



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova

Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in
Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane
Classe LM-37

Tesi di Laurea

Rupi Kaur's Poetry: Trauma and Healing

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Anno Accademico 2018 / 2019

Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
I. The Trauma Question.....	7
1. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.....	9
2. Post-Traumatic-Growth.....	13
3. Post-Memory.....	19
4. Multidirectional Memory.....	20
5. Post-Memory in the Digital and Visual Age.....	24
6. Female Post-Memory.....	30
7. A Post-Memorial Legacy of Objects, Traditions and Places.....	32
II. Traumatic Post-Memory in Rupi Kaur’s poetry.....	35
1. Gendered Violence.....	36
2. <i>A Survivor’s Story</i> and <i>What The Body Remembers</i>	39
3. Nakedness as a Weapon.....	45
4. Rupi Kaur’s Post-Modern Feminist Resistance.....	49
5. Post-Colonialism and Diaspora.....	56
6. 20 th Century’s Sikh Diaspora.....	62
7. Ethnic and Cultural Identity.....	68
III. The Healing Process.....	77
1. Vulnerability, Resilience and Resistance.....	78
2. Healing through Narration.....	85
3. <i>the healing</i>	90
4. The Best Form of Healing Narrative.....	95
Conclusion.....	103
Bibliography.....	105
Summary.....	108

Introduction

milk and honey and *the sun and her flowers* are the first poetry collections of the young writer Rupi Kaur. Both these works revolve around the concepts of trauma and healing, which are opposite and, at the same time, linked concepts, since the existence of one may imply the existence of the other. Indeed, in my dissertation I am going to discuss the way in which Rupi Kaur's works are representatives of a traumatic post-memorial type of literature, which enables its author, and its readers, to reflect on one's own traumatic memories, as well as on others' trauma-related memories, in order to give a meaning to one's trauma and reclaim one's active life back.

In the first chapter of my dissertation I focus on how trauma can generate in an individual, on the reasons behind it and on the consequences that follow its manifestation. In particular, I am going to consider the phenomena of post-traumatic stress-disorder, which comprehends the whole of reactions to a stressful event or a series of events; post-traumatic-growth, as the struggle to learn from one's past and improve one's personal situation; post-memory, as the custody of past memories which are not necessarily one's own, but which one has a personal, or familial, connection with; multidirectional memory, i.e. the characteristic of different memories of telling different stories but, nonetheless, of being linked to each other; post-memory in the digital and visual age, which refers to the influence that the digital world has recently had on the way in which post-memory is developed and transferred; female post-memory, which refers to Rupi Kaur's female-oriented post-memory; post-memorial legacy of objects, traditions and places, i.e. the way in which post-memory can generate from one's contact with objects, traditions, places, which may remind one of memories from the past.

In the second chapter of my dissertation I analyze more specifically Kaur's personal post-memory, which is disclosed along the lines of her poems. I start this second chapter by presenting the theme of gendered violence, which is often depicted in Rupi Kaur's poetry, both through her writing and her drawing. I then offer a broader vision of what gendered violence means in the context of Indian lineage, since Rupi Kaur is originally from Punjab, India. In order to do so, I introduce the works of two Indian female writers, Krishna Mehta and Shauna Singh Baldwin, who, through their books, have tried to identify the reasons for gendered violence in India.

Then, I present the way in which the nakedness of the female body can be used as a weapon, in a way that may show men's underestimation of the power of female resilience. For this reason, I also discuss the post-modern feminist type of resistance that women have lately shown to pursue in search of equality to men.

I will later open a discourse on post-colonialism and diaspora, since not only is Rupi Kaur's poetry conceived as a defense of the equality of men and women, it is also envisaged as a vindication of the equality of all nationalities and all skin-colors. Regarding this matter, I present Kaur's specific case, i.e. that of a Sikh diasporic girl. I consider the concepts of ethnic and cultural identity, in order to understand how an identity such as Kaur's, i.e. built on diverse cultural backgrounds, can develop and bloom, even when faced with the struggle of self-identification.

The final chapter of my dissertation focuses on the possibility of healing from traumatic memories. Especially, I argue that vulnerability, resilience and resistance may be the foundations of a process of healing. Moreover, I discuss the healing power of artistic expression, writing in the first place, since it may allow one to internalize one's traumatic memories and, eventually, to recover from them. Furthermore, I offer an insight into Rupi Kaur's personal process of healing, which is clearly displayed in *milk and honey's* last section *the healing*. At the end of the third final chapter, I highlight how narrative should be, according to some scholars and practitioners, if it aims to contribute to the achievement of healing from traumatic memories.

For my dissertation, I gathered and read the works of the main voices in the fields of trauma studies, and in particular post-memorial trauma studies, which proved to be essential for my analysis of Kaur's post-memorial trauma. For this reason, Caruth, Hirsch, Luckhurst, Rothberg, among others, are often cited in my dissertation, as they are able to offer important insights regarding how trauma can develop in a person, and even be transferred to future generations through post-memory. Moreover, since Rupi Kaur's experience of post-memorial trauma is deeply connected to the themes of post-colonialism, diaspora, feminism and post-modernism, authors and scholars such as Appadurai, bell hooks, Bhabha, Braziel, June, Mannur, Misri, Radhakrishnan, all have a say in the construction of my discourse. Finally, DeSalvo's research is a useful support in the consideration of how writing proved to be an essential step towards Kaur's healing; as well as Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay's investigation on how vulnerability and resilience are deeply connected to each other will result in the validation of Kaur's belief that, in order for one to bloom, one must first undergo wilting, falling, rooting and rising,

I decided to write my dissertation about Rupi Kaur's poetry because I found it to be extremely relevant in nowadays' society: it inspired me to reflect upon many socio-cultural issues of our modern times, and always in a way that let me feel connected with the author's perceptions and ideals. Rupi Kaur is indeed a young adult who, from her perspective as a Punjabi Sikh immigrant in Canada, is able to instill in her poetry a sense of questioning and doubting about society's self-imposed limits. For instance, her poetry aims at acknowledging gender inequality that still lingers even in modern Western society, as well as the social inferiority that immigrants, in the

Western World, are typically associated with. Rupi Kaur's poetry also highlights the importance of remembering one's origins, and how it is one's right and duty to be grateful for them, since they tell the story of one's ancestors and so, implicitly, one's own story too.

Moreover, Kaur points out the necessity of welcoming others' legitimate perspectives and points of view: because of this, her poetry praises freedom as a value that should never be taken for granted, as it was not always given to all and, in some places, it is still not recognized to everybody equally. Furthermore, Rupi Kaur is able, through her personal experience, to demonstrate how resilience, especially when shared with social peers, may more easily lead one to resist life struggles and, eventually, to accept one's traumatic past and, possibly, to generate healing.

For all the themes that I have listed above, I considered it important to discuss Kaur's poetry in my dissertation, and to share her thoughts with others. Furthermore, another reason that convinced me to focus my dissertation on Rupi Kaur's poetry is that she is a young writer who, in spite of her young age, has proved able to address social issues which are generally thought not to pertain to younger generations. In fact, I believe it is indeed the role of younger generations that may act as a key role to spread knowledge about such problems that are still lingering in modern society. As a matter of fact, young people are becoming more and more open to diversity, since contemporary society is itself delineated by diversity, which younger generations are generally able to consider as the norm: globalization has allowed for an interdependency of places and people, which are not to be defined by their ethnicity, their gender, their religion or their sexual orientation, but rather as part of humanity as a whole. This may indeed be another central idea in Rupi Kaur's poetry: the depiction of her struggle as a Punjabi Sikh immigrant girl living in Canada has the power to openly criticize all those situations where only differences among individuals are highlighted, while all traits of similarity are left obscured. Therefore, this poetry is an example of how commonality and solidarity can develop connections among humans, which allow individuals to learn from one another, allowing growth and healing to prosper, in spite of life's struggles and even of traumatic, or post-traumatic, memories:

the right one does not

stand in your way

they make space for you

to step forward

(the sun and her flowers, 182)

Chapter I

The Trauma Question

Trauma can be considered an event that can change one's life in an instant. According to Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, trauma is an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). Among people, there seems to be confusion about what a traumatic event is. As a matter of fact, the word 'trauma' or 'traumatic' is used nowadays for the most trivial events, in order to convey a sense of shock for something that has happened. Yet, most of the times, these events are not technically traumatic. Psychologically, a traumatic event is manifested through extreme stress that hits its victim and has a negative influence on his or her well-being. Therefore, a person who experiences a traumatic event is likely to feel a sense of helplessness and powerlessness which overwhelms him or her.

According to the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5*, an event can be traumatic when it results in the death or in threatened death, as well as in threatened or actual physical injury or sexual violation (APA, 271). What is interesting is that the victim of a traumatic event does not necessarily have to be a direct witness of the traumatic event itself. Indeed, the victim of trauma may also witness a traumatic event indirectly, being a close friend, relative, son or daughter of a direct survivor of trauma. In this case, the indirect victim of trauma experiences trauma through post-memory.

Moreover, the survivor of a traumatic event does not necessarily have to feel an intense emotional reaction to the event. Intense emotions, such as fear or horror, are not always a sign of the predictability of trauma.

A natural consequence of a traumatic event is the origin of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD) in the survivor, but also depression, drug abuse, loss of sleep and even chronic health problems. Trauma exposure is actually quite frequent in the lives of humans, and it normally has ever-lasting effects on its survivors. Trauma does not differentiate among race, ethnicity, social-class, age, religion or culture: a traumatic event can occur in the life of anyone.

