressive context capable of nullifying women, submitting them to a silence so entrenched they cease to exist.

This study

In order to study Riley's condemnation of the silence inscribed in black women by the cultural context they are inserted into, two of her characters were selected, Hyacinth, the protagonist in *The Unbelonging*, and Jean, whose story *A Kindness to the Children* is built around. Their characterization point to the double peripheral positions to which these women have been pushed, excluded for their race and for their gender; their submissive and passive behavior long conditioned by repression and domination not only by the white colonizer, but also by men in their own community who reproduce the pattern of exploitation and oppression they suffer themselves, bars the possibility of accusing their attackers and condemn them to muteness.

Chapter One of this study addresses the question of silence from the perspective of its roots in the discourses embedded in the social, historical and cultural contexts – the imprint of a patriarchal and post-colonial prescription of submission to which black women are vulnerable – and the consequent acknowledgement of labels and normalization which lead to their gagging.

The absence generated by women's submersion in silence and domination makes the discussion of Chapter Two; Riley's women characters present a void in their subjectivities, a lack configured by the author through the use of excesses, extremes in their behavior to cover for the crevice in their souls. Under the shield of a projection of belonging, the fantasy of coming back to her homeland Jamaica, Hyacinth hides her desperate need to remain a child, untainted by the sexual violence she had lived, distant from the issues of difference she must cope with in Britain, a life postponed, paralyzed. Also benumbed at the point of the trauma lived in her child years, Jean hides the fissure in her identity through the abuse of alcohol, through meaningless sexual encounters, through violent outbursts directed to her own children. Her final extreme is found in the abandonment of reason, her surrender to insanity

and eventually to death, the conclusion of her nonexistence. A final section of Chapter Two deals with the use of lack in the background scenario of the novels: Riley includes a strong heat wave followed by drought in the plot of *A Kindness to the Children*, thus calling attention to the symbolic association of water, that of fertility, growth, motherhood. That lack is associated with the striking absence of the figure of the mother in both novels analyzed here.

As silent as their voices, as invalidated as their subjectivities, is Riley's women characters' desire, the topic of the final chapter of this study; also taken to extremes of denial, one of total nullity, the other of the abjection of her own body in the excesses of promiscuity, desire is banned to these women, their bodies plundered and taken away from them. The castration of women's right to their own bodies and sexuality closes this study on the silenced women represented by Joan Riley.

1 CHAPTER ONE: WHEN GAGGED WOMEN FACE VIOLENCE

He is the Subject,
he is the Absolute – she is the Other.
Simone de Beauvoir

1.1 Prescribed silence

A revolutionary view of education as a tool with which to break the lethargic cycle of the oppressed masses, or the "culture of silence" as it was described by its creator, was first expressed in 1959 in a doctoral thesis at the University of Recife. The thought and work in question belong to Paulo Freire, a worldwide recognized name when the subject lies on the fight for a society where awareness leads to justice in the economic, social and political fields. It was clear to the professor that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the maintenance of the current social situation, one of silence and resignation, submission and submersion of the disinherited in a context of domination. His words were such a threat that he was jailed immediately after the 1964 military coup, being invited some months later to leave the country in exile.

His project, although primarily focused on empowering impoverished and illiterate adults in the Third World, allows parallels to any circumstances of conformity to the established system of social rules. In a work which aims at promoting the practice of freedom, Paulo Freire claims the oppressed are divided, unauthentic beings who "are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized" (FREIRE, 1996, p. 30); they host their oppressors in them in the duality described by the educator, where "*to be* is *to be like*, and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*" (FREIRE, 1996, p. 30; grifo do autor).

The dominated acknowledge the system as rightful, intoxicated with the discourse of the dominant to the point of partaking it, of submitting to its dispositions, of being bound to the role of oppressed; they identify with the concrete social system they live in since the very constitution of their thinking has been conditioned, shaped by the functioning of this

structure. To Paulo Freire, the paradoxical adhesion of the dominated to the system in force is due to the fact that their aspiration is not to emancipation, but to identification with the dominant, not to having their own subjectivities valued, but to being on a par with their oppressors, hence becoming tools for the reproduction of such system. "The oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors'." (FREIRE, 1996, p. 27). They have their oppressors in them, their thoughts shaped to incised molds:

> One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (FREIRE, 1996, p. 27-29; grifo do autor).

Freire's "banking concept of education" demonstrates the process through which the norms of the established social structure, values originally alien to the reality of the oppressed, are projected on the dominated, prescribed to their consciousness in the classrooms: in the teacher-student relationship, students are seen as empty containers to be filled by the teacher, the depositor of unquestionable knowledge, the Subject to lead the objects. "The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are." (FREIRE, 1996, p. 53). Erudition comes from one supply placed above students, who are considered to know nothing, to be empty vessels; notwithstanding, along with information, ideologies are passed on, specific views of the world, a certain discourse oozing into the minds supposedly void of the valued knowledge. This state of ignorance is projected on them as a characteristic of the attitude of oppression; the dominated must acknowledge their dependency, must internalize the lower position planted on their self-image if the oppressors are to guarantee their concept of the world as the one forwarded, legitimated. The dominated must see the dominant's path as the one way to be included in society, to leave the margins and become part of the social structure.

Such tactics extend their meaning to much further than the school; they apply to the many instances of dictation of thought in society. To comply with the concepts prescribed, and as a result, to obviate thinking, excludes the danger of the oppressed developing a critical perception which might lead to an intervention capable of transforming the world around them. "The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they

tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them." (FREIRE, 1996, p. 54).

Declaring that "the soul is the prison of the body" (FOUCAULT, 1984a, p. 177), Michel Foucault closes his demonstration of a concept which stands side by side with the thoughts of the Brazilian thinker; in "The Body of the Condemned" from *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault analyzes the changes in punitive methods along the past and its inextricably intertwined position with the history of the modern soul. The new process of epistemological formation of the Modernity produced a common history of man as both object and generator of knowledge, a dual power relation of man over man: discourse generates the very subject over which it then exercises mastery.

The scientific inquiry, classification and normalization of the Enlightenment brought about the objectification of man, now the target of discourse, investigation and regulation. The human subject was created; however, the same mechanisms which produced this new self would be used as means to control it. It was the birth of the intelligible body, object of knowledge, understandable by the intellect, a body whose functioning was explainable; nevertheless it also meant the rise of the useful body upon which a set of regulations were to be devised viewing its control and correction. In Foucault's example, the change from torture and annihilation to confinement and regulation mark a shift in the operational field of the punitive system, in which the measures are not negative, excluding individuals from society, but positive, useful, fruitful of subjects invested, while force of production, with relations of power and domination, correction viewing utility. This political investment of the body as labor force requires a subjection which is achieved subtly, without the instruments of violence, involving penalties which supervise and direct the subjects, mold and shape their behavior, train their bodies.

Thus the body is the object of political relations of power, subjected to examination and inspection, manipulation of its actions, regulation of its behavior. Formal institutions and the scientific investigation are allied to form the "political technology of the body", a diffuse, dispersed mechanism which combines knowledge about and power over man, implemented through the scrutiny which leads to knowledge, knowledge that pushes to normalization, which in its turn provides control, order, authority. It becomes a matter of controlling the individual's time and space, imposing repetitive actions, the correct use of the body, where nothing can remain useless, manipulating and being in command of its actions, supplying models, inciting subjects to bow to the regulations, to conform. One should act and be according to the prescribed patterns society provides.

The disciplinary strategies pointed out by Foucault appear not only in the penal system, but in educational and medical institutions, in the military organizations, in religious practices, in the family, at the working places, distributed throughout the whole social network rather than coming from one source above. In a society marked by rigid rules of social stratification and ranking as well as gender and racial differentiation and classification of individuals, conformity and control of the undervalued are required if the structure is to be continued.

Foucault expands his thoughts beyond the prison system in the chapter entitled "Docile Bodies", where the author takes the figure of the soldier and its shift of model from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries as an example of the investment in bodies of the technology exposed previously. In the seventeenth century, one was born a soldier, one bore the signs of their being naturally suited to the profession; yet “by the late eighteenth century, the soldier has become something that can be made” (FOUCAULT, 1984b, p. 179), a body that can be manipulated, educated through the application of formulas of domination, the “disciplines”, strategies to assure the relation “docility-utility”. Individuals become “docile bodies”, subjected, transformed through the uninterrupted though subtle coercion of the discipline methods which allocate to each one a rank, a place in a classification, emphasizing the obedience to rules and hierarchy, the established contract which directs individuals in society.

In this perspective of the functioning of the ‘microphysics of power’, control and subjugation are a strategy so understated and effective, so interwoven in the everyday acts of people, in the microcosm of the individuals and their relation to their own selves and the society around them that one is hardly conscious of their movement inside one’s own behavior. Nevertheless, the strategy aims at the corporal body in order to reach further. This diffuse technology of knowledge and power relations over the body gives rise to a duplication of such body, its correlative – the modern soul;

> […] it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished – and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains, and corrects; over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized; over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives. […] unlike the soul represented in Christian theology, is not born in sin and subject of punishment, but is born rather out of methods of punishment, supervision, and constraint. (FOUCAULT, 1984a, p. 177).

This soul born in the net of directives, educated to behave according to the instilled patterns, restrains its correspondent body, makes it teachable, easy to manage, submissive,

ready to take in and reproduce the hegemonic discourses which befall on it; the "docile bodies" conform and act according to the ideologies inscribed in them, tamed to the prescribed practices of the social world. We then get to the point where Foucault and Freire converse freely: the dominated must find it natural to be subjugated; they must see their positions as fittingly ordered, they must consider the social rules plain and unequivocal and applied as they accurately should.

This prison soul has the concepts of the ranking in social relations tenaciously imprinted on it, thus acting as double coercive power: it controls its own self, limiting and restraining the body's possibilities, and reproduces the discourses it has internalized, therefore taking part in the preservation of the rules to be passed on in social performance. It is in this scenario that the perverse ideologies of gender differentiation, discriminatory racial practices, post-colonial relations, the myriad criteria of "superiority" or "correctness" thrive in our society.

Rules are at all times established by the owner of the game; modern Western society was constituted by men, to men. They set the One compared to which the Other was to be created, relegating to women a subordinate role:

> Woman herself recognizes that the world is masculine on the whole; those who fashioned it, ruled it, and still dominate it today are men. As for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she has never stood forth as subject before the other members of the group. Shut up in her flesh, her home, she sees herself as passive before these gods with human faces who set goals and establish values. In this sense there is truth in the saying that makes her the "eternal child." Workers, black slaves, colonial natives, have also been called grown-up children – as long as they were not feared; that meant that they were to accept without argument the verities and the laws laid down for them by other men. The lot of woman is a respectful obedience. She has no grasp, even in thought, on the reality around her. It is opaque to her eyes. (BEAUVOIR, 1989, p. 598).

Respectful obedience, submission, acceptance: trapped in souls shaped through traditional silencing and bowing, Joan Riley's women characters, the target of the present work, are mirrors of Jamaican women, Others of the Other, bearers of the directives of both patriarchal and colonial prescriptions, submitted to men in their communities who themselves have suffered the yoke of oppression and who tend to reenact the cycle of domination, reproducing on black women the humiliation and subjugation imposed on them, black men, by the white society. Under the spell of the prescribed behavior of the oppressed, these women are gagged in the face of violence, physical or moral, when it comes from men; therefore, rape is silenced, kept as sentiments of guilt and shame, causing them to drown in their painful memories all their lives, paralyzed at the moment of the abuse. It is their

surrender to notions of themselves set by patriarchal society which turns into denouncement through Riley's pen.

1.2 Accepted labels

In *A Kindness to the Children*, Jean's story is a mystery gradually disclosed through the fragmented memories of her childhood; the first recollection displayed is the key image which haunts Jean to the point of madness, "a child in the shadow of a blood-red cross, groaning in pain, the seep of blood and tears mingling with the grey concrete dust." (RILEY, 1992, p. 22). Along the novel, this image unveils the traumatic events she kept silent about, events which, in spite of being repressed by her conscious memories, develop into the degradation she projects on her own self as well as in her behavior towards her children, a throbbing wound that refuses to heal. The truth comes back to her eventually, revealing to readers the trigger to her concealed pain.

Jean's father had been away on farm work, her mother had been dead for three years; the girl was on school holiday and had to accompany her aunt to the market in the city every Thursday. While she waited for her aunt, she would sneak away to the library, a place forbidden by her father, get a book, and sit up the crumbling sea wall to devour adventure stories. One afternoon, Pastor Baker, the religious leader of her congregation, caught the girl distracted with a romantic adventure novel, thundering his tough reprimands at her, calling her wicked, sinful. He decides she needs "the guiding hand of a man" (RILEY, 1992, p. 113) because her father is away so much; she is to be brought for guidance to his church every Sunday.

> She had expected to have to listen to a church service, kneel on the cool hard floor of the meeting room and pray in the forbidden shadow of Jesus and the cross suspended above his head. But Pastor had other ideas.
>
> He told her he had fasted for her, had spoken to the Lord, and that her sins were so great the only remedy would be a laying-on of hands. That time the touching had not made her uneasy, though his insistence that she keep it secret did. Unspoken between them was the knowledge that *he* had kept *her* secret, had prayed and suffered for her in preference to causing her trouble.
>
> It was on the third Sunday that the pattern of his touching changed. The day he silently pressed the shilling into her hand and laid her down on the rough burlap bag he had spread in readiness for her coming. This time no words passed between them. Jean lay staring at the picture of the white Jesus, refusing to accept the reality of those fingers, fumbling in that dirty place between her thighs. (RILEY, 1992, p. 114; grifo do autor).