Furthermore, trauma can occur after a single event or a multiple series of events, and its impact hugely depends on a variety of factors which include individual and social variables. For instance, some people may be more likely to experience trauma than others because of their weak resilience. Interestingly, one of the most recurring image in trauma studies of our century is that of

the soldier who, faced with death and extreme violence during the war, suffers from repeated nightmares. Yet:

As a consequence of the increasing occurrence of such perplexing war experiences and other catastrophic responses during the last twenty years, physicians and psychiatrists have begun to reshape their thinking about physical and mental experience, including most recently the responses to a wide variety of other experiences, such as rape, child abuse, auto and industrial accidents, and so on, that are now often understood in terms of the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

(Caruth, 11)

Moreover, trauma has a direct connection to one's state of physical health. Trauma can indeed generate heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune disease and other kinds of illness, which may even lead to premature death. But the effects of trauma are not only evident in the victim's body; on the contrary, it is usually in the victim's mind and spirit that trauma has the most intense consequences. Indeed, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud argues that the wound of the mind is not as easily healable as a bodily wound would be (Caruth, 4). On the contrary, the wound of the mind is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, and, consequently, it cannot be fully understood and recognized by the victim's consciousness, at least not until it re-imposes itself by dominating the victim's dreams, for example, and even the victim's daily actions.

Thus, trauma is not to be located in the first original event of the past, but rather in its feature of being unassimilated, of being unrecognized, which dooms its survivor to experiencing it all over again, in his or her daily life. Therefore, "what is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma [...] is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 4).

Furthermore, in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, "the recurring image of the accident [...], seems to be especially compelling, and indeed becomes the exemplary scene of trauma par excellence, not only because it depicts what we can know about traumatizing events, but also, and more profoundly, because it tells of what it is, in traumatic events, that is *not* precisely grasped" (Caruth, 6). Therefore, it is not really the violence of a traumatic event that haunts its survivor through time, but rather the fact that the violence of the event has not been grasped by the victim yet. The power of trauma lays in the fact that its survivor experiences the traumatic event as being really traumatic only by reliving it later in time, seeing that, at the time of the original occurrence of the traumatic event, its survivor seemed to get away with it apparently unharmed.

Thus, a characteristic of trauma is therefore that of being historical: a traumatic event cannot be totally perceived by the time it occurs; a traumatic event can become accessible to the victim only afterwards, in belatedness.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a frequent outcome of a traumatic event. Starting from the 1970s, “several social movements called attention to the psychological reactions of people exposed to stressful events and called for a mental health diagnostic category that more adequately captured the emotional reactions of these individuals” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 25). Especially, “advocacy groups drew increased attention to military veterans who demonstrated enduring psychological complications after exposure to war traumas and chronic difficulties in readjusting to civilian life” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 25): in the military, such reactions to war exposure “were categorized under terms such as *shell shock*, *combat exhaustion*, and *gross stress reactions*” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 26).

According to women’s movements, similar to shell shock and its consequences were also rape, domestic violence and child abuse (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 26). As a matter of fact, post-traumatic stress disorder refers to the response to a traumatic event, and such a response can be shown for instance through uncontrolled and repetitive hallucinations or other intrusive phenomena (Caruth, 57-58).

Therefore, post-traumatic stress disorder “reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event that it cannot control” (Caruth, 58). Thus, PTSD seems to be the most destructive psychic disorder, especially because it is to be considered as an enigma of survival, which intertwines with an enigma of destructiveness (Caruth, 58).

As Caruth argues, drawing on Freud, the problem of human survival, which is the core of individual trauma, can be understood only in the context of historical trauma (58). This is why, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses about a psychic disorder that reflects the unavoidable and overwhelming imposition of historical events on one’s psyche. Such a psychic disorder was called by Freud *war neurosis* (which is what will be later called *shell shock* in the military field, especially from the 1970’s) since it was studied during WW1 and mainly on traumatized soldiers, who relived their battlefield memories through repetitive nightmares (Caruth, 59).

Freud compares such war neurosis with what he calls *accident neurosis*, since he claims that nightmares about the war can be compared to nightmares about an accident, seeing that both kinds of nightmares are not to be understood as dreams, since they are not related to wishes or unconscious meanings (Caruth, 59). On the contrary, such nightmares are simply literal returns of an event, against the will of the survivor. The repetition of such flashbacks can then be considered as the incapability of the survivor's mind to attribute a meaning to a traumatic event (Caruth, 59).

Then, Freud comes to the conclusion that the re-experience of a traumatic event in one's dreams is the attempt to understand what was not completely grasped at first. Therefore, the survivor of a traumatic event is doomed to confront the threat of death all over again because the victim's survival becomes "an endless testimony to the impossibility of living" (Caruth, 62).

The repetition of the traumatic event in one's mind is then inherently necessary for one's consciousness, even though it may eventually lead to destruction (Caruth, 63). As a matter of fact, the destructive repetition of a traumatic event can itself be a source of re-traumatization, which is surely detrimental to the survivor's health. This would perhaps explain the high rates of suicide among survivors of the Vietnam war or the Holocaust only when they found themselves in a position of safety, and not during the times in which trauma was directly experienced, as during the time of the actual war or in the actual concentration camps (Caruth, 63).

These examples show how a traumatic disorder can then be considered as a struggle to die, since the mind of the survivor has not grasped why they did not die during the time of the direct traumatic experience. Therefore, the core of trauma does not specifically lie in one's confrontation with death, but rather in one's survival of death, without knowing why (Caruth, 64).

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) included post-traumatic stress disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) for the first time in 1980, making it the only psychiatric disorder that is necessarily linked to trauma, i.e. that originates only in the presence of a traumatic event (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 26). PTSD was considered by DSM IV to be the response of a traumatic event which left the traumatized victim with fear, horror and helplessness after a traumatic event put in danger the victim's life and well-being through actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation (criterion A) (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 27).

Moreover, DSM IV described PTSD as showing up in the shape of nightmares and flashbacks related to one's traumatic memories (re-experiencing symptoms: criterion B), as well as with the avoidance of anything that would remind the victim of their traumatic experience (avoidance of trauma-related stimuli: criterion C). Moreover, symptoms such as difficulty in falling asleep, irritability, anger were considered to be linked to PTSD, when they lasted for more than a month (hyper-arousal symptoms, criterion D) (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 27).

All the criteria that I have presented above were the criteria that DSM IV considered essential in order to diagnose PTSD. Yet, this diagnosis of PTSD by DSM IV was met with criticism, especially because of the possibility of diagnosing PTSD in such a wide range of possibilities. Some critics thought that an over-diagnosis of PTSD might have followed; while others criticized such a diagnosis of PTSD because it seemed to be based on the life experiences of Western culture only (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 27-28).

Therefore, Friedman, Keane and Resick grouped such criticisms in 2007 in the *Handbook of PTSD* (Guilford Press, 2007), in which they asserted that some individuals recover from trauma by themselves, thanks to their quality of resilience. Only those who are not able to recover from trauma by themselves can be diagnosed with PTSD and may require special support (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 28). In this way, PTSD can be seen as a universal response to trauma, and not only as a cultural-bound phenomenon.

In 2013, DSM-5 added a fifth criterion to the criteria, already present in DSM-IV, that make up PTSD: this new criterion comprehends the series of negative alterations in one's cognition and mood (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 29). Moreover, new hyper-arousal symptoms were added to the previous list made by DSM-IV (this symptom changed name from criterion D in DSM IV to criterion E in DSM-5), including for example irritability and anger both towards oneself and others and self-destructive behaviors such as drug-abuse or alcohol-abuse. As it was already clear in the consideration of PTSD made by DSM IV, these symptoms necessarily have to last for at least 1 month in order to be classified as probable symptoms of PTSD (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 29).

The additional examination and partial modification of what constitutes PTSD by DSM-5 also led researchers to find out that PTSD can generate a type of dissociation in the victim. Dissociation indicates that the victim may separate his or her thoughts, memories, experiences, feelings from his or her mind and/or body. The symptoms of dissociation can be for instance depersonalization, which consists in feeling detached from one's own body; or de-realization, which consists in feeling one's own reality as unreal or blurry (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 29).

Moreover, when it comes to PTSD, it is essential to point out that the reactive response to trauma is always individually determined. As a matter of fact, gender, ethnicity and culture influence the way in which response to trauma and PTSD is given by its victim (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 75).

Regarding gender, the difference in how men and women differently interact with trauma may be actually due to the severity of the trauma to which women would be exposed: "despite lower rates of trauma exposure in general, women are more likely to be exposed to chronic high-impact traumas such as childhood sexual abuse and rape (Olf. et al. 2007; Tolin & Foa, 2006).

Indeed, estimates reveal that approximately 20% of women have been raped in their lifetime compared to only 1% of men (Black et al., 2011)” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 76). It would then be a *situational vulnerability* that makes women more exposed to high-impact trauma than men, “who, in contrast, are more likely to be exposed to nonsexual physical assaults, combat traumas and accidents” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 76).

Yet, along with a theory of situational vulnerability, a theory of *female vulnerability* would also have an impact on one’s vulnerability to trauma and one’s coping responses: “research shows that women are more likely to blame themselves for the trauma happening, perceive themselves as damaged or incompetent, and view the world as unsafe (Cromer & Smyth, 2010; Tolin & Breslau, 2007)” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79). Thus, according to a theory of female vulnerability, “gender role socialization processes may play a significant role in the way men and women cope in the aftermath of trauma (Christiansen & Elklit, 2012; Olaff et al., 2007)” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79).

As far as trauma is concerned, women would feel fear, horror and helplessness more intensely than men, because of females’ psychological and biological strategies of coping with trauma (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79). On the contrary, men would be more likely to experience the increase of hyper-arousal symptoms, such as irritability, anger and self-destructive behaviors, when they face a traumatic event (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79).

Generally, women prefer to adopt coping techniques which include the search for social support and the expression of their emotions (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79). As a consequence, a lack of social support might worsen the experience of trauma in women. If social support were not efficient enough, women would be more likely to utilize coping strategies such as drinking-abuse, which would be a way to replace the role of social support. As opposed to this, men generally prefer to act aggressively, and tend to prefer more practical support (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 79).

The way in which men generate emotions of anger, and avoid demanding support, influences how men and women are differently treated when it comes to being supported after a traumatic event occurred (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 80). The tendency of men to respond to trauma by expressing anger implies that men are generally more focused on trying to help themselves alone, than on asking for help. Accordingly, men have more chances to give up on their treatments than their female counterparts, who seem to benefit more from supportive trauma-focused treatments (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 80).

In spite of the variable ways in how women and men seem to respond differently to traumatic events in diverse studies, “it remains unclear whether there is a significant differential effect of gender on PTSD treatment outcomes” (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 81), since the ways in

which coping works seems to derive mostly by the individual's character and predisposition, more than by his or her gender (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 80).

Regarding ethnicity and race, it is undeniable that members of racial and ethnic minorities still face more experiences of racism, prejudice and discrimination than racial or ethnic majorities. For example, taking into consideration the total population of the U.S.A., 37% of it is constituted by racial and ethnic minorities, such as Latin-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans. Some studies showed that such racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to develop PTSD than the majority of European-Americans (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 83-84).

A reason beyond this may be that racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to be exposed to more impelling types of stressors, such as poverty, crime, discrimination, but also to violent traumas such as homicide, sexual abuse and violence and child maltreatment. For instance, to simply reside in poor neighborhoods increase the chance of experiencing some of these possible stressors (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 84). The general socio-economic status of a traumatized victim seems then to be the main reason behind the difference in the exposure to trauma, when it comes to compare different racial and ethnic groups.

Yet, it seems that the treatment of trauma and PTSD does not need to be different on the basis of one's ethnicity or race. On the contrary, when the same treatments are offered to a group of victims of different races and ethnicities, they are likely to show a similar path of healing, as it happens in the study led by Zoellner, Feeny, Fitzgibbons and Foa (1999):

Zoellner, Feeny, Fitzgibbons and Foa (1999) randomly assigned 95 women (60 Caucasians and 35 African Americans) with chronic PTSD to either cognitive behavioral therapy or a wait-list control condition and examined racial and ethnic differences in treatment response. Both groups demonstrated improvements in their PTSD symptomatology. Moreover, there were no significant differences in treatment response between African American and Caucasian women after receiving cognitive behavioral therapy treatments for PTSD, suggesting that the benefits of treatment cut across race and ethnicity.

(Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 88)

Post-Traumatic-Growth

Even though trauma is such an intense event that is likely to change its victim's life forever, it is yet possible that the change in the victim's life might later turn into a positive change. Indeed, the process of working through one's trauma may lead a traumatized survivor to the improvement of his or her way of considering the world. Of course this kind of improvement, or growth, does not

come without a struggle from the victim's part, since it is not something that occurs directly after a traumatic event; on the contrary, it is because of the survivor's will and struggling against trauma, that trauma may turn into a possible personal growth (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 224).

It is interesting to point out that, according to some researchers (such as Joseph, 2011; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004), it is indeed those events of intense trauma that will see the most striking kind of growth from the victim's side, meaning that a certain kind of stressor might be needed in order for the process of growth to be triggered (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 224).

As a matter of fact, a research among refugees (Teodorescu et al., 2012) showed how, among a total number of about fifty refugees, most of them were able to produce positive changes in their situation of traumatized survivors of several stressors, such as rape, torture and imprisonment. The main factors that prevented the other refugees of the group from showing post-traumatic-growth were unemployment, lack of social relations and bad integration in their new country of settlement; in fact, these factors proved to produce even more psycho-pathological symptoms (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 224-225).

Another study (Blix, Hansen, Birkeland, Nissen, & Heir, 2013) that proved how post-traumatic-growth can be triggered even, and especially, in the case of an intense distress, was the one conducted on the survivors of the Oslo terrorist attack in 2011, in which seventy-seven people lost their lives. In this study, a higher rate of growth from post-traumatic-stress was found in those survivors who also showed higher rates of trauma exposure. Surprisingly, these same survivors were also reported to have the highest rates of impairment in their daily lives, especially at work, even though they showed good levels of life satisfaction (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 225).

As a matter of fact, post-traumatic-growth must not be thought as possible only in cases of a moderate trauma; on the contrary, those who were found to show a stronger post-traumatic-growth were also those who were assigned with higher rates of trauma exposure and post-traumatic-stress at the beginning of this study.

What is possible to infer from the studies about post-traumatic-growth is that the victims of trauma who show to grow and improve more than others are also the ones who have higher levels of self-awareness, and it might therefore be easier for them to be grateful for what they are left with, after a traumatic event occurred:

Knowing that once that concrete event comes [...], nothing will ever again be like it was before, which is a very, very good thing, and realizing that eventually, once that concrete event is in the distant past, you will only be able to believe that your life wasn't always as tremendously beautiful and amazing as it is now with the (albeit still very painful, but real

and okay, and conquered) memories that only you have of what it was like before, and when you do, you'll be so relieved and proud of how far you've come.
(Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 227)

Furthermore, the increase in post-traumatic-growth was also proven to be related to the quality of resilience. Resilience can be described as the human factor that allows the victim of trauma not to develop symptoms of post-traumatic-stress-disorder or, at least, to develop them with given limits (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 228). The reason behind this data might be that resilient individuals are less likely to come across an event which they would consider as really traumatic. As a consequence, it would also be less probable that they would have to come across the possibility of post-traumatic-growth.

In a study about victims of terror and war (Levine, Laufer, Stein, Hamama-Raz and Solomon, 2009) researchers proved that, even though both post-traumatic-growth and resilience are factors which are associated to better chances of healing from traumatic memories, they are yet inversely related, since the victims of trauma who developed post-traumatic-growth also showed the highest level of PTSD; on the contrary, those victims who were found with the highest level of resilience were also found to have the lowest rate of PTSD and, therefore, did not present high rates of post-traumatic-growth (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 228).

One way in which post-traumatic-growth may help traumatized victims to hold on to life, in spite of the traumatic event they survived, is that PTG allows the reconsideration of one's previously fixed assumptions about the world and life itself (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 228). One of the first assumptions that is likely to be reconsidered, when post-traumatic-growth is triggered, is the benevolence of the world, and this was especially found in victims from developed countries:

Largely because we are relatively sheltered from the danger that people in other parts of the world face on a daily basis. Because of this, we underestimate our risk of misfortune. [...]Unfortunately, even living in this privileged environment does not shield us from tragedy. It could be a vicious street crime, car accident, sexual assault, or diagnosis of a life-threatening illness: Such events show us quite clearly that the world is not always benevolent, that it can in fact be a dangerous place.
(Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 229)

Nonetheless, a person might be able to realize that the assumption that the world is benevolent is wrong only after a traumatic event happened to him or her personally (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 229).

Another assumption that seems to be pervading people's beliefs, in developed countries especially, is that the world is meaningful, i.e. good things happen to good people and vice versa. In fact, events of trauma may hit either good people or bad people quite randomly (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 229). Of course, it is recommendable keeping a behavior that may prevent traumatic events from happening to us, but this is not enough to be sure that a traumatic event will never happen. The belief that the world is meaningful is especially in line with the belief that God will only punish those who act badly, while those who follow God's teachings will also be given God's benevolence.

An example of this belief is given by psychologist Tom Greening, who considers the way in which war veterans who were also believers found themselves to be challenged regarding their religious beliefs, after they experienced war-related traumatic events: "for these veterans, Greening found that traditional treatments for PTSD were only partially effective. Recovery only happened once the soldiers grappled with their beliefs and the events that they had experienced and came to terms with them" (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 229-230).

Indeed, one of the main questions that may arise in victims who are also believers is how come God could allow such events to have happened to them. Thus, what Greening discovers from his research is that those veterans were able to accept the trauma they experienced during the war only when they were able to realize that the world is not necessarily meaningful and fair. Eventually, some of these victims eventually gave up on their faith (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 230). As a matter of fact, survivors of trauma, as these veterans were, need to pass through a stage of reconsidering their view of life and of the world, in order to understand that the world is not always just. Only after this realization has occurred, can victims of trauma experience a better adjustment to the newly reconsidered kind of world they live in.

Moreover, giving sense to a traumatic event is possible only either by modifying the meaning of the event to ones' own eyes or by modifying one's own view of the world (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 230). This process of realization may as well be considered as the basis of a *cohesive narrative construction*, which implies "to reflectively *ruminate* over elements of the event [...]. Perceived growth is thought to arise when people try to make sense of what happened and cope with their emotional reactions. This process allows trauma survivors to reflect on their lives, observe new strengths, and find meaning in the event, often by seeing *the bigger picture*" (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 230).

The possible types of meaning-making following a traumatic experience were researched in a study conducted by Duran (2013). Duran found out that meaning-making can be based on religious faith, when the survivor of trauma is a believer and believes in the purpose of his or her

traumatic experience, as if it were a sign brought to him by God. Another possible kind of meaning-making is the one that focuses on the beneficial effects of a traumatic event, when there are any. Examples of beneficial effects of trauma might include receiving love by others or rediscovering life values that were underestimated by the victim before the traumatic event happened. A further type of meaning-making is instead based on the victim's realization of his or her own strength. The victim of a traumatic event might consider him or herself as special for surviving a type of trauma that others may not have had the fortune to survive (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 231).

In order to help traumatized survivors to try to find a meaning to their traumatic experience, Anderson and colleagues (2012) organized a series of questions which should, at least, allow the victim to reflect on his or her trauma and his or her future after trauma. Such questions aimed at the consideration of the lessons learnt by the victim after their trauma, if there were any, such as positive changes in the victim's relationships with others or changes in the victim's inner-self; the discovery of a greater life purpose; the consideration of the victim's relationship with God or the universe (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 231).