Guilt is inculcated in the eight-year-old girl as the abuse escalates for weeks; the shilling pressed on the palm of her hand is always accompanied by the pastor's telling her of her sinful ways, of how she leads him to immoral thoughts, how she is the temptation of the devil. "The mark of Sodom, Pastor told her, was deep inside her stomach." (RILEY, 1992, p. 114). The exploitation reaches a higher level when, on the Sunday before her father's return, the pastor is even more forceful, lying on top of her to the point of almost crushing her breast, making her touch him. Her eyes meet the blue ones of the white Jesus on the altar; her gaze focuses on the cross, "blood-red under the burden of her sins. […] Pastor's hand clamped hers to the thing, moved it and squeezed it, while he groaned and squirmed as if he was in a death agony." (RILEY, 1992, p. 115, 116).

Inquired in an interview as to Jean's experience with religion, Joan Riley declared:

> Religion is very essential to Jean's rural Caribbean past. Religion for me too has always been male; it's either a white Jesus or a black Jesus but whichever way Jesus is a man. For Jean it was a white Jesus; it was about some place or something that is supposed to be safe. (HUSSEIN, 2004, p. 94).

Raised in a context of religious obedience, a context which concurs for the submission of women to the masculine figure, Jean does not find the supposed safety, but the dangers of a prescription that dictates the female body is the symbol of human weakness and the source of evil, a label reaching back to the story of the Fall.

Her father's homecoming from farm work abroad makes the girl strong enough to refuse to go back for guidance from the pastor; however, in her yearning to be fit for her father's eyes, she hides the violation so as not to let him know she is evil, the stamp the pastor had successfully established in her mind. Meanwhile, Pastor threatens the child with the wrath of God if ever she told anyone about what had happened, telling her she was all about sin, that she carried the mark of Cain. In the girl's mind, the seal of viciousness attached to her self was further supported by the vision of the holy cross turn blood red while Jesus attended her shamelessness.

Because of the father's marked preference for Noel, her older brother, Jean wishes he were dead, removed from the position of blocking the father's attention from her; to these thoughts, others of repentance and feeling wicked beyond redemption would follow. Her growing self-image as unworthy and brazen, lost and deserving divine retribution, reach its height when, during a thunderstorm in her ninth year, Noel is struck by lightning and dies in front of her, leaving a high scream imprinted on her mind.

The actual rape takes place on the fourth night of the mourning for her brother, as the guilty secret of her sins weighs the girl down; she watches her father cry for Noel, suffer because she had infuriated God with her behavior, “a viper from the nest of sin come into the bosom of this good family” (RILEY, 1992, p. 119) as Pastor would call her moments later. Mute and guilty, acquiescent to the unworthiness inscribed in her by the father’s lack of attention and the Pastor’s constant abusive rebukes, Jean does not fight when he grabs her alone in the kitchen, registering only pain and deserved punishment, closed eyes unable to lock out the blue ones which had all along presided over her sin from the shadow of the blood-red cross. Jean is found the day after lying on the floor on a pool of blood which her aunt takes as the coming of her periods, although it would be five years before she was to bleed again; to the girl, no conscious recollection of the brutal abuse is left, as confuse feelings of guilt, divine retribution to her sinful essence, and the befuddled image of a child who bleeds under a blood-red cross take over her mind.

Because reason cannot cope with the amount of pain and self-loathing the degrading violence causes, the girl Jean erases the events from her conscious mind; nonetheless, the repressed memories of the abuse remain, lying dormant, causing a discomfort which, although not grasped, charges its price. The adult Jean turns to alcohol, to promiscuity, to difficulties in dealing with her own children reaching the point of violence; she hears demon voices of temptation, has frequent glimpses of the blood-red cross, goes through a gradual process of nervous breakdown which is intensified when she is sent by her partner Jimmy to Jamaica for a rest. There, in the homecoming to her mother land, to the site of the tragic episode, the memories will all come to light after Jean is once again failed by men to whom she turns to for support.

In Jamaica, alcohol and degrading sex continue to cause disruption to Jean’s mind, who, in search of solace, turns to the support of the Sunday Church, leaving behind what the character takes as “the austere fundamentalism of Sabbath keeping” (RILEY, 1992, p. 62), the religion of her upbringing, one she found impossible to cope with from the outset, the “church that had cast a shadow so long, she had fled the country to escape it.” (RILEY, 1992, p. 64). At the Sunday Church, Jean had been told a pastor would come who would be able to help her free herself of the demon voices and temptation which had so long been troubling her. Confident and hopeful, Jean has an appointment for a counseling meeting at the church with Pastor Simmonds; yet her faith will be lost as he tries to take advantage of her condition.

The cross shines as a beam of light falls over it while Pastor touches her body and insinuates himself, causing Jean to feel dirty and sinful, sending her running away from the

church so as to avoid adding to her burden of guilt. She runs madly, falling on top of a heap of dead crabs on the beach where her memories come in full force; wrapped in her old pain, oblivious of the cloud of flies buzzing around her, Jean vividly recalls the acts of abuse from her childhood committed by someone who was supposed to watch out for her, someone she trusted.

At this point of the narrative, the events of sexual and moral abuse described earlier are then revealed to the reader, displayed by an aching Jean through the complete recollections of the rape. However, revisiting her past does not lead her to opening up, reaching for help, finally realizing the origin of her demon voices – rather it reinforces her self-loathing, her destructive behavior, her mental degeneration, her silence. Jean holds herself responsible for the horrifying acts of abuse she suffered, authenticating the image the patriarchal society had successfully inflicted on her.

Susan Bordo points out that our culture has long constructed the mind-body binomial, a dualism where the mind, the not-body, is "the highest, the best, the noblest, the closest to God" (BORDO, 1995, p. 5), and therefore the part reserved for men. To women, the body, the negativity, "the distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire" (BORDO, 1995, p. 5). Such spread discourse cast women in a role which end up in their framing as guilty of rapes and assaults, as bodies who speak the language of provocation:

> My point here, if it requires saying, is not to accuse all men of being potential rapists and wife-batterers; this would be to indulge in a cultural mythology about men as pernicious as the sexual-temptress myths about women. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate the continuing historical power and pervasiveness of certain cultural images and ideology to which not just men but also women (since we live in this culture, too) are vulnerable. Women and girls frequently internalize this ideology, holding themselves to blame for unwanted advances and sexual assaults. (BORDO, 1995, p. 7, 8).

Moreover, Bordo adds to her analysis the triple burden of negative bodily associations carried by black women. By being a woman she has long carried the label of temptress, she represents the source of man's downfall, as the Bible images of Salome, Jezebel, Eve, and Delilah illustrate. Her blackness brings the myth of voluptuousness and lascivity inculcated by misleading "scientific" representations of the black woman's body which portray their anatomy as animal-like, with overdeveloped sexual organs and voluptuousness. Furthermore, a third blemish is added to the black female body by the legacy of slavery: her body is a property to be taken and used, for she is a breeder to the slave owner; "rape implies the

invasion of a personal space of modesty and reserve that the black woman has not been imagined as having." (BORDO, 1995, p. 9).

There can be no freedom without ownership of one's own body; the direct locus of social control, the body of the black woman has long struggled for its tenure, so long as it has been victim of the long-standing sexualized violence that serves as reminders of male dominance. In "It Was like All of Us Had Been Raped: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle", an essay which received the 2004 Louis Pelzer Memorial Award, later published in *The Journal of American History*, Danielle L. McGuire reaffirms the idea that the sexual exploitation of black women in America has its roots in slavery:

> Slave owners, overseers, and drivers took advantage of their positions of power and authority to rape slave women, sometimes in the presence of their husbands or families. White slave owners' stolen access to black women's bodies strengthened their political, social, and economic power, partly because colonial laws made the offspring of slave women the property of their masters. After the fall of slavery, when African Americans asserted their freedom during the interracial experiment in democracy that briefly characterized Reconstruction, former slaveholders and their sympathizers used violence and terror to reassert control over the social, political, and economic agency of freed people. At the heart of this violence, according to Gerda Lerner, rape became a "weapon of terror" to dominate the bodies and minds of African American men and women. […] The acclaimed freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer knew that rape and sexual violence was a common occurrence in the segregated South. *For Freedom's Sake*, Chana Kai Lee's biography of Hamer, is one of the few histories of the modern-day civil rights movement that openly deals with and documents the legacy of sexual assault. Hamer's grandmother, Liza Bramlett, spoke often of the "horrors of slavery," including stories about "how the white folks would do her." Bramlett's daughter remembered that "this man would keep her as long as he want to and then he would trade her off for a little heifer calf. Then the other man would get her and keep her as long as he want – she was steady having babies – and trade her off for a little sow pig." Twenty of the twenty-three children Bramlett gave birth to were products of rape.
>
> Hamer grew up with the clear understanding that a "black woman's body was never hers alone." (MCGUIRE, 2004, p. 908-910).

Slavery left a deep scar in black women's bodies: branded by the hot iron of rape, a stamp decrees their dispossession of their own bodies, their fate to be merchandise in the power tactics of a phallocentric society. Long after abolition, chains still bind the black body of women through their relegation to object, ready to be taken and used.

1.3 Acknowledged rules

Another of Riley's women characters, Hyacinth, the protagonist in *The Unbelonging*, also lives by the principles inscribed by her oppressors' discourses, being they the white

society of the colonial fathers or her own biological one. Regarding the former, Hyacinth acts according to and reproduces the discourse of inferiority and dependency of the black, the patriarchal context of colonized countries. As to the latter, his shadow will follow the girl her whole life, in the form of her incorporating his thoughts, such as the mistrust and fear of the white world and, above all, in her silence and guilt about the attempted rape and constant physical and sexual abuse she suffers under his roof.

The girl behaves according to and replicates the colonial discourse of inferiority of the black: head hanging, always in silence, unable to defend herself or react, Hyacinth spends her childhood and adolescence cowering, apologizing even if not guilty of anything, being humble and submissive; it is only against the ones whom the girl takes as also inferior in society that she is confident to stand up to. Her first outburst of rage is directed at Margaret White, a mixed-race kid adopted by white people who hates "the black kids even more than the whites did" (RILEY, 1985, p. 18); the girl's offensive words find a responsive reaction in Hyacinth, who lets out all her pent-up frustration, making the other cower as she had done so many times. Being half black, White is not so white, therefore eligible to be the end of Hyacinth's fighting back. Her stepmother and half-brothers, taken as lower because of the way her father treats them, are also targets of Hyacinth's reproductions of insults and aggressiveness.

The character thus embodies the denouncement of how ingrained conformity to the established rules is in the minds of the oppressed; she acknowledges and submits to the dispositions of ranking in society, she adheres to the system she herself is a victim of. The roots to the formation of her identity lie in her own representation as Other, inferior to the One, therefore incapable of reaction, destined to submission. Hyacinth at the same time hates and aspires to the white world, envies and wants to be on a par with her historical oppressors, reproducing their discourse on other black people as well as in her vision of her own self. Stuart Hall's words on the shaping of cultural identities molded to reproduce the colonial discourse of superiority are valuable here:

> […] identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as 'Other'. (HALL, 2002, p. 52; grifo do autor).

The white people's world, the world of the colonizer, is seen by Hyacinth through the lens of the love/hate paradox of the oppressed, of one who, pushed to the position of Other, fully acknowledges it; permeating the whole narrative is the difficulty of the protagonist in dealing with her own blackness, her wish to sameness, to the effacement of her distinguishing characteristics as a black girl, the total denial of her African roots. Hyacinth has internalized the discourse that affirms that white is better than black, that black does not have the right to belong, does not have a place in society. Being black is being lesser – this is the programmed thought in the girl's mind the moment she steps out of the plane at the airport in London:

> There had been a sea of white faces everywhere, all hostile. She had known they hated her, and she had felt small, lost and afraid, and ashamed of her plaited hair as she looked enviously at the smooth straightness of theirs. She had always wanted long hair, would have given anything for it, and she wished with all her might that her prayers would be answered and she would become like them. (RILEY, 1985, p. 13).

Exposed in the novel is the way Hyacinth blames the world around her for its racism yet is incapable of seeing how rooted it is inside her own self. The character's incorporated discourse of levels of superiority and inferiority follows her along the school days to the college, where she chooses the company of the Indian girls, who "were not white, but had long hair, and their noses were straight, their lips nice and thin" (RILEY, 1985, p. 81), keeping her distance from other black students she sees as inferior. As she enters the large hall feeling important for being there,

> […] she couldn't help noticing how many black students there were. She supposed she ought to be glad that she no longer stood out, but she wasn't sure she liked the way they all bunched up together, and were so arrogant and rude to white people, nor the way they insisted on talking in that awful broken English so that the other students kept staring at them. They just seemed so ignorant, and she felt uncomfortable when several of them kept smiling encouragingly at her. She hoped none of them would approach her, hating the thought of being associated with them. (RILEY, 1985, p. 81).

Riley points out the power of the white patriarchal discourses in engendering the sense of Otherness in the black female immigrant; she wants to be set aside from the other black students in an attempt to stand out from the mass of people she considers of lower level, a feeling which she maintains at university. In this new scenario, Riley introduces Perlene, another Jamaican student, who works as the voice which gives way to much of the political ideas of the narrative; while she has conversations with Hyacinth, trying to "get [the girl's] head out of [her] test-tube and take a look at the real world for once" (RILEY, 1985, p. 111),

Perlene introduces the questioning of how deeply rooted racism and the colonial attitude still are in Jamaica.

During one of their conversations about the social situation in their homeland, Hyacinth cannot accept being called African and looks down on the other students at university who are not from the West Indies but from any African country; Perlene reacts with impatience:

> 'Can't you see how they brainwash you? Africans are the only race of people who are ashamed of their origin. Caucasians are Caucasians, Chinese are Chinese, but Africans, Africans are negroes, or West Indians or anything else that don't mean African. What's the matter with you, Hyacinth, why don't you admit what you are and be proud of it?' (RILEY, 1985, p. 112).