All these studies were able to prove some of the positive outcomes found in some victims of trauma. What seems to be pervading most studies is the improvement of the victim's relationship with others, be it in the shape of greater intimacy, greater compassion or solidarity. Another positive factor originating in some survivors of traumatic events is a greater appreciation of life, which is likely to positively influence the possibility of finding meaning to one's trauma which, in return, seems to open up the victim to new perspectives in life.

Yet another important positive factor found out by studies on trauma was the improvement of the victim's self-awareness and self-knowledge (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 232). As a matter of fact, to survive a traumatic event might instill in the victim of trauma a sense of strength which might allow the victim to know him or herself better than ever, since the strength of the victim might never have been challenged as much as during, and after, a traumatic experience.

Regarding the frequency of the appearance of post-traumatic-growth in traumatized individuals, it is possible to draw some conclusions that would make post-traumatic-growth more likely to occur in some situations and in some individuals more than in others. For instance, both the factors of age and gender seem to contribute to the occurrence of post-traumatic-growth. Regarding older individuals and, apparently, women too, faith and religious beliefs would be a factor that contributed to post-traumatic-growth (Ruglass and Kendall-Tackett, 233).

Indeed, Anderson (2012) proved that, in women who had been in abusive relationships, both social support and spirituality helped them cope with post-traumatic-stress and contributed to the

origin of post-traumatic-growth, which generated in participants with high rates of resilience, self-control and spirituality. As a matter of fact, a higher rate of resilience was also associated with a lower rate of developing PTSD (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 235).

Furthermore, Gled, Jensen, Holt, & Ormhaug's study (2013) could show that, in teenagers, post-traumatic-growth seemed to be accompanied by the improvement of maturity, self-confidence, self-knowledge and independence, as well as an improvement in their relationships with others, probably caused by an increase in empathy and compassion (Ruglass, Kendall-Tackett, 233).

Therefore, Both Gled, Jensen, Holt, & Ormhaug's study and Anderson et al.'s study seem to be in line with what I have found to be the pathway of healing that Punjabi-Canadian author and artist Rupī Kaur shows to have followed to her readers, and which clearly appears when reading her two volumes of poetry. Not only do Kaur's books *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers* reveal the traumatic post-memory that she lived as a Punjabi diasporic female child living in Canada, they also depict the way in which her traumatic post-memory seems to have triggered the origin of post-traumatic-growth in the author's spirit.

Rupī Kaur's pathway from trauma to healing is therefore going to be the focus of my written work, in which I am going to discuss the author's specific kind of post-memorial trauma. Kaur's story is indeed one that shows how resilience, self-awareness, social support and spirituality in a broader sense, might be of great help when dealing with traumatic memories and grief from one's past.

Thus, I would like to take the reader of my dissertation on a journey through Rupī Kaur's memories, in order to discover how the author was able to grow on a personal level, in spite of the difficulties that she has found on her way from childhood to adulthood as the daughter of a diasporic Sikh couple living abroad. Hopefully, Kaur's story of healing might be inspiring to my reader, as it was for me. Indeed, the success of Rupī Kaur's poetry might be traced back to the author's willingness of sharing her life story with others. With *milk and honey* (Andrews Mc Mill, 2015) and *the sun and her flowers* (Simon & Schuster, 2017), Kaur was able to prove that trauma may as well be considered as a starting point for its' victim's pathway of personal growth.

Specifically, Rupī Kaur's poetry tells memories and post-memories about her and her parents' modern diaspora. In her books, Kaur clearly shows her intention of remembering the story of her parents, in order to reflect on the issues of diaspora, migration, racism, but also gender inequality. All these topics are dealt with starting from Kaur's awareness that she might not even be discussing about all of this, had not her parents decided to leave their country, with the aim of offering their children, including herself, a safer life.

Post-Memory

In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch offers a thorough depiction of what is meant by the notion of post-memory. According to the author, post-memory is to be considered as “precisely the *guardianship* of a traumatic personal and generational past with which some of us have a *living connection*, and that past’s passing into history or myth” (1). Therefore, post-memory involves an act of transfer between generations, regarding ethical or theoretical matters (Hirsch, 2). Post-memory is then a means through which traumatic events can be passed to other generations in order for their memory not to fade away. Usually, post-memory is connected to the painful memories of an event or a series of events, which generations before us have lived.

The main issue in the discourse of post-memory might revolve around how to build post-memory both without diminishing the emotional intensity, the horror and the sorrows of others and without generating further possibilities of re-traumatization on post-generations. For instance, storytelling and poetry are two means which might prove to be helpful in transferring post-memory safely; along with these types of art are also photography, performance, interactive museology, which have expanded particularly in most recent times (Hirsch, 2). All these methods of transmission must have memory as their central focus, in order to be effective for post-memorial transmission.

Yet, post-memory is necessarily different from the memory of the original victims of a traumatic event. As Hirsch comments on this, the discrepancy between the survivors’ memory and the post-generation’s memory is an essential element in understanding what post-memory is (3-4). As a matter of fact, the post-generation’s understanding of past traumatic experiences can only happen through mediation: “these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Post-memory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch, 5).

There might be a dangerous risk in the process of post-memory creation though: the possibility that the memories inherited from ancestors (i.e. parents or grandparents) will have such a strong influence on post-generations that one’s own life story may be overwhelmed by post-memory, which might mix with one’s own direct memories, creating confusion and possibilities of re-traumatization in post-generations. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the *post* in post-memory does not only signal a delay in time and space, but also, and more importantly, a problematic “oscillation between continuity and rupture” (Hirsch, 6).

Therefore, post-memory can be finally described as not simply an idea, or a movement, but rather as a “*structure* of inter- and trans-generational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied

experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic-stress-disorder) at a generational remove” (Hirsch, 6). Hirsch’s statement that post-memory can be seen as a traumatic recall means that post-memory may carry along all the possible effects of post-traumatic-stress-disorder, in the sense that even post-memory can be felt as deeply and as intensely as post-traumatic-stress-disorder can be (but with the difference that post-memory only works on post-generations).

Even though the aims and the perspectives of post-memory seem to be legitimately coherent and consistent, some critiques have been addressed to its practice and narration. One of the most striking is the one that assumes the will of post-generations of simply aiming at using their ancestors’ traumatic experiences in order to equate their suffering with their personal one, building an identity for themselves which might work as an excuse for their weaknesses or flaws.

An author who supported this theory is Gary Weissman, who gave the name *fantasies of witnessing* to this process of memory appropriation, and affirmed that there cannot be such thing as a *post-Holocaust generation* (Hirsch, 20). Another author who does not support post-memory is Ruth Franklin, who sustains that “driven by ambition or envy or narcissism, a number of the children of survivors - commonly referred to as ‘the second generation’ - have constructed elaborate literary fictions that serve to elevate their own childhood traumas above and even beyond the suffering of their parents” (Hirsch, 20).

Contrarily to these assertions, Hirsch affirms, in *The Generation of Postmemory*, that post-memory can actually work through the memory of a traumatic event, re-considering it in order to reach comprehension or, at least, awareness. Yet, according to Hirsch, post-memory needs to be *multidirectional*, if it aims at working through trauma. Post-memory being multidirectional means that it has to be approached by different starting points and various methods, in order for post-memory to have as wide a perspective as possible (Hirsch, 21).

Multidirectional Memory

In a context of post-memory, the relationship among different collective memories is still considered by many to lead to “a zero-sum struggle for preeminence” (Rothberg, 3). This means that collective memories would not be able to intertwine on a same level, but would necessarily show to be competitive, one against the other. Yet, as Hirsch and Rothberg claim, collective memories should be multidirectional: they should be considered as part of an ongoing process of “negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative” (Rothberg, 3).

This consideration of post-memory may allow one to understand that to speak of, for example, Holocaust memories, should not in any way prevent us to connect such memories to those of slavery or colonialism, as competitive memory instead would try to achieve, even underlining a subtle type of racism. Instead, when interaction among historical pasts is done, then post-memory can become productive, intercultural and dynamic: it becomes multidirectional.

It is important to consider post-memory as a process of “making the past into present” (Rothberg, 3), since post-memory is related to the past, but happens in the present. Moreover, post-memory is a form of working through, thanks to diverse kinds of interventions and practices (Rothberg, 4). Post-memory may as well be described as “a symbolic representation of the past embedded in social action” (Rothberg, 4). Thus, in a multidirectional type of post-memory, various social actors would bring their diverse pasts together into a heterogeneous and dynamic contemporary present.

Cleverly, Rothberg does not see “all claims of memory or identity as necessarily tainted; instead I see such claims as necessary and inevitable” (4) and, furthermore, Rothberg rejects “the notion that identities and memories are pure and authentic - that there is a “we” and a “you” that would definitely differentiate, say, black and Jewish identities and black and Jewish relations to the past” (4). Indeed, such a confrontation would only be counter-productive, as it would only lead to divergence and disparity. Indeed, “our relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other. When multidirectional memory is explicitly claims, [...] it has the potential to create new forms of solidarity and new visions of justice” (Rothberg, 4-5).

In opposition to a competitive type of memory, which works on the basis of a pre-given sphere of discussion, multidirectional and connective post-memory works on the basis of a dynamic public sphere, which welcomes anybody and is open to reconstruction and confrontation (Rothberg, 5). Another assumption about competitive post-memory which only proves to be counter-productive is that it links the pre-given sphere of discussion only to the identities that are directly touched by such a sphere and, consequently,: “as I struggle to achieve recognition of *my* memories and *my* identity, I necessarily exclude the memories and identities of others” (Rothberg, 5).

On the contrary, Rothberg argues that “memories are not owned by groups - nor are groups ‘owned’ by memories” (Rothberg, 5). As a matter of fact, in a context of post-memory, what at first may look as private and personal memory is usually a borrowed or adapted memory, which other groups have experienced already, in a more or less far historical past: “memory’s anachronistic quality – its bringing together of now and then, here and there – is actually the source of its

powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones” (Rothberg, 5). For example, it is often from Holocaust memories that multidirectional memory originates.

Indeed, the Holocaust is an event that embraces a wide range of collective memories. Consequently, because of its salience, it is often evoked in contexts of collective memories (Rothberg, 6). For instance, Holocaust memories are widely evoked in discussions of decolonization, post-colonialism and racism, among others. Yet, it is indeed the peculiarity of the Holocaust that may lead people to think about it as a unique event, which cannot, and should not, be compared to other events, as traumatic as they may be. The Holocaust is sometimes even considered as transcending human history and, therefore, incomparable to any other human event; as a matter of fact: “the Holocaust has come to be understood in the popular imagination, especially in Europe, Israel, and North America, as a unique, *sui generis* event” (Rothberg, 8).

Nonetheless, intellectuals interested in the cause of minorities, indigenous, colonized, have tried to spread the idea that the Holocaust may, at least partially, be compared and confronted to other events such as those of colonization, ethnic cleansing, other types of genocide. As these intellectuals claim, it may be counter-productive to separate Holocaust memories from all other kinds of extreme violence, and even other kinds of genocide. The main danger of keeping the Holocaust as a unique discourse, that cannot even be confronted to other discourses, is that “it potentially creates a hierarchy of suffering (which is morally offensive) and removes that suffering from the field of historical agency (which is both morally and intellectually suspect)” (Rothberg, 9).

Moreover, as David Stannard argues in *Is the Holocaust Unique?* (Rosenbaum, Westview Press, 1995), the discourse of uniqueness in a context of post-memory, as the one regarding Holocaust memories, “willingly provides a screen behind which opportunistic governments today attempt to conceal their own past and ongoing genocidal actions” (Stannard, 250). The genocide brought about by the Holocaust seems to be so extreme that more recent genocides would not seem to measure up. The system created with such a consideration of memories is a competitive one, which prevents us from thinking about apparently different stories as related to one another. Such a competitive system is indeed too rigid and unfair.

As Rothberg asserts, memory is not a zero-sum game, i.e. the memory of an event does not preclude the memory of another one. All traumatic events should take up their space and meaning in a context of human history, and should not compete with each other (Rothberg, 11). On the contrary, events such as those I have presented above, i.e. genocides, colonization, the Holocaust itself, should be confronted in order to generate solidarity and create bonds among people, even among apparently distant communities. As a matter of fact, multidirectional memory seems indeed

to cut across boundaries of nationality, race, ethnicity, age, social class: when it is fully achieved, it is able to connect different spatial, temporal and cultural sites (Rothberg, 11).

Yet, adopting a multidirectional type of memory should not in any way prevent us from differing situation from situation, as traumatic memories must be studied and worked through in detail. The best kind of multidirectional memory seems then to be one that tries to bind communities together, since multidirectional memory is in itself collective and historical; on the other hand, it should not prevent those same communities from remembering the peculiarities of their particular traumatic history, i.e. multidirectional memory should not separate individuals or communities from their original biographies and stories.

Regarding the relation between individual and collective memories, the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs claims in *On Collective Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), that all memories are both individual and collective. According to Halbwachs, individuals are the necessary subjects from whom memories can generate; yet, at the same time, individuals are also part of a social community, from which they gain specific collective frameworks (Rothberg, 15).

In *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard University Press, 2002), the philosopher Avishai Margalit widens Halbwachs' discourse, distinguishing between two forms of collective memory, one common and one shared. According to Margalit, common memory "is an aggregate notion. It aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experienced individually" (Margalit, 51-52); on the other hand, shared memory "is based on a division of mnemonic labor" (51-52); thus, common memory "is not a simple aggregate of individual memories. It requires communication. A shared memory integrates and calibrates the different perspectives of those who remember the episode" (51-52).

Margalit's notion of shared memory is indeed very similar to the concept of multidirectional memory. As a matter of fact, both Holocaust memories and colonialism or decolonization memories have their origin in individuals, but they are then mediated by communities and communication networks. Indeed, especially in contemporary society, mediascapes play an essential role in the configuration of frameworks (Rothberg, 15). Therefore, multidirectional memory can be considered to be collective as long as it is shaped within social frameworks, and through mediascapes, which call for a division of mnemonic labor. In this case, multidirectional memory would always be, at least in part, transversal, as it spreads through genres, nationalities, periods of time and cultures (Rothberg, 18).

Nonetheless, it is important to remember that all forms of memory are particular and original, as social, political and psychic forces work together in shaping any act of remembrance. Moreover, imaginative links may as well bring similarities of different events together, aiming at

producing lines of thoughts that can help achieve communality and solidarity among people (Rothberg, 18).

Post-memory in the Digital and Visual Age

Post-memory as *connective* refers to the feature of post-memory of being shared through different groups and social levels “with different starting and reference points and different models, suggesting paradigms and strategies for working through and [...] for moving beyond a traumatic past” (Hirsch, 21). The characteristic of post-memory of being connective is especially relevant in the Twenty-First century, in which an actual connective turn has occurred. Indeed, the digital age has brought post-memory to a new level of diffusion, that considers memory neither as collective nor re-collective, but rather as connective, since post-memory can now be worked through digital networks, which allow a constant flow of contacts and discussions among people, the world of the digital and the media.

As a matter of fact, the acts of transfer, which are essential when transmitting experiences from the past to successive generations, also involve the act of sharing memories among individuals and generations, and it is no doubt that this process of transferring is facilitated in the era of the World Wide Web and social networks. A clear example of how post-memory can be transmitted through the use of social media is indeed the case of Rupri Kaur.

Kaur was able to make use of the instruments of the digital world in order to spread the knowledge and the awareness about a series of traumatic events that hit her family in quite recent times: the rage perpetrated against the Sikhs in India during the 1984-Sikh-riots, following the murder of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in New Dehli, which itself followed the assault to the Punjabi holy Golden Temple in Amritsar by the Indian central government and, consequently, the great movement of Sikh people abroad, looking for safety, Kaur’s parents included.

Kaur’s publications *milk and honey* and *the sun and her flowers* resettles post-memory into an area of discussion which not only involves the transmission of post-memory itself, but rather functions as a model for post-memory transmission. By making use of imagery which accompanies her poetry, of virtual spreading which enables her poetry to be read practically anywhere in the world, and by creating a special and intimate bond with her readers, Rupri Kaur has definitely proven to be a modern post-memory female writer.

As argued by Aleida Assmann in *Re-framing Memory* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), once post-memory is transformed into words on paper, the individual’s post-memory gets intertwined with the symbolic system of the language and, therefore, can no longer remain

exclusive and private; instead, it can be exchanged, shared, confirmed, corrected. Moreover, each individual's memory does not only include what the individual has experienced or learnt during his or her own individual life, because individuals are always also a part of socio-cultural groups, which shape the memory of each individual in a way that differentiate one's memory from that of another, even when the memory of the two parts comes from the same event.

Regarding this matter, Assmann differentiates between two kinds of memory: intergenerational memory and transgenerational memory. The former type of memory resides in the familial context, in which experience is passed through practice and direct experience from one generation to the other, in one same family. On the other hand, transgenerational memory is a kind of political and cultural memory which does not involve practice, its context being much wider, but is rather based on symbolic systems, which mediate past experiences and events, even among distant and different types of receivers (*Re-framing Memory*, Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

According to Hirsch, the most effective kind of post-memory is the one that “strives to *reactivate* and *re-embod*y more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (33). Thus, post-memory can get the best out of both intergenerational memory and transgenerational memory, enabling the creation of a type of post-memory which can survive beyond the boundaries of the private familial sphere, and which can make any of us a spectator of post-memory, even when a particular kind of post-memory is not directly related to us or to our socio-cultural sphere.

In order to understand more clearly what is meant by post-memory, history and memory must be clearly differentiated. Indeed, memory presupposes an affective, living, connection to the past, which can be generated through mediation by narration, photography, testimony, among others, which history does not necessarily include.

The culture of memory transmission may have been growing lately because of the feeling of connection that the globalized world may be instilling in social groups. Groups, and individuals on their own, need to feel connected to others not only in their daily lives, but also, and maybe more importantly, in what constitutes their past, especially when this involved traumatic events and experiences, since one's past is also necessarily part of one's present. Moreover, Assmann also suggests that the term *collective memory* may also be challenging the concepts of ideology and history, which do not necessarily incorporate the idea of an affective link with previous generations and their experiences (*Re-framing Memory*, Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

As a matter of fact, the way in which Rupi Kaur is able to tell the diasporic history of her family to her readers, includes a series of techniques and styles which are able to highlight Kaur's personal feelings about her task as a witness of post-memory, making her writing not only a

historical one, but rather a post-memorial one. For instance, Kaur makes use of a familial setting in her books, which does not only imply that her books will talk about her family's history, it also means that the language Kaur uses is familial, which involves nonverbal and spontaneous discourse.

It may indeed be Kaur's ability of enabling her reader to enter her family situation that has been proven to be one of her best achievements in her writing. While reading her books of poetry, one can easily perceive her deepest emotions, which are not limited or restrained, which is what I have found to be most inspiring in her books.

For instance, what one may recognize in Kaur's works is the struggle to transmit the everlasting effects that living in a family of refugees may have generated in the author. Historical trauma, such as the diasporic escape that Kaur's family had to undergo, is likely to leave its victims to tackle pain, depression, dissociation. In post-generations, the effects of trauma reported above are likely to originate confusion and sense of responsibility and even guilt in the child's mind. The children of families who underwent traumatic experiences might feel like they have to, in a way, repair to a situation that did not touch them directly but that directly hit their parents, and even that their own existence is not to be taken for granted.