Hyacinth has a deeply inbuilt wish to be set aside from the other black people, she wants to move nearer into the category of the One, as described by Freire and quoted earlier in this chapter: "*to be* is *to be like*, and *to be like* is *to be like the oppressor*" (FREIRE, 1996, p. 30; grifo do autor). After being convinced by her friend to attend meetings held by black students on the university campus, the girl feels frustrated for she had thought that "she was unique among black people, that her education set her apart." (RILEY, 1985, p. 112, 113).

In an intertext with reality, Hyacinth attends a lecture given by Dr Walter Rodney, the Guyanese historian and political activist who was killed by a bomb in his car in 1980 while running for office in Guyana. During the 1970s, Rodney was involved in the Black Power Movement, the questioning of the direction of the post-independence governments, and the issue of empowerment for the black and emancipation of the working people. In Jamaica, where he had been a student in the 60s, he shared his knowledge of African history with one of the most rejected sections of the society – the Rastafarians. The Rastafari movement, which arose in Jamaica in the 1930s, worships Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia from 1930 to 1936 and from 1941 to 1974, as the re-incarnate Christ, who the followers of the movement believe was black, despite his depictions as white by Western society; the movement also proclaims Africa as the original birthplace of mankind and encourages the valuing of African roots. Diane J. Austin-Broos points out that the Rastafarian figure "subverts the master-servant relationship embedded in relations between the pastor and Christ, especially when those relations are infused with notions of a Euro-Christ and an African disciple." (AUSTIN-BROOS, 1997, p. 239).

In 1968, Walter Rodney was banned by the government from re-entering Jamaica when coming back from a conference in Canada, which sparked widespread riots and revolts

in Kingston. Quoting Perlene, who explains to Hyacinth who the historian is and the importance of attending his lecture, “Walter Rodney is one dread academic when it come to African history. He is giving back African history to African people, radicalizing the way it is written and creating a tool, a potential force for liberation.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 115). Yet Hyacinth refuses to acknowledge her African roots and free herself of the planted racism, of the prescribed colonial thoughts deeply entrenched in her soul, remaining impervious to the thoughts discussed in the lectures as well as to the tentative enlightenments coming from her friends.

The colonial fathers had left their mark, and so had her own. An indication to the girl’s full acknowledgement of the father’s figure is the non-existence of a mother in the narrative, a point further exploited in Chapter Two of this work. Hyacinth never mentions or thinks about her mother, readers never learn anything about her; during her childhood in Jamaica, the girl lived with her aunt, to whom she never writes while living in England, an aunt she only seeks a week after returning to Jamaica, and who the girl rejects at the degrading vision of her sickness. It is the father, no matter how loathsome and vile, brutal and abusive, who remains in her mind as source of guidelines, an ambivalent figure of model and rejection. As an example, the manner to achieve her steadfast ambition – to return to Jamaica – is set following her father’s words: “He was always saying that education was the only way to get rich.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 46). Also, he instills in her his fear of the white world, his position as undervalued colonized, causing Hyacinth to be suspicious of any attempt of help which might come from white people; her father’s words return to her anytime she is faced with the decision of reaching out:

> ‘You think you get bad treatment here?’ he often asked. ‘Well let me tell you, if you run go tell the white teacher them going to take you away. […] They don’t like neaga in this country. All them white people smile up them face with them plastic smile, and then when you trust them, them kill you.’ (RILEY, p. 50, 51).

Verifying her internalization of patriarchal values, of her feelings as fittingly ranked below men, Hyacinth, repeating the pattern observed in Jean, keeps forever silent about the father’s abuse, feeling guilty and ashamed. Disappointed at the decay of the rented room in the rehabilitation hostel, Hyacinth wonders if they have guessed her secret, therefore her worth, and sent her to such miserable place; “[s]he supposed in a way she deserved to be there. She should have been punished for what her father had tried.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 94). Keeping quiet, Hyacinth acts according to the discourses spread in the culture, reproducing the rules that sanction men’s behavior towards women.

In the summary to “Violence against women in Jamaica: A public health concern”, a thesis presented at the University of West Indies, Mona as a requisite for her Masters of Public Health, Eugena McFarquhar affirms:

> Violence against women in Jamaica has deep roots in Caribbean cultural history manifested by the gender approach, stereotypes of women, and the attitudes of both the abuser and the abused. Women in many instances perpetuated these trends by demonstrating the female dependency syndrome, lacking the will to succeed, not seizing opportunities for upward mobility and not acquiring skills for their social and economic independence. […] Abused women are characterized by psychological manifestations of feeling embarrassed, ashamed, fearful of threats by the abuser, and a feeling of being blamed. (MCFARQUHAR, 1991).

Jean and Hyacinth are hence Riley’s denouncing of the cultural conditions which allocate to women a sense of guilt for any abuse they might suffer, a feeling of being blamed which leads to silence in the face of violence. Their resignation to the position assigned to them by others, their acceptance of the labels of temptress and sinful or of inferior and undeserving, is a gag they cannot rip out.

1.4 Of betrayal

Masculine authority and absolute might are imposed on women from the cradle; they grow up to see male figures as supreme in their essence, made for adoration, allowed to act as it is not permitted for women to, freer, more capable, an archetype to the perfect human. Used to be in the shadow, it is in men that Jean sees her sources of safety all along her life, yet they always fail to live up to her expectations, they always betray her notions of dependency.

Her self-esteem problem is built in her relation with her father, whom she tried to please at all cost; he undervalued her for being a girl, for not being able to carry on his name as her brothers could. He neglected her triumphs leaving words to her – ‘worthless’, ‘disappointment’ – which become attached to her view of herself, draining her confidence. “All she wanted was for him to like her as much as Noel; to treat her like she counted for more than assistant cook, and trouble on his head.” (RILEY, 1992, p. 31). Furthermore, after Noel’s death he is consumed by alcohol and grief, abandoning Jean and her brother George when he is institutionalized, an event which leaves a mark of rejection forever indented in her soul.

The pastor of her childhood, a leading male figure who was supposedly a source of security and guidance above his congregation, betrays its function in society, fails the girl by corrupting her innocence, staining her sexuality, triggering the destructive wish and her view of herself as low, vicious, a blot time will prove impossible to erase. The pastor from her adult years, another of the many men she turns to for comfort in vain, concurs to prove to her eyes her role as temptress and shameful.

As she had hungered for her father's love and sanction of her value in her childhood, Jean now craves for Jimmy's, her lover and father of her children. Her father's approval is replaced by her wish to be lawfully married, having been living with Jimmy for nine years; the status of married woman is seen by Jean as a form to redeem her sins, to bring her back from the wrath of God, to prove her value and legitimate her position is society. Because it never happens, the character feels undeserving of the lover's affection, inferior to him, just as she had felt unworthy to her father and lesser than her brothers. While he tried to build his career as a writer, Jimmy needed her, because she worked to support the family. When he starts selling stories and publishes a book, Jean feels he will finally realize she is not good enough for him, a reliving of the abandonment alarm that allows the demon voices to finally grab her.

Jean trusts men and puts herself in their hands in several occasions, even in the most abject figures. The fake Rasta man she meets at the beach, Ras Peter, is taken by her as second-rate, for she has lived and studied in England, therefore, he is someone who will never leave, someone who will feel pleased to have her by his side. However it is through him that she will get to drugs and even more degradation, left in a shack with her children, lost in hallucinations, with a bottle of 7-Up and a bag of ginger cakes.

Through the end of the novel, we follow Jean in her last appearance, barefoot, lonely, and increasingly losing contact with reality around her. Unable to find her way home, she sits down, feeling defeated and abandoned; yet, in one more demonstration of how much she seeks after men's approval and support, she trusts a man who approaches her and offers to help: "A know just where you wanting to go, just follow my lead and a will look after you." (RILEY, 1992, p. 296). She obediently follows the one who will close the circle of degradation and violence of her story: lured with rum, Jean is grabbed and pulled down to the ground behind some bushes.

> She lay incuriously as he fumbled under her skirt and pulled her panty down, watching passively when he unzipped his flies. She felt his hands clutching at her, hard intrusive

> fingers poking and jabbing in her body with painful brutality. The image of the cross flickered a moment, wavered and dissolved.
> It barely registered on her conscious mind. Nothing did any more. Soon he would be finished and she could sit up, drink her rum and wait for him to take her back to where she knew Jimmy was waiting to take her home. (RILEY, 1992, p. 298).

Riley closes the participation of this character in the novel majestically, leaving the readers the unpleasant feeling of having witnessed the complete dehumanization process of a woman, the abuse and objectification of her sex, the disrespect with which she had been treated her whole life concentrated in one scene. Readers next hear of her from the piece of news her cousin Sylvia, a character whose participation is further discussed in Chapter Two, reads in the papers on board of the plane back to England: a woman had been found dead, green dress, strange haircut, barefoot, with no identification. She wonders if it could be Jean; nonetheless, she dismisses the thought, asks for a Perrier, and offers the newspaper to another passenger. “There is nothing in it to concern me” (RILEY, 1992, p. 312), the closing words of the anguishing novel, the summing up of a life neglected, discarded, a woman betrayed in all her attempts at finding security.

Betrayed is also how Hyacinth feels as she, coming back to Jamaica after a life of awaiting, finds nothing of the free land ruled by black people picture she had long nurtured, nothing of the place to belong and be accepted, no home to fit as she had dreamt of all her life. As the title of the novel anticipates, she remains an outsider, misled by her ignorance of reality only to return to the rejection of her now foreign, English-like self. “She remembered England as a child, the beatings, the jeers. ‘Go back where you belong,’ they had said, and then she had thought she knew where that was. But if it was not Jamaica, where did she belong?” (RILEY, 1985, p. 142). Back in her hotel from the frustrating attempt to find her past untouched as she had left it years before, Hyacinth observes the tourists on her way to the sun, sea and excitement they went to Jamaica for.

> How could they come here, live like lords and ladies? What justice said that to be black was inferior? It was so unfair, her mind cried out in frustration. She had run back to where black people ruled, only to find that it was all a dream. They were all still slaves, still poor, still trodden down. (RILEY, 1985, p. 143).

Behind the bitterness of rejection, behind the shattered dreams, Hyacinth beholds her father, “crouching in the shadows, beating at her with all the horrors she had faced, laughing and mocking all her attempts at escape.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 143). As the primary source of protection a child is to have, he is all about betrayal, about breaking faith with the pure, with the good, with the possible in her life; he is treachery, he is perfidy. He means betrayal from

her own community, from her own blood, destroying in her any prospect of trust. The girl who cannot belong the world of the whites is barred from the confidence which would ensure her belonging in the black community.

Poet, essayist, and novelist Audre Lorde speaks of betrayal in two distinctive aspects when it comes to violence against black women and children: what she denounces as the betrayal of black men against black women and children, since they are exposed to violence inside their own communities; and what is taken by some as an undermining of black men therefore a betrayal to the black cause, the attempts of black feminism to depict the blemish of violence as it exposes black men in their faults, which would add to their mythical images of brutality and voluptuousness already spread in society.

> The threat of difference has been no less blinding to people of color. Those of us who are black must see that the reality of our lives and our struggle does not make us immune to the errors of ignoring and misnaming difference. Within black communities where racism is a living reality, differences among us often seem dangerous and suspect. The need for unity is often misnamed as a need for homogeneity, and a black feminist vision mistaken for betrayal of our common interests as a people. Because of the continuous battle against racial erasure that black women and black men share, some black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women and that sexual hostility against black women is not only practiced by the white racist society but implemented within our black communities as well. It is a disease striking the heart of black nationhood, and silence will not make it disappear. […] Yet the necessity for and history of shared battle have made us, black women, particularly vulnerable to the false accusation that antisexist is antiblack. Meanwhile, woman-hating as recourse of the powerless is sapping strength from black communities and from our very lives. (LORDE, 2002, p. 377, 378).

Thus betrayal is in the core of relations when one discusses the rape of black women by black men, as Joan Riley does in her fiction. The humiliation and subjugation black men suffer from the white society for their skin is perversely reproduced in the most vulnerable of the members of their own community, children and women, in their assertion of masculine power and sovereignty. The oppressors' tactics are acknowledged and passed ahead. Riley seems to concur with Lorde that denouncing is the way to achieve awareness, the first step in the struggle, that silence will only bring the circle of violence and exploitation to grow stronger.

By accepting the labels imposed on them and keeping quiet in the face of violence, the author's women characters analyzed in this study perpetuate the cycle of aggression and submission, "a disease striking the heart of black nationhood", as defined by Audre Lorde in the excerpt above, an illness depicted by Riley in her exposing of the treachery Jean and Hyacinth experience.

1.5 When violence strikes the dehumanized individual

"It amounts to this: just as for the ancients there was an absolute vertical with reference to which the oblique was defined, so there is an absolute human type, the masculine." (BEAUVOIR, 1989, p. xxi). To be human requires qualifications, or so it seems. If compared to the presumptively human – Caucasian, male, Christian, educated, heterosexual – one misses a tick to the boxes, he is excluded to the group of eligible to the title 'human', obliterated from consideration, not assigned the full possibilities of existence.

Non-prescribed features, marginalized aspects of identity, such as black skin or the absence of a penis, generate undervalued individuals, diminished in significance, taken as lower in the ranks of society, not sanctioned by the authoritative model. Lesser, inferior, underling, not really human. In "Global Violence, Sexual Politics", Judith Butler's words for the Kessler lectures at CLAGS (Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies) raise the question of who counts as the human, whose lives are acknowledged as lives, therefore worth protection and respect, of which individuals are entitled to be regarded as fully human. The ones placed outside the realm of the defined human, unfit for the dominant frame of the human, therefore not human, are likely to be subjected to violence, physical or moral, for theirs are lives which do not matter.