Indeed, in *After Such Knowledge* (PublicAffairs, Perseus Books Group, United States, 2004) the Polish-American writer Eva Hoffman claims that post-memory can be differentiated between a familial, or inter-generational, post-memory, occurring among parents and children; and an affiliative, or intra-generational, post-memory, in which the whole of memories at first shared among parents and children end up being exposed to the outside public, by means of mediation which are able to expand the private familial issue to the wide web of memory transmission (187).

One way to enable post-memory to work through the past more efficiently may be by considering it through the means of photographs, which may function "as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world" (Hirsch, 36). Of course, photographs being material objects, they cannot survive the transmission from memory to post-memory completely intact and authentic, but they necessarily change with time. It may indeed be these physical changes that make photographs a proof of the passage from memory to post-memory.

Regarding Kaur's books, even here one may find images which support the readers in imagining a past which is given spotlight and is reanimated by the poetry of the author. The imagery presented by Kaur in her poetry is familial, which is able to connect her family story to the minds and the souls of her readers, facilitating their understanding of the narration and enabling affiliation to Kaur and her parents' life story. As a matter of fact, when images are used in narration, their aim is especially that of causing a reaction in the readers' approach to the text they are reading, in order for them to have a visual reference on the matter. Hirsch affirms that photographs, and

images in general, can function as “screens - spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection” (38). Moreover, pictures may be able to connect the reader to a traumatic past in a material way, i.e. they can make the relationship between the reader and the narration more intense and even physical.

Sight is indeed a sense which is very much connected to the kind of affective, and affiliative, memory that post-memorial narration aims at, so images can have an intense impact on the reader’s body reactions, which enables the reader to feel something, rather than only acknowledging something. The effect of pictures is even more intensified if it is presented through familial structures, which are likely to represent a lingua franca for the readers, who might be more easily able to reduce distances and differences between themselves and the narration.

Yet, Hirsch brings up an argument against a kind of familial and affective narration: even though “the idiom of family can become an accessible lingua franca easing identification and projection, recognition and misrecognition, across distance and difference” (Hirsch, 39), it may also represent one’s trauma less objectively and historically, but rather subjectively and affectively. Thus, “constructing the processes of transmission, and the post-generation itself, in familial terms is as engaging as it is troubling” (Hirsch, 39).

I would claim that a familial and affective kind of narration does not really obstruct the readers’ understanding of a past traumatic event. As a matter of fact, a historical traumatic event can be lived by different individuals, different families, and different social groups, very much distinctively and variously. Thus, when a traumatic event from the past is reconsidered by a familial narrative, that same event cannot but become personalized in a way, i.e. becoming affective and intimate. But this does not mean that the authenticity and the original state of that traumatic event are necessarily modified or distorted.

As a matter of fact, I could not think of a traumatic event without thinking about the infinite range of bodily and emotional consequences that the experience of trauma may generate in a person. Being this range hypothetically infinite, since humans’ reactions to traumatic experiences (and life events in general) can never be totally presumed or anticipated, then it is clear that a kind of familial narration, which offers the readers an experience of authentic life, can only be enriching to the understanding of trauma as well as to the understanding of historical facts, history being generated by humans’ actions (and emotions).

On the other hand, it is also possible that a traumatic event shared by many people could show how particular tropes and images may be more recurrent than others, showing that a particular traumatic experience is likely to generate specific reactions in its survivors. This effect would allow the use of the same, or similar, tropes by narrators, when it comes to tell the story of a traumatic

past, which may offer a particular perspective on post-memory and may help identifying what a traumatic event left in its victims and survivors on an emotional, but also corporal, level.

There is yet a controversial issue about pictures related to a discourse of post-memory, which is that about how pictures may negatively affect the narration of a traumatic past event, for a various range of reasons. For example, Historian Susan A. Crane claims that the on-going circulation of atrocity pictures and images may end up banalizing all that they represent (Hirsch, 108). Also Professor Alison Landsberg insists on the fact that repeated images may become “empty signifiers, clichés that distance and protect us” (Hirsch, 108) from their authentic visual and emotional narration. On the other hand, Landsberg tries to imagine if repeated images may even have a re-traumatizing effect on their spectators, “making distant viewers into surrogate victims who, having seen the images so often, have adopted them into their own narratives and memories” (Hirsch, 108).

Seeing that repeated images can produce processes of reenactments and representations in the minds of post-generations, “repetition connects the second generation to the first, in its capacity to produce rather than screen the effect of trauma” (Hirsch, 108). Thus, when images are repeated through post-generations, they are likely not to lead to re-traumatization, as it would be likely to occur instead, if they were presented to direct survivors of trauma. On the contrary, when images are presented to second generations, they are likely to help these second generations to assimilate their inherited trauma and to work through it (Hirsch, 108). Moreover, images of a traumatic past need to be interpreted not much for what they disclose, but for how they do that, or how they fail to do so (Hirsch, 109).

Yet, the repetition of images in a discourse of traumatic past may as well lead to the act of trivializing what these same images carry along, especially when the information and the context of a traumatic past event are not clear to the viewer of an image. When this happens, repetition of images might be striking but, nonetheless, an ignorant individual, who is not aware of what these pictures are actually referring to, might easily become accustomed to see them and, consequently, these images may eventually lose their insight, which should instead always be remembered when looking at them.

Thus, to make use of pictures or images can be effectively helpful for post-generations to reflect upon the circumstances, but also the inexplicability and the non-sense, that traumatic past events may carry along, only when these same images are preceded by explications, discussions and confrontations; otherwise they would risk losing their power and, eventually, they might even become trivial. Therefore, images and pictures may have an important role in a post-memorial work, but its author or artist should always be able to find a balance between allowing the spectator

to imagine a traumatic past and preventing too easy an access to that same past, which might make traumatic memories less effective.

In this discussion on how photography and imagery is in general positively correlated to a better understanding of narration, it is also essential to refer to Barthes' notions of *studium* and *punctum* as well.

Studium refers to all the diverse cultural features that make up the context of a photograph or an image. In this sense, *studium* can be considered as a kind of general level of commitment that one feels when in contact with a picture, which is likely to function either as a socio-political testimony or as a historical scene about a particular past: "for it is culturally (this connotation is present in *studium*) that I participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions" (Barthes, 26).

On the other hand, the *punctum* functions as a specific point which breaks through the flow of the *studium* and enables a particular element of the image to prevail from all others, because of its importance for the spectator. Barthes interestingly describes the *punctum* as a "sting, speck, cut, little hole - and also a cast of the dice. A photograph 's *punctum* is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)" (27).

Yet, Barthes cares to precise that not all photographs (and images) always contain a *punctum*: "many photographs are, alas, inert under my gaze", says Barthes (27). The French author also points out that not to feel the *punctum* when looking at an image does not necessarily mean that the image considered is not interesting or important. Instead, what Barthes affirms is that there might be a polite-kind of interest generated by an image one sees, which is carried along by the *studium*. In this case, the *studium* is not likely to provoke an intense emotion in the spectator, as it occurs instead when the *punctum* is triggered (Barthes, 27).

Therefore, a *studium* is different from a *punctum* in the matter that the former may as well please or displease the spectator, but it does not prick the spectator. On the contrary, a *punctum* can be experienced when the spectator feels that a particular component of an image strikes him or her particularly. If put on an affective scale: "the *studium* is of the order of *liking*, not of *loving*; it mobilizes a half-desire, a demi-volition; it is the same sort of vague, slippery, irresponsible interest one takes in the people, the entertainments, the books, the clothes one finds *all right*" (Barthes, 27).

Moreover, just like the *studium*, the memorial *punctum* is also socio-culturally related, since it is triggered by collective and socio-cultural factors. An experience of *punctum* may then be more frequently triggered when the element that generates it comes from a familial and affective perspective, that enables the spectator to feel an encounter with his or her past personal story, his or her culture or even, more widely, his or her humanity.

Referring to the phenomena of the *punctum* and the *studium* in the case of Kaur, and the imagery she uses in her poetry, it seems that, in many of her poems, Kaur is able to raise her readers' attention and identification with her story, by triggering the *punctum*. Therefore, Kaur is surely able to render the feelings and the emotional consequences of post-memory through both her writing and her drawing. The process of identification of the reader to Kaur's narrative story is indeed also visually stimulated by the sketches that accompany Kaur's poetry, which have the task of visually representing what the poetry can only offer on a mental (and affective) level.

Female Post-Memory

When post-memory is related to female writing, post-memory's first aim should become that of revealing and restructuring stories which, otherwise, could pass by without being recognized and given the value they deserve. As a matter of fact, post-memory is also an advocate of justice, but not intended in its utmost juridical sense, rather in its morality and ethics. Indeed, it is morally just to spread the stories of those who came before us, when they had something worthy to tell and to transfer to post-generations who, in return, will end up being morally richer and more conscious of their origins.

It is in this sense that post-memory intertwines with feminism, in what becomes "a point of memory offering insights into how memory functions and is transmitted" (Hirsch, 179), which might be able to enlighten post-generations about the lives, the trauma and the intimacy of women who had to live through traumatic events.

When female writing meets post-memory, new shapes of a traumatic event can be generated, which might include particular images and narratives which are not to be found elsewhere in post-memory, if not in female post-memory. A female kind of post-memory may more likely involve a display of domestic scenes in its narration, as well as a deep consideration of the public space in which a traumatic event happened. Nonetheless, to adopt a female kind of post-memorial narration does not imply that post-memory will be preferred or better received by women than by men; on the contrary, when feminism and female writing in general are correlated to post-memory, the theme of post-memory itself simply becomes richer of new shades, derived from the differences in context, attitude and mindset of women, which might highlight some aspects of post-memory that a male-oriented context might exclude a priori.