Butler poses the question "What makes for a grievable life?" (BUTLER, 2003, p. 199), pointing to the core of an issue which extends far from queer studies to countless situations in our society; it is not only the lives of individuals who chose to express their sexuality or gender in a way which differs from the binomials man/woman, male/female, who are regarded as disposable. Women, black people, poor people, immigrants, children, – they all belong to the category of lesser, to the class of dehumanized individuals who are "ungrievable" victims of violence.

> Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as "grievable". […] And how do the contours that we accept as the cultural frame for the human limit the extent to which we can avow loss as loss? […] For there to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that would qualify for recognition. (BUTLER, 2003, p. 203, 204).

After learning of Jean's death through the piece of news read by her cousin on her flight back to England, readers realize her story will remain untold; there will be no justice, no truth coming out, and above all, no grief. Jean dies alone in the streets of Kingston, again

violated, abused, and silent. Only the readers will mourn her, for she failed to be in the group of "grievable" lives. Her life had been a state of postponement of being, the non-being of silence, the non-existence of a life paralyzed at the moment of abuse, of the marked vulnerability of her condition of woman. Jean fails to become a grievable death as she had failed to count as living human; her being a woman sets from the beginning her state of beneath human, less than human, since the border established for that status in society defines the man as its paradigm. The implication of Riley's work is that violence against women is not fully recognized as violence because it is inflicted on an individual which does not succeed to count, to have significance, therefore gagged, forever condemned to silence and resignation.

Riley also displays Hyacinth under extreme conditions of dehumanization, decadence all around her, a childhood in loneliness, abuse, and degradation. Like an animal cornered in fear, she wets her bed constantly, waking up to the stale smell of urine, sickness in her stomach, horror at the anticipation of the beatings to come, of the cold baths watched by her father. She feels surrounded by ugliness and decay in the corrupted relation with the people in the family mirrored in the deterioration of the house she rejects and feels ashamed of. Hyacinth is dehumanized to the point of not being considered daughter, child, person; she is the object of her father's lust, as well as the end of his own frustrations and humiliation in the form of his beatings. While she accepts this vulnerability of her body, while she remains inactive, validating the dehumanized perception of her self, violence repeatedly finds her. It is in her flight to the exterior world, in the action, that she finds the end of abuse from her father. Agency proves positive to Hyacinth: whenever in her story she is bold enough to try taking over her destiny, reclaiming her title of human and demanding her rights, she succeeds. Unfortunately, she does not do it often enough.

Gendered identities, constructed to straitjacket women's possibilities and aspiration to achieve the status of the phallocentric defined human, are shaped to make women conform to the position assigned to them as inferior and bound to the established cultural laws. Rape is thus a ritualistic reenactment of the pattern of social dominance which women end up authenticating with their silence. Violence strikes them as they are deprived of the basic consideration a human should be granted, as they are positioned as undervalued; "violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark." (BUTLER, 2003, p. 205).

Joan Riley exposes the gagging of these women as well as the high price they pay for it, their subjectivities destined to incompleteness and paralysis, their lives lived in absence.

Jean’s and Hyacinth’s anguish is meant to remain unknown, unrecognized in the plots so as to be full of meaning in Riley’s crying condemnation; their silence is heard through the sorrow they leave in readers.

Ensnared by the gagging order prescribed by established social rules, submersed in a context of domination, the women characters analyzed in this work accept the labels imposed on them, thus suffering in silence the violence on their dehumanized selves. The consequent fissure in their subjectivities, the absence felt in the pages of the novels, the lack embodied by these women characters, is the subject of the next chapter.

2 CHAPTER TWO: IN THE EXCESS LIES THE ABSENCE

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.
Maya Angelou

2.1 Extremes

Absence: a crevasse carved into the souls of Riley's women; a hole buried deep, abandonment, betrayal, privation showing at the bottom; acquiescence to their positioning by the world of men revealed in their guilt, in their fear, in their shame. Banned from completeness, destined to lack. Absence: the piece violation took away; silence.

Joan Riley manifests such profound absence in her narrative structure through the oppositions of excess and want incised in her protagonists and setting, extremeness pointing to emptiness, the first concealing the other, yet enhancing the other's presence. In both novels selected for this work, *The Unbelonging* and *A Kindness to the Children*, the author's use of extremes conveys the deprivation to which her women characters are condemned after experiencing violence, neglect, and submission to an order established by the patriarchal society they are born into, the profound lack they silence yet unconsciousness utters through behavior in instances of excessiveness.

Hyacinth makes her want evident through an intense inactive attitude before life and the real, indefinitely deferring her maturation, associating being to the coming back to an oneiric home in Jamaica. Paralyzed at a point in time and space where she felt safe, a point before she experiences difference and the brutality of her father, the character clutches obsessively at her starting point, her national identity, as only means of self-definition, loneliness hidden in idealized projections of belonging, a dream into which to commit one's existence.

In *A Kindness to the Children*, Jean's surrendering of the real goes beyond that of hiding in imagination: the unbearable crudeness of her story reaches the eventual yielding to insanity; in the gradual process of her capitulation of reality in favor of the ultimate step into non-being, the total abandoning of consciousness, Jean is extreme in alcohol, in violence towards her children, in her religious attempt at salvation, in abjection of her own body and sexuality.

Moreover, in *A Kindness to the Children*, excess is reflected in the background, in the oppressive atmosphere generated by the high temperatures and drought; the shortage of water, a primary symbol of the feminine and of motherhood across countless cultures, mirrors the absence of the mother in the plots of both novels, a negation which highlights the figure of the fathers and their omnipresent shadow and excessive load. The unspoken words of loss find a way to come out.

2.2 A shield to hide behind

The most prominent instance of want veiled by excess in *The Unbelonging* is found in the obsessive weight laid by its protagonist on her national identity as the only point of anchorage to her self. Hyacinth hides in her feeling of belonging to Jamaica, pushing away the world around her, the host country which she sees as rejection, as well as the father's home where she undergoes violence, neglect and fear; as the only possible way of being, she builds an identity based on her memories of homeland, protecting such self – a construct – by constantly revisiting the static moment in an idealized past where she projects her happiness. Her utopia must be shielded at any cost if she is to survive the brutality and abuse at home, the prejudice and hostility at school, private and public spheres of defeat. Her fading memories are taken over by imagination, producing the place to flee to and find safety, a fancy she cherishes for eleven years, from the point she arrives in England to the facing of truth as she finally returns to Jamaica.

In his *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie points out how "exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (RUSHDIE, 1992, p. 10). However, adds Rushdie, reclaiming precisely what was left behind is not possible; thus what is created is a fiction, not the real space but the imaginary homeland, the version (which is only one of the many

versions possible), one small part of the fragmented vision. To the Indian author, the broken part of the mirror can actually mean a contribution from over the borders, heritage which can turn identity plural, enriched: "*Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world" (RUSHDIE, 1992, p. 394; grifo do autor). However, the "newness" described by Rushdie can only manifest itself at the coming together of the two cultures, at the opening of frontiers both ways, in and out of the self. Enrichment can only be achieved at the reaching out and allowing contact to happen.

Terrified of difference, inappropriate to her own eyes, submitted to the absence, Hyacinth denies her new space and sets her happiness and belonging at the distant (in time and space) homeland, falling into the pillar of salt trap: the girl who came to England at the age of eleven is petrified at her wish to return immediately when she arrives in London, fear, shame and hatred mixed in her mind. Her difficulties in dealing with difference when confronted with the white faces at the airport, a scene discussed in Chapter One, anticipate not only the strangeness of herself she will undergo all along her story, as exploited previously, but also the paralyzing dread at the new experience to come. Her wish for Jamaica expressed then unfolds as the inaction in face of the real she will always present: Hyacinth is passive in the face of difficulties. She bows her head in self-deprecation and fear while she escapes in her mind to the fiction of safety she cultivates, her coming back.

Joan Riley prefaces *The Unbelonging* with a poem, "Memories", which puts into words the image of the imaginary homeland Hyacinth carries with her throughout the narrative, a childhood scene of freedom and happiness, the idyllic dream which accompanies the girl all her life:

> Lianas trailing in sparkling green pools
> tempted our childish minds to adventure,
> Gullies stretching forbidden and deep
> calling us do delve in their mysteries,
> Sky blue and smiling beckoning forward
> unclouded minds to reach for perfection,
> Poised on the edge of unknown worlds
> willing to face any challenge they brought,
> launching ourselves from that cool
> blue and green place,
> swinging forever through sun-dappled leaves,
> Up, up and higher, higher and higher
> maybe to reach to the high wide blue world,
> seeing the people, ant specks below us
> scurrying madly through myriad adventures,
> Unclouded minds saw unclouded visions
> then we were young, in a land of our own.
> (RILEY, 1985, p. 7).

Hyacinth clings to the lianas of her memories not to fall into the air. Lianas, the tropical vines which root in the ground and climb around tree trunks, provide the girl moorings to a land of her own, a sense of hanging on to this tree that emerges from solid soil as last resource to belonging. However, such feeling charges its price, for the lianas which trail in her memories form a thick web, intertwined around her mind, blurring the possibilities of reality, taking her higher and higher, each time more distant from the ground, distorting the spot where the roots are supposed to attach being to land. Too ashamed of her truth, fixed at the fantasy constructed as escape, she is incapable of acting in the present, of accepting anything or anyone from the host country to enter her tightly closed borders.

Although Riley depicts the prejudice, racism and violence the character meets along the way, the author also includes hands reaching out to assist, such as Miss Maxwell, the English teacher who genuinely tries to help the girl:

> ‘Hyacinth, what is the matter with you?’ the teacher asked as soon as the door closed on the last child.
>
> ‘Nothing, Miss Maxwell,’ she answered, looking down at her hands.
>
> The teacher looked disbelieving. ‘I am not just talking about today,’ she said gently. ‘I am talking about your whole stay in this school. I realize that it must have been hard for you to adjust, coming to a strange country, but it is three years now, and I am sure everyone has tried to make you feel at home.’
>
> Hyacinth said nothing. If she only knew, she thought sadly. She wished she could tell the teacher what it was really like being in England, but shrugged off the idea. She was probably like all the rest anyway, deep down underneath it all.
>
> ‘I am aware that you have a far from satisfactory home life,’ the teacher persisted when she failed to answer, then after a pause, ‘I would like you to feel that you can confide in me, if you need someone to talk to.’
>
> Hyacinth wanted to die of shame. She looked everywhere but at the woman, feeling sick with embarrassment. Mrs Maxwell knew what her father was like. How? How had she found out? Who had told her? The questions tumbled through her mind and her palms felt clammy. She had to struggle to keep her face blank, to stop the tears of shame from falling.
>
> ‘There is nothing to tell, Miss Maxwell.’ (RILEY, 1985, p. 49, 50).

Imprinted on her mind, her father’s frightening words – “‘All them white people smile up them face with them plastic smile, and then when you trust them, them kill you’” (RILEY, 1985, p. 51) – add up to the shame and guilt she feels, making it impossible for her to accept help, to trust, to open up. Her only recourse is to turn to her frozen time and space references as means of finding refuge, as possibility of being: “The more she suffered, the more she clung to thoughts of Jamaica, sinking further into her world of dreams, where she was never older than ten, never had to face the unpleasant reality that was England.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 74).

Furthermore, as an adult, Hyacinth will need to smother another facet of her identity, her sexuality, her maturity as a woman. Overvaluing national identity over any other defining feature, protecting the crystallized image of happiness fixed at a moment before abuse, is the

only way the girl manages to obstruct the birth of the adult woman. The complete individual whose sexuality she would have to deal with, the adult woman who would have to leave the cocoon of fantasy and face the world and her own story, is sabotaged, aborted by her remaining locked inside her own walls of produced world, a space of beauty and innocence fixed at a time of childhood. Her lack, expressed in the excesses of her wish to return to her country, becomes paralysis, prostration, inertia; Hyacinth cannot grow up, cannot move forward, for she is bound by the secrets she fears. Homeland turns into aim and hideout.

2.3 Dreams of a distant land

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's pioneer studies into dreams as a means to explore the unconscious meant a revolutionary step in the discipline of psychology; "every dream will reveal itself as a psychological structure, full of significance, and one which may be assigned to a specific place in the psychic activities of the waking state." (FREUD, 1994, p. 3). Ever since his findings, dreams are seen as a means to open the doors of the unconscious wishes, lifting inhibitions and constraints of vigilant times, allowing glimpses into the conflicts in process in our minds.

Along the narrative of *The Unbelonging*, ten episodes of Hyacinth's dreams of her childhood in Jamaica are described, signalizing her immobility and hopelessness, her bonds to a calcified projection of happiness fixed because of her need to find asylum from the violence she faces in real life. Also, they indicate her wish to escape the reality hidden in her very past in Jamaica as the girl builds modified versions of supposed memories, ones which fit her necessity of experiencing belonging and beauty somewhere in her life, avoiding the impressions which might give rise to unpleasant facts obliterated by her mind.

It is in the idyllic scenario of warmth, colors and smell of ripening mangoes of homeland that the character finds her comfort. The atmosphere of contrast between her hiding fantasy of Jamaica and the truth she evades at all cost in England is established from the beginning; the opening scene of the narrative brings the bright colors and sweet scents of Hyacinth's secret place, where the girl and her two friends from childhood lie back in the cool grass, safe in their little green cave, "her mind centred on the warm glow of contentment somewhere in the centre of her chest." (RILEY, 1985, p. 9). The dream moves on to the sounds of the Independence parade, a theme which returns twice again in her dreams, and the

reassuring presence of her aunt Joyce, also a recurrent image, who takes her to see the festivity.