Female post-memory is then another component of the whole of post-memory, in which the more components are found, the more detailed post-memorial construction can be. Therefore,

feminist post-memory can work as a new method of reconstructing memory, in which women may be able to transmit memories which had before then been silenced or hidden.

In *The Generation of Postmemory*, Hirsch introduces the reader with examples of some of the most important female post-memorial writers who have contributed, and are contributing, to giving shape to post-memory, by the perspective of women. These female authors have all shown to give an important role to imagery and visual aids in relation to post-memorial narration, just like Rupi Kaur does in her works. One of these authors is Toni Morrison who, in her book *Beloved* (Alfred A. Knopf, United States, 1987), highlights how hard and even controversial it is to pass to post-generations the memories of a traumatic event, as slavery is in the case of Morrison's story. In *Beloved*, the bodily wound is considered as the sign of the incommunicability of trauma, the skin and the body being two elements that cannot be transmitted to others, but are instead utterly intimate and personal.

In any case, post-generations are forced to feel the difference to their previous generations in very ambivalent terms. On the one hand, they need to identify themselves with their ancestors, desiring that same traumatic event which would generate an innate connection between them; on the other hand, they understand the impossibility of such a dynamic to occur. As a matter of fact, trauma seems to amplify and to puzzle the generational gap between survivors of trauma and post-generations, and, as I will show in relation to Rupi Kaur's poetry (especially in the relationship between mother and daughter) the risks of re-memory, reenactment and repetition of trauma are quite high.

Re-memory is especially an important element in this discussion because it involves the certainty that traumatic memories will haunt not only their direct survivors, but also their post-generations, in a phenomenon that is not mere *identification*, but rather one's *transposition* into another's memory. And it is only when transposition becomes narration that re-memory can become post-memory. When memories of a traumatic past are worked through into stories and images offered in the present, then they will allow a mediated kind of post-memorial remembrance (Hirsch, 83).

Indeed, what seems to be most difficult in post-memorial writing is to find a form of empathic mediation that can transmit the traumatic memory from the past without wounding and re-traumatizing post-generations. This issue has been the central core of post-memorial feminist writing in the last decades, and of author Tatana Kellner too. As in Morrison's *Beloved*, also Kellner's post-memory in *71125-Fifty Years of Silence* (Women's Studio Workshop, Rosendale, NY, 1992) has its focus on body: here, the body is directly involved in post-memory because of the concentration camp numeral code on her parents' arms.

In Kellner's work, the author tells the story of her parents by structuring her text on the paradox of recognition and non-recognition of her parents' tattoos from their traumatic past. The reason behind this decision is that visual images are able to amplify and intensify her parents' oral testimony. Thus, for Kellner, as it will be for Rupi Kaur in most recent years, "visuality is both a vehicle and a figure for the transmission of sense memory" (Hirsch, 90).

What is most strikingly visual in Kellner's *Fifty Years of Silence* is that the text itself becomes visual since it has to adapt to the structure of the book pages, which literally have an arm-shaped hole in the middle, representing the arm of Kellner's parents, carrying along the terrible tattoo. Therefore, Kellner's visual strategy aims at producing a body and mental reactive response in her readers, since the arm-shaped hole in the middle of the pages transmit a sense of her parents' wounded skin, which would be otherwise difficult to transmit only through words on a text.

Another example of an affiliative-like post-memorial work is *Written in Memory: Portraits of the Holocaust* (Chronicle Books, United States, 1997). This is a work of post-memory in which the male author, Jeffrey Wolin, is the narrator and the visual mediator of memories, which are again widely based on the ambivalent relationship between mothers and daughters in the context of memory transmission. Wolin's work aims at inviting his readers to join the familial remembrance of a mother's traumatic past. Wolin is able to achieve this by means of photographic writing, which enables memories to surpass the limits of a familial structure and to be affiliatively witnessed *by adoption*.

Therefore, Wolin might aim to highlight that a feminist kind of post-memory does not absolutely imply that only women may be able to appreciate this particular kind of post-memory. On the other hand, post-memory can only become richer when it is based on various perspectives and diverse sources, since the possibility of transposition and allo-identification (the identification with the other) cannot but be facilitated by the use of a diverse range of perspectives.

In conclusion, it is the whole mix of texts, images, media that are consistent in the authors I have just presented, that are able to create a strong and innovative textuality which should be appreciated by the reader.

A Post-Memorial Legacy of Objects, Traditions and Places

There is yet another element that might support the reconstruction of memory in post-generations, which is the whole legacy of material objects, traditional practices and oral stories which contribute to the remembrance of previous generations, when they are reenacted by second generations.

An example of this legacy and its importance in post-memory is offered by the book *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezín* (Jason Arson Inc, United States, 1993), edited by De Silva and based on the story of Mina Pächter and other female prisoners in the concentration camp of Terezín (Theresienstadt). These women got together and decided to create an actual recipe book from their infant past, which would become an object of remembrance of prewar-time memory, which should be sent to Mina Pächter's daughter in Palestine.

It is not surprising that the recipe book from Terezín was a product of female co-work since the transmission of memory from a generation to another is very much influenced by gender, social group, individual characteristics, which all provide different means and strategies of remembrance, amplifying and enhancing our consideration of the past. Regarding this, Hirsch points out that even though the recipes were actually collected by one woman, nonetheless they are the creation of a shared work, which involved women in the creation of a collective resistance which should reach Pächter's daughter.

It is then possible to say that this work is in itself collective and affiliative, as it aims at sharing traditional practices with post-generations, which might indeed risk losing their connections to the past, especially if their mothers are imprisoned in a concentration camp: "as a collective work, it also invites broader forms of affiliation and attachment within and across generations" (Hirsch, 180).

Also Aleida Assmann considers the way in which objects and places have a role in the reconstruction of memory. In *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* (Beck C.H., 3. Auflage, 2014), Assmann argues that neither places nor objects actually carry along qualities of the past, what they can do instead is to hold all that one projects onto them. When we have to leave from a place or have to leave an object behind, we also take a part of that projection with us, but half of it will remain with the object or the place itself (Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* 122).

In order to make this concept more clear, Assmann uses the Greek notion of *symbolon*, which was a symbolic object used when it came to drawing up a legal contract. The symbolic object was broken in halves and each party in the contract was given a piece of the object, so that they could reunite the broken *symbolon* in the future. Only when the object would be whole again, then the legal contract could be ratified. Indeed, return journeys and the return to memorial objects can have the effect of such a symbolic reconnection and, when this reconnection occurs, memories regenerate. Thus, objects and places are able to trigger remembrance, both emotionally and bodily.

Along with the objects from one's past, also places have a huge impact on post-generations' imagination of a traumatic event, which they could not be there to live firsthand. Yet, places cannot

be carried along, as objects can be; this means that places might be less likely to bridge the gap between a past familial traumatic event and post-generations, if compared, for instance, to objects and their stronger, physical, inner testimony.

Anyway, the kind of traditional and practical transmission of memory achieved through objects, places, pictures, oral traditions proved to be a typical way of transferring memories during totalitarian regimes, diaspora and in all those cases in which popular traditions were put at risk. As a matter of fact, art, music, theatre, literature are all means which allow access to others' viewpoints, others' stories and others' past memories. To produce works of this kind, say music pieces, poetry, drawings, oral testimonies, means that whoever generated them, no matter the dehumanizing condition they were living in, could still manage to feel like a human being, like a part of the whole, which should not be forgotten so easily and, therefore, aimed at passing their story on to post-generations, in order to educate others and prevent such acts to occur again. Such works are material or oral testimony of human resilience, collaboration, love, hope which may survive even in the most horrible place and time.

Thus, a work of post-memory should group as many people as possible under the cause of remembering and passing on one's familial and personal story, since our familial story is what we ourselves descend from. Indeed, the act of female, familial, collaborative and affiliative remembrance is also what proves to be of central importance in Kaur's poetry.

Chapter II

Traumatic Post-Memory in Rupi Kaur's Poetry

The theme of post-memory in Rupi Kaur's poetry is related to the discourses of gender, race and ethnicity. Being raised as a diasporic Sikh girl in Canada resulted in Kaur feeling torn between two cultures, one that is still quite conservative when it comes to how women are treated in society, while the other is more liberal but does not prevent women from considering themselves not beautiful enough, not clever enough, not brave enough. In her poetry, Kaur considers both perspectives: that of her country of origin and that of her adoptive one.

The issue of post-memory is linked to that of gender as Kaur remembers the lives of her mother, her grandmother and her great-grandmothers whilst writing down her poetry. The lives of these women are ennobled by Rupi Kaur, as she understands that the freedom she is experiencing nowadays, as an independent woman, is the result of the claims and the resistance that, step by step, the women before her demanded and obtained.

On the same line is also Kaur's awareness that, as a Sikh girl, the possibilities given to her of studying and writing were not only achieved by herself because of her personal will; on the contrary, they were offered to her because someone before her had worked to get them, even fought for them. By disclosing the story of her life and that of her parents and ancestors, the poet aims to create a sense of solidarity among her readers, who might be able to grasp the power of being united against inequality and injustice.

As a matter of fact, it is when people get together that they can effectively show their disapproval against unfairness and have more chances of obtaining the rights they demand. It was indeed in a context of solidarity and binding that Kaur herself was able to accept her situation as a diasporic Sikh girl, taken away from her homeland and transplanted into a distant country. Moreover, it is also by acknowledging her personal resilience, that of her mother and that of her ancestors, that Kaur understands that to experience freedom and independence as a brown woman is not to be taken for granted, since many generations of women before her did not have such a possibility.