David Punter affirms that, in postcolonial writing, loss is ubiquitous; to the author, “the dream of a Jamaican Independence Day that begins Joan Riley’s *The Unbelonging*” reproduces this loss, “‘independence’ reduced to its opposite, the lineaments of an agonized dependence.” (PUNTER, 2000, p. 130, 131). Under all perspectives, Hyacinth lives as a captive in the house of the father: England, the host country of the colonial forefathers which represents to her eyes obedience, distrust, abiding to laws of fear and submission, a place to highlight her unsuitability; also, the concrete house of dilapidation and ugliness, the dingy grey walls and roof which witness her abuse, verbal, emotional, physical and sexual, her father’s house; what is more, the psychological prison house shaped by the yoke of the brutal man whose internalized lack of worth and servitude she inherits. Reflecting the dependency and loss of her situation, Hyacinth often dreams of the Independence parade in Jamaica, dreams of a celebration she is always prevented from watching though she hears the sounds in the distance, an image which anticipates her questioning of the independence of her country to be shown in the last pages of the novel as she watches the tourists marching to the sea, a scene discussed in Chapter One.

The excitement of standing with the crowd and waiting for the celebrating floats and band of her dreams displayed in this opening scene becomes harsh reality as her stepmother’s painful pinch wakes her up and informs her of her wetting the bed again. “Hyacinth looked down at the sodden sheet in dismay, shame and fear warring inside her. She could hardly bear to see the extent of the drying yellow stain that marked the outer edges of her disgrace.” (RILEY, 1985, p. 11). The girl sits in silent misery in the anticipation of the punishment to come from her father, violence and fear contrasted with the ease and safety of her dream-refuge; she wakes from a dream of joy in the eagerness of a moment of glory, the parade to commemorate Independence, to the reality of her physical expression of loss, her wetting the bed. As a cornered animal urinates in fear as the only defense possible, Hyacinth is not able to expel the vicious father or the country where she does not feel accepted in any other way but with the abjection of urine.

Her body ousts her defiance and defense against rejection and abuse, her unconsciousness communicating the profound absence through the outbursts of her sleeping body, uncontrolled by the conscious mind and the fear she constantly carries with her. What is foreign, abject, strange and dirty, must leave the body. It must come out as the venom of the tarantula is expelled through the ceremonial dance of the tarantella. Other episodes of wetting

the bed after dreams of Jamaica are described, all while Hyacinth lives in her father's house, except one. Yet it is precisely the one which occurs long after she has left his house – she is twenty-two and at university – which shows the father's shadow still lurking in the corners of her mind, a presence acknowledged though heinous, carved into her soul, an indelible mark to her sexuality, a ghost which will require one more time the cathartic expulsion of urine.

After her first and only sexual experience, Hyacinth runs away from the man's bedroom to her own in order to wash away the filth, fighting to control her urge to vomit; during the night, Hyacinth dreams she is playing with other kids in Jamaica, but loses her turn because she has to go to the bathroom. The figure of the boy who takes her turn in the game mixes with the lump she can never forget, the image of filth and violence representative of her father's abuse, defeat and disappointment filling her dream. The girl wakes up to the soggy wetness. Once again, Hyacinth reactivates the memory of her trauma, of the repressed event she must keep shut inside her, silenced. Escaping to her unconscious hideout of Jamaica is not enough that night; her body must concretely repel the outsider, blot out the memory of her forever open wound.

Her paralysis and attempt to shun reality are displayed in other dreams of the chimerical homeland along the narrative; among the ones her fancy concocts about the annual outings at school which she never actually experienced in her life, but envied the girls who did, dreams of burning fires and screaming children mingled with her friend Cynthia are filtered and forced to slip away into forgetfulness when Hyacinth wakes up. Fire and screaming children also frequently get mixed up with the usual nightmares about her father's house, bitter memories trying to cross the frontiers of the unconscious and come out to haunt the girl.

This cruel truth which tries to emerge from some of her dreams, the tragic death of her friend, burned in childhood as readers confirm at the end of the narrative through the accounts of Florence, the other childhood friend, is concealed, buried along with any image of poverty and dirtiness under the imagined perfection of her child years. Whenever ugliness or woe try to interfere with her projected hideout, her mirage of Promised Land, the character censors it, since nothing would be left as hope to her had she to acknowledge the inventive component of her treasured dream and cope with the truth.

By using dreams to punctuate her narrative structure, Riley provides a view of her character's psychic state, adding significance to her plot, allowing readers into the conflicts in process in the girl's mind.

2.4 Inescapable frontiers

By the time Hyacinth reaches university, being Jamaican means having an identity with which to be part of the social life, part of a group of students from abroad. Yet because she worried about others finding out about her past, the girl gives herself a new identity, creating an image she imagines would cause people to envy her. Part of that creation lies in having come from Jamaica only some few years before, having lived in the United States for some time, never mentioning a father. However, her misconceptions about politics and the social situation in her country, her lack of knowledge about her homeland, the fanciful idea of a paradise she had prized for so long, soon find reality. When confronted with other students from Jamaica her ignorance about their common homeland becomes obvious; Perlene, her Jamaican friend, tries to open her eyes to reality, but Hyacinth chooses to remain attached to her long-cultivated picture of her country, even when images of a little girl's scream of terror, of flickering orange flames, of the decadence in Lumber Street, of men "round the peeling grey wooden table, its legs gnawed and splintered by the fat, obscene rats that fed off the tenement waste" (RILEY, 1985, p. 123) start to invade her memory and her dreams.

Many are the isolating frontiers of the enclave the character settles around herself: the physical frontiers between Jamaica and England, geographic distance between homeland and host country, become the frontiers of denied reality and idealized dream, borders to avoid the feared other, the different, restricting lines to prevent Hyacinth from stepping out into the world. Her skin, the badge of difference which she has trouble coping with, also becomes boundaries she cannot trespass or see trespassed, neither allowing herself to step out into the world nor permitting the other to become part of her, as discussed previously in this chapter. Also, her female body is impenetrable and inescapable, does not admit entering or leaving, an isolated land: any attempt at sexuality is always frustrating and interrupted, for penetration of any part of her body is for her sordid and sickening, requiring expulsion of the alien, as further discussed in Chapter Three. What is more, her refusal to accept the unfamiliar, the other, the new, stretches to the realm of knowledge, of information. In order to maintain herself at an inert position as innocent child living in a woman's body, untainted by violation, unaware of the real, it is paramount to Hyacinth that she keep away from knowledge.

Her passage from girl to young woman, her first menstruation, is marked by the lack of knowledge about her own body: she imagines she is dying, prays to God for salvation from death. At hearing her stepmother's explanation about menstruation, she mistakes it for

masturbation, responding angrily she did not do things like that, things that would make you blind. Her stepmother tells her about periods, and above all tries to alert the girl for the danger her father may mean now; in an attempted warning, she gives Hyacinth the book left by her cousin years before, *Cider with Rosie*. Yet the book would "lay at the bottom of the drawer, unread and half-forgotten" (RILEY, 1985, p. 46), until her father's behavior towards her, now insinuating and even more uncomfortable, makes her read the book and look up a word in the dictionary – incest. Hyacinth finds a sentence ringed in black in this book, a sentence which will prove impossible to be removed from her mind: "Incest flourished where the roads were bad." (RILEY, 1985, p. 49).

The refusal of accepting enlightenment concerning Jamaica when at university is an extension of her rejection of knowledge about her body, about sexual matters and her desires, and therefore all kinds of growing. The suppression of her sexuality is possible only by sustaining her ignorance of the issue, her distance from attempts of sexual discovery; yet if one cannot know about sexuality, knowledge in all areas are to be avoided, a more general inhibition of thought is needed, thus avoiding overall maturation. According to Freud, "[t]he behavior of a human being in sexual matters is often a prototype for the whole of his other modes of reaction to life" (FREUD, 1997, p. 25); maintaining ignorance of reality, keeping firm at her projection of perfect motherland where to return to, allows Hyacinth to remain paralyzed at her childhood innocence, distant from the sexuality she cannot deal with, protected from the difference she has trouble coping with.

From Charles, the African student she considers inferior for being African and safe to be around because he is small and thin, the exact opposite of her father, Hyacinth gets a piece of advice about the dangers of romanticizing the origin country when feeling homesick which, tangled in her dreams, is rephrased by Cynthia: "'There is no harm in it, so long as you know the reality." (RILEY, 1985, p. 122). That proves to be a foreshadowing of the disappointment she faces when she finally manages to come back, when reality, which she avoided for so long, is impossible to be denied.

The relief Hyacinth always found in her make-believe world where everything was perfect turns into disappointment as she feels trapped inside this castle in the air coming down on her head when she returns to Jamaica. Her mirage of perfect land, belonging and acceptance, friends and aunt waiting for her crystallized in time as in her dreams, crumbles to the ground as she is confronted with the reality, as she observes from the taxi the landscape, familiar yet denied, smells that rescue memories she would rather leave behind. People now call her 'foreign lady'; in her own land she is now a stranger, her accent and her clothes

contrasting with the decadence and filth she finds in the neighborhood of her child years. Florence, now a grown woman Hyacinth can barely recognize, tells her to go back for she does not belong there anymore. The girl comes to the bitter realization of having been living inside a dream.

The character's obsession, her excessive devotion to maintain her little green cave impenetrable to growth, to knowledge, to the other, hides the secret of her lack, of her absence. Her flawed sexuality, the fissure in her growth; her inappropriateness and impossibility of self-definition; the indelible pain left by her father – all cached in this cave of her mind waiting for resolution. As Hyacinth completes her circular journey coming back to Jamaica, she realizes she remains bound to her starting point, fixed in space and time as a girl, a child:

> And always, behind it all, her father waited, crouching in the shadows, beating at her with all the horrors she had faced, laughing and mocking all her attempts at escape. And inside her, deep down, buried inside her woman's body, trapped and bleeding in the deepest recesses of her, a young girl screamed. As the scream echoed in her mind, the tears seeped out and Hyacinth knew she would never be free until that child healed. (RILEY, 1985, p. 143).

The absence is fully expressed in the image of the crying child who bleeds inside Hyacinth. The void left by violence, disregard, lack of love and belonging, cannot sustain any construction on top, cannot hold growth; it will have to be solved so that the woman can be born free. As Hyacinth's journey led her back to the point of stagnation, the narrative turns circular: Riley closes her novel with the same scenario she opens it, Hyacinth's dream of being back in the green cave of her dreams, her place of comfort and belonging, now acknowledged as lonely and sad. Will the absence ever be solved? Readers are left to wonder as Riley's final words point out once again to the lack:

> It was safe there, in the little green cave. Safe and lonely and sad. But was there anything out there but rejection and all the uncertainty she had hidden from? Safe inside her cave, Hyacinth lay back in the sweet-smelling grass and cried. (RILEY, 1985, p. 144).

The anguish portrayed in the closing paragraph of this tough narrative evokes the insurmountability of the girl's father's legacy, the paralysis in the formation of her subjectivity. Immobile, Hyacinth is close to being lifeless, consequently close to death, condemned to nonexistence in Riley's denouncing of a social order which tramples on women, crushing their possibilities of existence.

2.5 And your past shall be carried within you

While Hyacinth hides in the Caribbean of her childhood, in *A Kindness to the Children*, Jean runs away to escape it, goes to England to study, leads a fairly successful professional life, meets somebody, has two children. However, her want remains, and the kindness denied to her as a child, left a mark. The silenced emotional and sexual abuse in her past, unintelligible for the eight-year-old girl therefore cast off by her consciousness and erased from her memory, festers within her adult unconscious mind, a beast eating her up from inside, adding to the burden of her fear of rejection, waiting for the cracks to open in order to demand emergence.

And the cracks do come. Feeling excluded from the family circle and pushed out of her lover's life when he starts thriving as a writer, Jean sees her old urge for approval and affection rekindled, her self-depreciation alive with the echoes of her father's hard words for her – worthless, disappointment. The disintegration process is soon triggered as she has her first drink with the excuse of celebrating Jimmy's book. A vicious circle is soon initiated as Jean, feeling rejected and unworthy of her partner, engages in excesses of alcohol, meaningless sexual encounters, difficulties in dealing with her own children. In an attempt to remedy her behavior, whose cause her family does not enquire further, Jimmy sends her to Jamaica, a concrete return home which initiates the metaphorical one, her encounter with her past.

French philosopher Henri Bergson states the past follows us at every instant, "leaning over the present to which it is about to join, pressing against the door to the consciousness that would rather leave it outside."[1] (BERGSON, 2006, p. 47, 48; my translation). The past lurks over our shoulders, waiting to sneak through the cracks the memories we drag along behind us. Bergson asks further in his text: "in fact, what are we, what is our character, if not the condensation of the history we have lived since our birth, […]?"[2] (BERGSON, 2006, p. 48; my translation).

Images of a child in the shadow of a blood-red cross, in pain, bleeding and crying, haunt her along with voices which plague her mind with reminders of her lack of worth, her sinfulness. Her pain is in the realm of the uncanny, of "the frightening that goes back to what

[1] The text in the original reads: "debruçado sobre o presente que a ele irá se juntar, forçando a porta da consciência que gostaria de deixá-lo de fora."
[2] The text in the original reads: "Com efeito, que somos, que é nosso caráter, senão a condensação da história que vivemos desde nosso nascimento, [...]?"

was once well known and had long been familiar" (FREUD, 2003, p. 124) and yet becomes estranged, repressed, incomprehensible, a shadow intended to be concealed. The diffuse absence experienced in the breaking of innocence and trust of childhood defies her reason, opens a gap which contradicts familiarity, leaves a blurred boundary between reality and hallucination.

Returning means revisiting one's story, therefore being back in Jamaica only deepens her mental strain; the voices keep taunting Jean, who believes the demon inside her laughs a bitter sobbing sound in the cavity of her chest, and her behavior keeps deteriorating. Desperately looking for salvation, Jean finds help at Sunday Church, engaging in what proves to be one more instance of excess in her life, religious faith. Because the demon voices are temporarily replaced by healing angel ones, Jean feels encouraged to bear witness to the glory of God anywhere she goes, preaching on buses, singing hymns on journeys, feeling dismayed at the number of people who would mock her and demand her shut up. In her conversion fever, she often goes for the "ragged woman", the insane woman who traverses the narrative in a parallel to Jean, to talk about "the sin of fornication, punishment and repentance. It was as if she was wallowing in some form of mental association; some unhealthy thing that drew her to poverty and despair like a sinister magnet." (RILEY, 1992, p. 123).

Nevertheless, the peace of mind she hopes for and seems to find at Church does not last long. The harassment of another pastor, as described in Chapter One, discloses the full trauma of her childhood. The ground under her feet ruins, revealing the void in her mind, her self-depreciation stronger than ever in the expectation of punishment for her sins. Readers are then taken to the disclosure of Jean's full absence in the spectacle of her dementia, classifiable under the description by David Punter of writings in contemporary gothic: "at the other end of abuse, they are about minds and values which have been so degraded that their own substance, their substrate, whatever (ever) underpinned them, has vanished". (PUNTER, 1996, p. 160).

Right after the surfacing of her memories, Jean shows her incapacity to accept the guilt of her eight-year-old self; "[s]he needed a drink. Gin, rum… anything! Something to dull the pain and take the sharp edges off the knowledge of the thing her mind was telling her she was." (RILEY, 1992, p. 120, 121). Yet forgetfulness will not come through alcohol but through her abandonment of consciousness, her capitulation to the deepest absence. Bound by the filth and sinfulness she sees in it, her body is now the canvas to expose her desertion of life, her loss, the corruption she feels within herself; an array of instances of abjection of her own body follow, such as no longer bothering to wash, corroborating her unworthiness

through smells of alcohol and stale sex. She is soon engaged in a relationship with the also abject Peter, a phony Rasta man, who introduces Jean to ganja, something else to make her lose track of reality, used by her to placate the demoniac laughter which bubbles inside her, to make her pain fade in numbness. However, Jean's surrendering her body only makes the cracks wider for her wound to emerge.

Recollections mix in fragments of pain disclosing the core of this chapter, absence. Following what one observes in Hyacinth, Jean's excesses disguise the absence of grounds for self-definition, the denial of full possibilities of existence by a patriarchal society which maims women psychologically, crushing their capacities and strength at their formation years:

> Every last one of them let you down, went out of their way to try and hurt you.
> Look at Jimmy, the way he caused her to get sick; and Sylvia with her lies. It had been the same with Noel, the way he went and got himself killed just so the blame would fall on her. […] *He was the one did make Pastor put the pain in me belly so the sins couldn't escape again.* […] *Papa was just as bad, she thought sadly, he never love me one bit. Look at the way he just dump me and George in that terrible charity home, just cart us up to town and dump us … none of them did care what Pastor did.* […] *If you can't trust your own father, who you going to trust?* (RILEY, 1992, p. 154, 155; grifo do autor).

Castration and impossibility are imposed on Jean by the world of men. She was neglected by her father, who only saw value in the male children, the man who first abandons her, fails her, betrays her, thus creating a pattern she sees repeated in every man that crosses her story. Her brother Noel is the obstacle between her and her father and the instrument of God's punishment through the hands of the pastor who raped her and reinforced on her the notion of being undeserving of her father's love, therefore of any love, the absence stained in her soul. As an adult, unmarried to the father of her children, she confirms again the sentiment of unworthiness before the eyes of men, the sinful nature she attributes to herself. Pastor Simmonds' final blow, his betrayal by trying to touch her, is just the catalyst to open the fissures which eventually lead to her total giving in to insanity.

Understood in classical psychoanalysis as the one who cannot escape the past, one whose symptoms enact a return to personal history, whose crises and voids are traced on their bodies, the hysteric represents more to French feminist and literary critic Catherine Clément: not merely the effect of a private realm of events, but of the whole repressed past of patriarchy. The hysteric is to the author the continuum of the line started with the figure of the sorceress: both are then intelligible as the limits of dissent at their particular cultural moments, the antiestablishment, "because the symptoms – the attacks – revolt and shake up the public, the group, the men, the other to whom they are exhibited." (CLÉMENT, 1996, p. 5).

> The heart of the story linking the figures of sorceress and hysteric lies in the subversive weight attributed to the return of the repressed, in the evaluation of the power of the archaic, and in the Imaginary's power or lack of it over the Symbolic and the Real. […]
> We can follow the thread connecting them, or rather, we can read them in the same scene, caught in the same networks of language. These women, to escape the misfortune of their economic and familial exploitation, chose to suffer spectacularly before an audience of men: it is an attack of spectacle, a crisis of suffering. And the attack is also a festival, a celebration of their guilt used as a weapon, a story of seduction. All that, within the family. (CLÉMENT, 1996, p. 9, 10).

Jean's excesses are her spectacle before the inquisition around her, family, neighbors, doctor, all gathered inside the circle of established symbolic order she dissented, an order which had failed to give her voice.

A Kindness to the Children is filled with characters who are unable to fit such order, offside elements of society manifested in the words of the author through madness: creating the background mirror story to Jean, Maddy, the ragged woman who wanders as a derelict around the streets of the narrative setting, is stoned and cursed during the day, visited by men at night for sexual favors; another example is found in the escapee from the mental hospital in Kingston, a stone mason who "each year carved a new tribute to a long-dead past" (RILEY, 1992, p. 6), a man who chisels elaborate patterns to the memorials in the old plantation-owner's burial plot. Jean, the girl who carries inside her the bubbling laughter of demons triggered by neglect and abuse, is, in her insanity, another of the women destined to disappear in silence – like hysterics and sorceresses have to.

In the postcolonial scenario developed by Joan Riley, madness connotes struggle, reaction to the past violation, an answer to the violence of conquest imprinted in memory. The body becomes the space for resistance, for the things which cannot be constrained by ruling and prevented from finding expression; in Jean's overflowing of madness one can read the story of the occupation of a whole country. Violation cannot be forgotten, cannot be repressed in the past indefinitely. It must be revisited, as Jean does, even if only in form of the insistent acknowledgement of the trauma translated in the disease.

It is not due to chance that her foil in the narrative, Sylvia, the cousin Jean sees as a major threat, is a social worker, a professional sanitizer of behaviors which diverge. The character that opens and closes the novel, Sylvia, English although born of Jamaican parents, has a discourse of having come to Jamaica in order to search her roots, to get to know better her late husband's homeland; however, her words are denied in the development of the plot. What Riley shows us is an imperialist attempt to regenerate insanity, a therapeutic endeavor to suffocate the manifestations of displacement in face of the established order.

Her intervention is rejected by the ragged mad woman whose story parallels that of Jean's: after putting a stop to three boys who were calling Maddy names and stoning her house, Sylvia feels good for standing up for what she believes in, "half expecting the ragged woman to come flying out, full of praise and gratitude. When nothing happened, Sylvia knocked tentatively on the thick wooden door, puzzled by the lack of response." (RILEY, 1992, p. 258). When the woman opens the door, she clears her throat and spits at Sylvia. The dissent refused her patronizing attempt to help, her superiority in talking, and her condescending interference.

In her analysis of the postcolonial and the construction of the feminine in Joan Riley's *A Kindness to the Children*, Maria Conceição Monteiro sees Sylvia as characterized as Jimmy's agent, providing Jean's partner with the status of victim instead of victimizer. "Because she is his agent, she acts in his interest and by his request. She represents, therefore, the ambivalent relationship between colonizer and colonized, reflecting a certain complicity with the terrors of the past."[3] (MONTEIRO, 2006, p. 88; my translation).

Jean believes Sylvia wants to rob her of her children and lover's affection, replace her; taken by the cousin to see a doctor, Jean runs away when she overhears they plan to send her to an institution. "Her cousin was the betrayer, the Judas" (RILEY, 1992, p. 291). After escaping, she absently wanders the streets in Kingston, cars swerving to avoid hitting her, people laughing and jeering at her. Confused, lost in her delusions, Jean follows the last man to let her down, as described in Chapter One, to her final abuse and death. No greater emptiness can be seen than that of her final moments as she once again delivers herself to the world of men, the renewed rape barely registering on her mind because nothing did any more; absence swallowed her, the gulf of loneliness and want to which she finally gives in. Jean vanishes as burnt sorceresses and locked-up hysterics must so that the order may be reestablished; her story will be known only by readers, and the enormous gap in her soul, the absence felt all along her life, the lack of affection, love, respect and consideration, will disappear with her.

The closing chapter of the book comes immediately after Jean succumbs to the world of men; Sylvia boards the plane leaving back to England, Jimmy has the children, and order is restored. Of Jean's pain, of her loss, of her want, nothing will ever be heard; silence will prevail.

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[3] The text in the original reads: "Por ser sua agente, atua por interesse dele e a seu pedido. Representa assim a relação ambivalente entre colonizador e colonizado, refletindo uma certa cumplicidade com os terrores do passado."

2.6 Parched throats

Joan Riley's denouncing work can be dissected into several layers: the tension of white and black societies still woven in the relations, as experienced by Hyacinth in *The Unbelonging*; the post-colonial meanings of violation of the Caribbean, expressed in the theme of rape itself and in the one of madness exploited in *A Kindness to the Children*; and the tough condemnation that Blackness can in fact be gendered, that the greatest gap left by a colonial system belongs to black women. The absence her characters represent is that of one who has been stripped away of possibilities, mutilated by being relegated to the role of Other of the Other, a subject who cannot lay claim over her own body, whose mind has been shaped so as to silence and accept, bow to the directives supplied by both the white colonial Fathers and black men. Emasculated, humiliated and diminished by the dominant discourse, black men reclaim their status by demanding power over black women's lives, by joining the patriarchal system of oppression they themselves are victims of.

> Exacerbated by racism and the pressures of powerlessness, violence against black women and children often becomes a standard within our communities, one by which manliness can be measured. But these woman-hating acts are rarely discussed as crimes against black women. […] Rape is on the increase, reported and unreported, and rape is not aggressive sexuality – it is sexualized aggression. (LORDE, 2002, p. 378).

In order to further point out the vulnerability of women to the dialectics of such system, Joan Riley wipes out the figure of the Black mother from her narrative, focusing on the Black fathers. In *A Kindness to the Children*, the setting itself points to this lack: adding to the agony of the plot, a burdensome atmosphere is built through the very strong heat wave which occurs during Jean's coming back to the island, causing discomfort and oppression in the characters. "'They were saying on the radio that it's the hottest it's been for twenty years'" (RILEY, 1992, p. 175) says one of the characters, leading readers to wonder if that would coincide with the time of the rape. The excessive heat which disturbs the space mirrors what in Jean is excess of sex, alcohol, intemperate attitudes, self-destruction, abjection, the aftermath of an event lost in time, perhaps when this last extreme temperature hit the island. What follows is drought, absence, lack – of water, in the physical plane, of hope and prospect in Jean.

Fundamental in the creation and the sustaining of life, essential element in our bodies and our planet, water is considered the primary symbol of the feminine and of motherhood

across several cultures. In water lies the mystery of fertility, of birth and growth, of purification and redemption. Christians are baptized in or with water as a representation of a rebirth into faith, a cleansing of the soul. Ancient Egyptians saw in the sacred waters of the Nile the whole of their power of life. African religious cults brought to Brazil, such as the *umbanda*, relate the power of water to women deities: Iemanja is the presiding force over the oceans and the moon, guardian of women, childbirth, fertility; Yansã is the *Orixá* of storms, while Oshun rules the "sweet" waters, rivers, streams and waterfalls. In the Tarot, water, symbolic of emotion and intuition, characteristics commonly associated with the feminine, has its main representative card in the Moon, the subconscious. In Chinese philosophy, the concept of yin yang, complementary elements of all things, characterizes yin as cold, wet, diffuse, associated with water, with nighttime and the moon, linked with the feminine, while yang, by contrast, is hot, dry, associated with fire, with daytime and the sun, with the masculine.

The shortage of water which causes women and children to run out with every sort of container after the water truck, "desperate to get enough water to survive to the next trucking" (RILEY, 1992, p.108), reinforces the striking absence of the mother in Riley's novels, a lack which points to the aridness imposed on the characters, the impossibility to grow, to surmount the barriers imposed by the fathers. In both narratives, the absence of the figure of the mother underlines the lack inherent to the women characters and gives further emphasis to the exhibition of the role of the fathers, or the world of men, as determinants to their stories.

The only mention of Jean's mother provided in the text appears along with the reemergence of the long forgotten memory of the abuse, and refers to her death: "She had just turned eight when it all began, bored and restless in the long school holiday. Her mother had been three-years dead and her father was away on farm work." (RILEY, 1992, p. 111). Death is nonexistence, want. Death, metaphorical or concrete, is what Riley's characters are destined to: Hyacinth in her paralyzed life, immobile, lifeless; Jean, in her actual vanishing of the story, a woman whose disappearance causes no search parties, but the restoration of order, a woman transformed into a ghost.

Also unlikely to escape observation is the absolute absence of the mother figure in *The Unbelonging*; Hyacinth's mother is not once mentioned in the narrative, thus directing attention to its substitute, Jamaica, the motherland which stands for the character as the comfort and safety to run back to, the easiness of a place which accepts and cuddles. It is in the Promised Land she struggles to return to that rests the symbolic Mother, in the idealized place where she plays safely, guarded from the perils of real life. Though not mentioned, the

mother's figure is felt in the loss, in the lack, in the character's subconscious periodical returning to her safe little cave, the mother's womb, the place she is still bound to, connected through the umbilical cord to the only protection and belonging she can refer to.

Hyacinth feels excluded, left apart in a society where her face stands out as different, as other than the ones, an orphan in a place where she is in addition. She is never there, she is absent, unattainable; she is forever fleeing, always transient in the constant wandering in search of her moorings. Hyacinth is stranger to herself, one who knows no origins, no roots, unbelonging because of her orphanage, orphan because she does not belong, unfit, foreigner to her own self.

> As far back as his memory can reach, it is delightfully bruised: misunderstood by a loved and yet absent-minded, discreet, or worried mother, the exile is a stranger to his mother. He does not call her, he asks nothing of her. Arrogant, he proudly holds on to what he lacks, to absence, to some symbol or other. The foreigner would be the son of a father whose existence is subject to no doubt whatsoever, but whose presence does not detain him. Rejection on the one hand, inaccessibility on the other: if one has the strength not to give in, there remains a path to be discovered. Riveted to an elsewhere as certain as it is inaccessible, the foreigner is ready to flee. No obstacle stops him, and all suffering, all insults, all rejections are indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond.
> The foreigner, thus, has lost his mother. (KRISTEVA, 1991, p. 5).

Her concrete orphanage is symbolic to her condition of want, of someone with no territory, no land under their feet, empty and lonely, away from a mother. Hyacinth glimpses her mother in the back of her absence, in the loss, in her search to escape to her motherland, to a cradle long missed.

By not mentioning the mother in her narrative, Joan Riley adds force to her expression of bareness, of the elements missing in a woman submitted to a postcolonial patriarchal culture which assigns her a lesser role, an unbreakable silence, an internalized lack of worth passed on from submissive generation to submissive generation. Her orphanage, her void, is felt in her constant dread of two instances of impossibility of belonging: being the Other, the different, in face of the white society she unendingly expects to harm her, England, the country of the colonizing fathers, home of the men who invaded, shaped, ruled; also, the impediment to belong represented by her biological father, the man who had her transported to this alien terrain, the element from the black community who passes over to her his fear, his humiliation, his anger, his need to destroy and violate as he feels violated.

> 'All these white people trying so hard to hide their hate,' she thought sadly. 'Yet they could kill you because you are different from them.' She always had to remind herself that they had not hurt her yet. Of course, they let her know she was not wanted, did not belong, but at least they were not violent like black people. (RILEY, 1985, p. 69).

David Punter analyses the above excerpt from *The Unbelonging* pointing out how fear maintains Hyacinth captive in this land of the fathers, paralyzed in her double absence, the impossibility of finding self-definition in either culture, the white or the black:

> ‘They had not hurt her yet’: in this deferral of harm the fate of the diasporic is summarized. Of course the rejection and exclusion by the host culture may be deferred, withheld; but that withholding only makes it the more effective as a weapon for subjugation, as a device for scooping out the heart, for replacing it with a trembling absence, an absence of self – and it is this very absence of self that Hyacinth also finally realizes in the phrase ‘like black people’, a phrase in which she signifies her inability to resist summing up an entire people – in a sense her people – under a single stereotyping banner. (PUNTER, 2000, p. 165).

Self-definition is unattainable when the ground one has to base it is eroded, unstable because full of holes dug along a history of loss. Hyacinth does not fit the white world where she is alien, a world marked by relations of power constructed in exploitation and marked by difference, yet she cannot feel associated to the world of black people, a world which portrays a negative self-definition to the girl. The violence which gave birth to her Caribbean land, slavery, brutal conquest, the prescription of thoughts and behaviors, carried echoes to her biological father, the brutal man she will always connect to the sentence ringed in black in her book from childhood: “Incest flourished where the roads were bad” (RILEY, 1985, p. 49). Decadence and humiliation formed a man who in her eyes stands for the whole black people, people she does not want to be linked with in order to maintain herself distant from what she sees as ugly and base, cruel and vile, a place ‘where the roads are bad’.

The title of the book says much about the character: Hyacinth does not fit England, yet cannot find her place in Jamaica either: she cannot belong to the white society for her skin is a mark of separation, of inappropriateness; however, the brutality she underwent from the black male prevents the girl from belonging to a black community. Hyacinth is the unbelonging, Hyacinth is pure absence.

Incomplete, dependent, deprived of voice, affirmation, full existence, Joan Riley’s characters selected to analysis in this study bring forward the pain of women who have internalized patterns of oppression within themselves, who suffer from their own people the after effects of the hatred and indignity of a patriarchal colonial system. In the chest of these dehumanized subjects, burns a wound of lack, of absence, a gap in the definition of their identities hidden ferociously by either holding on to a mirage of belonging or succumbing to madness.

Riley's characters' subjectivities are not their only fraction withered in absence, in want; their female bodies, objects in the play of masculine domination, taken and used, stolen from them, present deep cracks in their sexuality, a failure in the development of their expression as women. The deep lack inscribed in their identities is thus screened by their bodies in other extremes – in either the complete nullity or in the debasement of their sexuality through the excesses of promiscuity and abjection, the topic to be developed in Chapter Three.

3 CHAPTER THREE: ERASED DESIRES

…because silence, too, has an echo,
hollower and longer-lasting than the
reverberations of any sound…
Salman Rushdie

3.1 Living in borrowed houses

"Beauties slept in their woods, waiting for princes to come and wake them up. In their beds, in their glass coffins, in their childhood forests like dead women. Beautiful, but passive; hence desirable: all mystery emanates from them. It is men who like to play dolls" (CIXOUS, 1996, p. 66), writes Hélène Cixous. The French feminist points out that this widespread categorization of the feminine is not about an essence, or nature, but rather about structures set within historical and cultural paradigms, a system which puts women in a position in which their bodies, produced through discourse to be passive, are objectified, set to be in wait for the male to conquer. As an object, she does not have tenure over her body, hence her desire to express it sexually is not supposed to exist, except when required by her owner; a doll, therefore powerless, inert. Patiently waiting for her active, operative male; dormant, living in a borrowed body, a body she is not allowed to know, a body proscribed in social representations.

> She has not been able to live in her 'own' house, her very body. […] One can teach her, as soon as she begins to speak, at the same time as she is taught her name, that hers is the dark region: […] dark is dangerous. You can't see anything in the dark, you are afraid. Don't move, you might fall. Above all, don't go into the forest. And we have internalized this fear of the dark. Women haven't had eyes for themselves. They haven't gone exploring in their house. Their sex still frightens them. Their bodies, which they haven't dared enjoy, have been colonized. […] *The "Dark Continent" is neither dark nor unexplorable*: It is still unexplored only because we have been made to believe that it was too dark to be explored. Because they want to make us believe that what interests us is the white continent, with its monument to Lack. (CIXOUS, 1996, p. 68; grifo do autor).

Shaped in culturally and historically constructed practices, an effect not of genetics but of relations of power, limited (and delimited by exclusionary constructions) in order to

guarantee the economics around their bodies-commodities, women have been made to believe their bodies to be too ‘dark’, too feared, too dangerous, an interdicted location, better left unknown, unexplored. They embody the lack, they become the crippled, the one who carries the negative, the *not*, the absence, as once again their representation is set in contrast to the male.

Women dare not look into the female body in the mirror for they fear the abyss of their sexuality, they are taught to fear the dark hole they might fall into. They dare not crash into those locked doors of their own houses, defying the fixed rules of ignorance, for they were programmed to consider them natural, part of their essence, part of what it means to be feminine. Their element in the established binomials must rest in being the passivity, the receptacle; intention, authority, desire are private reserves of the masculine if the system’s functioning is to remain.

Unfamiliar, not under their own control, mysterious, their bodies belong to the system of exchange that organizes patriarchal societies, a system in which, at the expense of their own subject positions as female, at the expense of their desire, women’s value lies in their materialization inside the relations between men; from father to husband, from one man to another, merchandise in this organization, the social roles available for them in the symbolic order are restricted to three options, affirms Luce Irigaray: mother, virgin, prostitute.

> The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorization of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure; a passive acceptance of men’s “activity”; seductiveness, in order to arouse the consumer’s desire while offering herself as its material support without getting pleasure herself … *Neither as mother nor as virgin nor as prostitute has woman any right to her own pleasure*. (IRIGARAY, 1985, p. 186, 187; grifo do autor).

She must maintain in her own body the status of object of desire in order to keep her exchange value, her condition, as commodity, to be consumed and circulated, yet the access to her own desire is unthinkable. “The economy of desire – of exchange – is man’s business.” (IRIGARAY, 1985, p. 188). Irigaray’s words rekindle the description of the Victorian regime, one which served the economy in the mechanisms of power. The function of reproduction was to be carried out under the custody of the family, the utilitarian role of the mother; the brothel held the unspoken pleasures reintegrated in the sphere of profit, of production; while to children (and one can extend their characterization of innocence and lack of knowledge over sexual matters to virginal women), the operation of a nothing-to-know hypocritical law, a decree to maintain oneself alien to such matters, a sexuality under the “repression operated as

a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence." (FOUCAULT, 1998, p. 4).

The feminine body is thus bound and constituted by political forces, shaped to perform in certain ways, and to take this performance as its own nature. As Judith Butler puts it, "any discourse that establishes the boundaries of the body serves the purpose of instating and naturalizing certain taboos regarding the appropriate limits, postures, and modes of exchange that define what it is that constitutes bodies" (BUTLER, 2001, p. 2492). The manifestation of the impositions on such body ends up being taken as its true essence, as quintessential of its existence.

In the social order in which Joan Riley places her narrative, voice and sexual expression come together in the silence inscribed as natural, as ideal, as fit for women. Inasmuch as they live in borrowed bodies, for their bodies belong to the operations of power which require women to take their place in the binary frame of active/passive, owner/object, their desire is compelled to nonexistence, to the same muteness and tameness her subjectivities were submitted. The Jamaican author explores the negation of control over their own feminine bodies and sexuality depicting the utmost face of physical and sexual domination of male over female, rape, in a denunciation of violence which can be taken in its literal meaning, for the criminal sexual abuse of black women is a tough reality she condemns, but also in its connotation of oppression under a male power, a ruling to the suppression of being. Their bodies are exposed in Riley's narratives as absolute objectified, taken and used in an act of violence which carries the symbolism of the seized property, of the plundering act, a practice which is to persist while women continue to perform in accordance to the laws of the father, gagged and bowing to their annulment as individuals in the social order.

Hyacinth and Jean have their desires erased in the objectification of their bodies, in the sexual abuses suffered; the former completely effaces her sexuality, incapable of relating sexually to any man for her body is tainted by the constant memory of her father, an indelible stamp of the invader which requires the total rejection of sensual contact in order to remain in control, to remain repressed; the latter buries her desire in the excess, in the self-objectification of her body through promiscuity, in the acceptance of being treated as merchandise. Both women acknowledge the rulings of their abusers, not only by keeping silent about the assaults, but also by following the prescriptions left by them: Hyacinth's body is enslaved to her father's interdiction of her sexuality, to his claim of property over her body;

Jean incorporates the sinful nature the pastor projected on her, enacting the role he set down to her.

3.2 Hyacinth

Hyacinth's body is literally claimed of her property as her father, whom she meets for the first time at the airport in London at the age of eleven, sends for her in Jamaica, having the girl transported to the foreign, to the strange, to the not chosen, in an exercise of power the girl is to bow to. England, though denied by the girl through her regular fleeing to the Jamaica of her fantasy, is the imposition of this father, coming as a capture, a reproduction in reverse geography of the enslaving of ancestors long lost in history, commodities in the transactions of commerce, working bodies that were to meet their owners at their encounter in foreign lands.

The custody of her body is further attested as, while living in his house, under his domain, her boundaries of intimacy, the roots in the formation of her sexuality, are constantly trespassed, in an assertion of rights of his authority over her position as subject. Besides being often beaten in a physical and psychological demonstration of his power, Hyacinth is frequently watched by her father while bathing, causing her shame and, as soon as her body starts to show signs of maturation, a hatred of it:

> She would sit in the water, dying from embarrassment. 'Wash yourself, girl,' he would say, and she would hang her head in shame, as she scrubbed the top part of her body, praying he would leave before she had to stand up. Many times he would order her to stand up and wash, and the knowledge of the lump in his trousers would force her to obey. She hated her body, felt shame at the wisps of black hair that had started to grow on her pubic area and the fact that her breasts had started to swell. Sometimes she dreamt of asking him to leave, of telling him she found his presence uncomfortable, but it was only a dream, of course; she never found the courage. (RILEY, 1985, p. 52).

As the primary symbol of the male, the phallus is represented by Riley in *The Unbelonging* as menacing, as cruel, the emblem of a violent subjugation of the female body, of Hyacinth's degradation as subject. The 'lump of anger', as it is often described by the girl, marks his affirmation of property over her body and sexuality, the crest of his physical and psychological supremacy over the girl; before her menstruation, its growth is always taken by her as an index of how painful and violent her beatings will be, later becoming a more dangerous, though unknown source of dread. As soon as the girl menstruates, now in a

behavior changed from aggressive to seductive, to insinuating, he establishes his orders, his claim over her sexuality, followed by his injunction of her distance from other men.

He tells her to make him some tea and keep him company, patting the space next to him on the settee:

> 'What do you know about men and women, Hyacinth?'
> She did not like the way he asked the question, the intimate note in his voice, but at the same time she was relieved he did not seem inclined to hit her.
> 'Only what Maureen told me,' she answered hastily.
> 'Do you know what a man's body looks like?' he asked suggestively.
> 'No, sir,' she answered nervously, not liking the way he was speaking.
> 'Call me daddy,' he said automatically. 'I am tired of telling you that. I don't want no man to take advantage of you,' he continued. '*So I going to show you some of the things not to let men do*.' (RILEY, 1985, p. 48; grifo nosso).

His banning of her knowing any other man, his decree as to what "not to let men do", remains as many of the dictations of his thought do, becoming a prohibition set in the girl's mind as an imprisonment of her maturation as woman. After her stepmother flees with her half-brothers, Hyacinth is left alone with her father, with a sentence ringed in black in her mind along with a "nameless thing" done to her cousin, a thing "that was so terrible, he could have gone to prison for it." (RILEY, 1985, p. 57) The bulge in his trousers now represent a menace more dreadful than ever, a danger she cannot fully grasp, yet her body registers as utter panic. The bulge is to Hyacinth the symbol of his supreme domain over her for it paralyzes her in dread, a paralysis she will carry imprinted in her mind, determining the annulment of her sexuality, the incarceration of her desire.

Sexual activity becomes filthiness, foulness, degradation, as well as humiliation and impotence in face of male will. Her body, stolen from her, invaded and ravaged, is soil no longer fertile because aridness has invaded and desecrated the land; her body is stained, forever marked by the memory of the usurper, therefore she is no longer able to explore it. The response to such despoliation comes in the total denial of her sexuality, in her self-annulment as woman, in her sealing the doors to this room of her house. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hyacinth maintains her distance from knowledge in all areas, crystallized in her position as a child, hiding in the fantasy of security of her homeland, in an attempt at unawareness of the sexual component of her subjectivity, in an attempt to remain alien to desire. Lurking shut in the dark behind locked doors, her desire is to the girl threatening and feared, because it is watched by the shadow of her vile father's directives, because it has been condemned to interdiction.

Her female body is as inescapable as it is impenetrable; her desire cannot reach outside, cannot be expressed, while her body, with its closed frontiers to the stranger, to the other, does not admit entering, cannot accept any kind of penetration. She chooses to remain under the determination of ignorance of sexual matters and lack of interest in sexual pleasure which is defined as appropriate to femininity, to the role of virginal women and children, as a form of avoiding having to deal with what she keeps as a secret, the father's corruption of her desire. In the economics of the exchange market, her father kept the property of her body, a disposition she is not able to dispute.

By the time she reaches sixteen, now living in a social house for orphans, the feeling that something is missing from her life follows her constantly, an alarm to the suppressed awakening of her maturation as woman. Hyacinth, isolated, does not talk to the other girls who are her age, but listens to their conversations about boys while pretending to read books. She silently thrills at their stories of romantic experiences, "yet always for her the image of the father would intrude, loom big and threatening above her, sick reality in the lump, exposed and obscenely menacing." (RILEY, 1985, p. 77). Her desire is always kept under vigilance, locked away; she cannot let it surface in a body which no longer belongs to her. Comfort is once again found in the realm of imagination, in the fantasizing which accompanies the romantic novels she starts reading every night, in a process of sublimation of her sexual energy:

> Now her lonely nights were peopled with tall, dark, handsome strangers, Spanish caballeros with warm brown eyes, romantic and intense Frenchmen. Sometimes in her secret fantasies she would be swept off her feet by a rich, passionate stranger and taken to live in his wild, remote castle. Always her hair would be blonde and flowing, her skin pale and white. (RILEY, 1985, p. 78).

Two points are brought to light in the fantasy described in the passage above: her full acknowledgment of the passive role in a sexual relation; and her denial of her own body in her wish to sameness and suppression of sexuality. Hyacinth daydreams of being 'taken', a confirmation of her incorporated notions of women as submissive, as sleeping beauties in wait for a hero, for a savior, a man who would decide on her destiny. Furthermore, she cannot accept her violated and spoiled body to know any expression of desire, therefore she transforms it in her fancy, adapts her self in dream to a different shape, one she regards as viable for love relations. Her difficulties in dealing with her own skin because of her prescribed notions of inferiority of the black blend with her view of her body as contaminated by her father's abuse.

At eighteen, she is courted by a well-dressed, older black man, an engineer, a polite and educated man whose persistence at talking to her warms her heart. She accepts his lifts home and to her work, and starts to look forward to them as if they were the dates of her dreams. The day before her going to university in Birmingham, she accepts his invitation out: at the pub where he takes her, Hyacinth feels uncomfortable, apprehensively looking around for the presence of her own father, although years had passed since she had last seen him. As they leave the pub, he invites her to have dinner at his place; she wants to have "the nerve to tell him to turn back, ask him to stop the car, anything but sit there in acceptance." (RILEY, 1985, p. 103). Too afraid to refuse his invitation, yet too afraid to deal with her desire, she wishes she were one of the heroines of the books she reads, for she would then know what to do.

The man tries to kiss her after the meal, but she pulls herself away with revulsion; she expects blows, presses her knees together in fear, has a "compulsion to look down, to see the lump she knew would be there, the anger she knew was waiting to burst out at her." (RILEY, 1985, p. 105). The words ringed in black in the book of her childhood reverberate in her head, and she cannot control the image of her father's penis rubbing against her belly as her date tries to kiss her again. In panic, she claws at the man's face.

No other attempt at romantic relations will occur before the time she is twenty-two and at university. However, this will prove as frustrating and filled with the memories of her past as always, as seen in Chapter Two (in the section *Dreams of a Distant Land*) in the description of the dream and wetting the bed which follows her only sexual experience. The father, the man who has colonized her body, whose property over her flesh she cannot dismiss, continues to claim his right. Although she agrees to have sex with her friend Charles in an attempt to get rid of the ghost, sick disgust, anger and self-loathing plague the girl at her loss of virginity. Her sexuality is destined to remain null, silent, tied to the man in her childhood.

3.3 Jean

In a chapter entitled "Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy", Shoshana Felman states that "[f]rom her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development, the social role assigned to the woman is that of serving an image, authoritative and central, of

man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter/a mother/a wife." (FELMAN, 1993, p. 21). This thought concurs with the concepts expressed by Luce Irigaray concerning the exchangeable body of a woman, the body seen as commodity, as put previously in this chapter, socially rated through the mimetic expression of masculine values, in the exchange between men.

In *A Kindness to the Children*, Jean surrenders her body to this speculation, to the market, as she wants to see her rate as commodity asserted in the passage from father to husband, the exchange from one man to another, in her validation inside the symbolic order of the proper name, the name of the father. Jean tried to occupy the three roles, daughter, wife and mother, yet was not successful in any of them; as a daughter, she wants to please her father, be valued and considered suitable, yet she is taken as lesser, as worthless and a disappointment. Incapable of finding appropriateness in her father's view of her self, Jean transfers her search for a legitimized place in the social order to the role of wife, which proves to be another frustration, for Jimmy never proposes to her, never realizing in the nine years they had been together how important the status of married woman was to her; "she was only his live-in lover" (RILEY, 1992, p. 28), she thinks sadly; once again, unworthiness is attached to her image of herself.

At first, Jimmy was the stay-at-home parent while Jean worked to support his career as a writer, therefore their kids, although not rejecting her outright, find comfort in his presence, perhaps recognizing how much she fears motherhood, driving "her further into the cold, forcing her to seek solace and affirmation of her worth by putting all her energy into building a career." (RILEY, 1992, p. 21, 22). Nevertheless, careers, in the system of values Jean was raised in, belong in the social sphere, the sphere of the masculine, not in the domestic sphere where she was culturally programmed to find her place. Her unfulfilled role as mother closes to Jean any possibility of accomplishment in the social order she wants to be inserted into.

Her entire story is based on the effort to fit the social positions assigned to women as an appendix to the central image of man. When validation as daughter, wife, or mother does not come to the character, her being is not concretely authenticated to her own view of herself, a life existing yet not; absent, vacant, empty. Cast out from the symbolic order she wanted to belong to, Jean blames herself for her inappropriateness; as soon as the memories of the trauma are retrieved, she sinks further into the realm of the abject, all the way from the borderline position of insanity to the extreme figure of the abjection, that of the corpse. The exclusion she had always experienced combined with the label of temptress, sinful, and

wicked successfully attached to her self-image by the pastor in her childhood show in the defilement and corruption of her body to which she surrenders.

"The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*." (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 1). When meaning collapses as she recalls the events repressed in her past and still unintelligible to reason, Jean surrenders to the one she is not, to the impossibility of being, letting herself be dragged by the abjection. She breaks the limits of rules, she tears her skin off to purge her infection:

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 2).

If pain cannot be placated, Jean takes up the improper, the alcoholic, the filthy; a fall above all the limits possible, a fall destined to the dissolution of consciousness, therefore annihilation of being, the yielding of body and mind to the chasm, to the final limit of the corpse. Her death, again raped, violated, desecrated, with a body unrecognized, unclaimed by family or society, completely destitute of humanization, brings about the symbolism inscribed in the cadaver – from the Latin *cadere*, to fall – a body with no soul, no being, only fundamental pollution, filth, uncleanness, thus closing the cycle started by words heard when she was eight years old, the hopelessness at full existence, her erasure as a subject.

Repugnance and repulsion are expressed on her own body at first in the series of indiscriminate sexual encounters she engages in while intoxicated with alcohol, promiscuity to erase her sexuality, to debase her desire, defilement to corroborate her self-image of vileness, of unworthiness, to demean even further what she sees as already corrupted. Jean mixes with the inferior, with drugs and alcohol, no longer washes herself, carrying around the smell of stale sex, thus disturbing the order of the family and the society, trying to expose the abject position she had been thrust in by those same institutions, by the social order which offered her roles she could not fill.

Her own cadaver, her ultimate fall, is foreshadowed in her thoughts as she, obsessed with the idea of punishment for her sins, sinks deeper in depression: "*The good Lord knows I could write a book about sin*, she decided sadly, *I feel so loaded down with them myself, is like a festering corpse on my back sometimes*." (RILEY, 1992, p. 142; grifo do autor). This thought is followed by the laugh that bubbles up inside her, threatening to break loose and

boil over, destroying the emotions she imagines are contained in fragile bottles, thus emptying her of the good and exposing her sinful nature.

Branded with the hot iron of sinfulness by the pastor's words and actions, her body must now incarnate the role of prostitute as the only one left to her, for Jean failed to be taken as daughter, as wife, as mother. Yet promiscuity deepens her degradation, exhibiting her want, the absolute absence in her soul, the lack which takes her to the limits down, to the total annihilation of the self, to the body without soul, the cadaver. The laughter she tries to suppress, the one which dwells in this hollow part of her own body, impels her to cross the line to the improper, to the excluded. The abject, the 'not I', requests its convulsion, its abreaction.

Quoting Breuer and Freud in the description of the process they called 'abreaction', Catherine Clément elucidates the cathartic expulsion which makes hysterics (and sorcerers) ill in order to find their cure: "Emotional discharge through which the subject liberate himself from the affect connected to the memory of a traumatic event, thus permitting it to not become or remain pathogenic." (CLÉMENT, 1996, p. 15, 16). Hence, the cure for Jean is in the reifying of her nonexistence, in the affirmation of her annulment as woman which lies in the concrete dissolution of her mutilated self. To expel the laughter which bubbles inside her, the foreign, the corrupted, and surrender to the effacement of consciousness first in madness and finally in death; that is Jean's way of abreacting.

Her death is her final erasure, the utmost surrender to the world of men. Her invisibility is now concrete: forgotten, left behind, she silently leaves the social order in which she was a foreigner, a burden, to become an anonymous cadaver in a note on the papers. Her body follows her subjectivity and her desire – it ceases to exist.

Both women analyzed in this study were relegated to the directives of acceptance and inferiority, silence and submission, imposed on them by a cultural structure in an exercise of power meant to abort any aspiration to be on a par with the other sex. Sexual expression becomes one more tool in the tactics of the oppressor, one more point of pressure with which to suppress their voice. Michel Foucault states:

> Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of maneuvers and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies. (FOUCAULT, 1998, p. 103).

The political operations involved in this structure produce women who bow to their prescriptions, replicating and validating their injunctions. Their mouths are gagged, their desire is erased. They are destined to incompleteness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Have I *the right to remain silent*?
Briar Wood

Inculcated discourses start to be rooted out from a subject's mind and behavior through the raising of awareness, of consciousness, through the exposition of the operation in course. Abandoning a naïve pattern of repetition of the constructed notions of one's self to become critical of one's own positioning by culturally established rules is the first step to transform a social order. Audre Lorde, the Caribbean-American writer who defended a feminist movement which was conscious of both race and class, affirms that "[…] the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape but that piece of the oppressor that is planted deep within each of us and that knows only the oppressor's tactics, the oppressor's relationships." (LORDE, 2002, p. 380).

By articulating social, cultural and political conditions as she chronicles the difficult lives of Caribbean women, Joan Riley takes part in the process of shedding light over the oppression practice leading to their displacement, their sexual exploitation, and eventually their hopelessness. Riley exposes in her work how deeply entrenched the sentiment of otherness, of inferiority and worthlessness, is in the minds of these women, a positioning which dooms them to silence in face of violence when it comes from men, which sets their destinies as exploited.

In "Silenced women in Joan Riley's fiction", I tried to explore the Jamaican writer's exposition of the submitting of black women to a context of subjugation in which their silence is expected and encouraged; a gagging order is imposed on them by a patriarchal, post-colonial society in the form of prescribed notions of themselves, of labels to which they acquiesce. Riley's female characters elected to this study, Hyacinth and Jean, have been thrust into silence, a castration of their tongues, of their subjectivities, followed by yet this other, the one which aims at extirpating their desire, the usurpation of the entitlement to their own bodies by a cultural structure, a body whose confiscation of sexual expression is ratified by the violation.

Rape, the prompting of the plots for the novels used in this study, *The Unbelonging* and *A Kindness to the Children*, becomes hence an enactment of the social dominance of male over female which women end up authenticating with their silence. Condemned to muteness by the social structure they are inserted into, women are violated, erased, made null, kept under the objectification of their bodies and the dehumanization of their selves.

Yet Joan Riley's silent women are, through her pen, able to scream.

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