In this second chapter of my dissertation, I am therefore going to present the themes that characterize Kaur's poetry, being written by a diasporic Sikh girl. Consequently, the discourses on gendered violence, feminist resistance, post-colonialism and diaspora will be the focus of the following paragraphs, in which I wish to present the cases of other writers, who prove that post-

memory is a universal result of a previous situation of crisis, from which one is challenged to find one's own resilience and resistance, as it is in Rupi Kaur's case.

Gendered Violence

Post-colonial India has been subject to extreme violence since 1947, the year of the Indian Partition, when India and Pakistan became two separate states by British will: "the partition of India was based on an infamous two-nation theory, which proposed that Hindus and Muslims, fundamentally different in every regard, were two separate nations and should therefore inhabit different states." (Misri, 7). The actual border dividing Pakistan and India was drawn by the British only after the announcement of the independence of India and Pakistan. Because of this, the local populations did not exactly know in which state they would live, at least not until the official announcement came: violence, insurgencies and terrorism started to spread then, between the territories of India and Pakistan, often intertwined with forms of gendered violence: "historians now estimate that between 12 million and 17 million people were displaced from their homes, about a million people died, and more than seventy-five thousand women were abducted" (Misri, 7).

Even after decades, the mass violence that was originated after Partition led people to perceive a united Indian state as a colonizing entity, just as the British Empire previously was. The people's perception of India as a colonizing entity had caused the origin of a communal sense of alienation from their own nation, especially in non-Hindu parts of India. Thus, for many people, the state of India does not represent a safe home anymore, if a home at all. Yet, from the point of view of the central government, India must be home for anybody who lives within its borders (Misri, 5-6).

As a consequence of this social disruption, many insurgent groups have tried to claim back their independence, but all attempts were met "with the most brutal counterinsurgent violence by the Indian state (the world's largest arms importer), which continues even after popular support for militancy has receded in recent years" (Misri, 6). Therefore, the issue of gendered violence has to be seen as a product of a national kind of violence, which the population of India seems to have experienced, directly or indirectly, on their skin, especially after 1947 Partition.

In particular, women became a symbolic and literal target of this violence: women of all religious backgrounds, no matter if Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, were sexually abused, mutilated, disfigured and even killed, by men of the other religious groups. Moreover, women became the victims of another form of violence, which remained unacknowledged for a long time, i.e. "the preemptive sacrifice of women by their families in order to save family and community honor"

(Misri, 55). Because of the idea that women carried the honor of the family within themselves, wives, daughters and sisters started to be silenced, beaten up, even killed, and not only by men, but by other women of the same family as well.

The notion of honor became so effective in the context of post-partition India that women themselves began to commit suicide, shooting themselves, swallowing drugs and eating crushed glass, in order not to spoil their family honor (Misri, 55-56). All these stories of violence and death were not “unknown or unremembered. Tales of women going to honorable deaths with stoic resolve have been only too pervasive in the South Asian cultural imaginary” (Misri, 56), so that they almost became the norm.

Yet, by the end of 20th century “this memory’s truth has come to be vigorously contested by feminist scholars, writers, and filmmakers, who have produced their own narratives to transform the ways in which these deaths have been popularly remembered” (Misri, 56). As a matter of fact, men’s narrations of women’s killings, rapes and suicides, for the sake of honor, seemed to highlight the act of *martyrdom*, *duty*, *bravery* and *sacrifice*, carried out by these women; as if their deaths were essential and could not be questionable (Misri, 57). On the other hand, when women started writing and discussing about such actions, they were not related to such terms as *duty* or *bravery* anymore. On the contrary, *violence* had become the main motif related to such acts (Misri, 56). Indeed, the new feminist discourse, which originated in the second half of the 20th century, had a strong effect because it challenged the perspectives and narrations of men, and such a feminist interpretation of the violence perpetrated against women is present in Rupi Kaur’s collections of poetry too.

One of the most recurrent issues in Rupi Kaur’s works is for example sexual abuse. The first sexual traumatic experience that the reader is presented with in *milk and honey* is in the second poem of *the hurting*, in which Kaur recreates the scene of her first kiss as a child. She describes the boy who first kissed her as carrying “the smell of / starvation on his lips / which he picked up from / his father feasting on his mother at 4 a.m. / he was the first boy / to teach me my body was / for giving to those that wanted / [...] / and my god / did I feel as empty / as his mother at 4:25 a.m.” (12). With this portrayal, the poet wants to highlight the experience of feeling sexually used, as if she were just an empty body with no emotions, which the man may decide to make use of, whenever he wants, and she would not have the right to oppose, because women’s bodies would not be entirely theirs, they would be of whoever wants them instead. Therefore, this poem points out an essential issue in the modern feminist manifesto: women’s re-earn of their own bodies, which have often been considered as a means for men’s satisfaction.

One finds a strong critique against the issue of sexual abuse, and sexism in general, also in the third poem of *the hurting*, in which the author accompanies her verses by a sketch that represents the stylized figure of a naked woman with open legs:



(*milk and honey*, 13)

This poem aims to represent women's loss of their bodies, as if their bodies were actual properties of men, which women only carry as void flesh.

Kaur's critique against patriarchy is then another central point in *milk and honey's* section *the hurting*, in which the author criticizes how patriarchy acts negatively even on little girls:

every time you
tell your daughter
you yell at her
out of love
you teach her to confuse
anger with kindness
which seems like a good idea
till she grows up to
trust men who hurt her
cause they look so much
like you

- to fathers with daughters
(*milk and honey*, 19)

In this poem, Kaur argues that patriarchy and violence might be even more detrimental to children than to adults. As a matter of fact, if children are used to violence and patriarchal behaviors, then they will grow up considering such attitudes as in the norm, and would repeat those same behaviors as grown-ups. Moreover, the issues of patriarchy and abuse influence children of both genders. As Kaur herself claims too, if girls are used to be yelled at, or even physically hurt, they are likely to look for men who treat them like that, when they become adults. On the other hand, if boys are used to witness such a behavior on the female gender, then it is only natural that they will grow up considering such a conduct as normal and even necessary.

An abuse of patriarchy may even result in normalizing acts of physical violence or sexual abuse towards women, which are instead to condemn firmly. This is indeed the issue of Kaur's twelve poem in *the hurting*:

sex takes the consent of two
if one person is lying there not doing anything
cause they are not ready
or not in the mood
or simply don't want to
yet the other is having sex
with their body it's not love
it is rape
(*milk and honey*, 22)

Rupi Kaur is indeed one of the many female writers who aim at raising awareness on the issues of patriarchy and gendered violence, in order to shed light on issues that have been silenced for too long.

A Survivor's Story and What The Body Remembers

In the history of narration of the female body related to gendered violence, a remarkable narrative example is that of the Indian author Krishna Mehta. In *Kashmir 1947: A Survivor's Story* (2005), Mehta focuses on the accounts of women who experienced war and violence during the time of the Indian partition. For instance, Mehta's personal case involves her husband being murdered by enemy raiders, and her consequent survival escape in the territory of new-born India, carrying along

her six children. Mehta's work is important in a discourse of gendered violence because the true story it tells is based in Kashmir, a region that, along with its people, has been marginalized for years from Partition studies, which tend to focus more on regions such as Punjab, Rupri Kaur's homeland, or Bengal (Misri, 58).

In her work, Mehta narrates the violence that women had to face during their escape from Kashmir, during which they were abducted, raped, forcefully converted; some of them even committed suicide instead of becoming victims of any of those acts of violence (Misri, 65). Therefore, Mehta tells the reader how she decided to take two things with her on her journey towards home, which would prove to be helpful during her escape: a bed sheet and a swordstick (Misri, 65). What led her to take these two things with her was the thought, or premonition, that if any danger showed up on her way towards freedom, she could try and kill herself and her children, before a worse destiny should come upon them: "I was willing to kill myself and the girls, if the worst happened [...] I told my sons, '...if they are going to shoot you, die bravely... And to Veena I said, 'If it is too hard to face death, just remember how Indian women of old went to their death without flinching'" (Mehta, 28- 29).

In Mehta's speech to her children, it is clear how the role of honor played such an essential role in the lives of Indian women and men. Mehta even reminds her daughter Veena of the ancient practices of Indian women who, after their husbands' death, killed themselves, usually by burning alive, "without flinching" (Mehta, 29): this practice is called *sati* and was still undertaken by women of Rajput up until the 20th century; the practice of committing group suicides before being captured and raped by enemies, called *jauhar*, was also carried out by the Rajput Hindu caste (Misri, 65). The example of these two practices highlights Mehta's consideration of how important it was, even in 1947, to keep your honor safe, in spite of death: "these invocations reveal how existing practices and the patriarchal narratives around them shaped the violent practices during the Partition as well" (Misri, 65).

Yet, Mehta's opinion about such violent practices seem to change after her journey towards freedom:

What I saw there I shall never forget. Before that I had only heard about the women who had jumped into the river; for the first time I saw the tragic spectacle of humanity surrendering life so willingly and for no great cause at that. Some women still stood on the edge of the bank with forlorn looks on their faces and a few others were knee-deep in the water. They threw their children first into the rushing river and seemed impervious to the shrieks and yells of their own infants... The mothers looked on vacantly in front of them. Prolonged suffering had wiped out all colour and emotion from their faces. Then they

jumped in themselves. Meanwhile, the children upon the bank... ran to their mothers' sides and clasped them around the knees with a strength that comes only with despair. The raiders toiled hard not to let these women die. They cajoled and they threatened; they even drew their guns and shot at some of them who were beyond reach. But the desire for self-immolation was too great and they all went to their death with a seeming lack of pain, pity or feeling.

(Mehta, 40)

From this account by Mehta, it is clear how the martyrdom that these women used to undertake was not characterized by the strong willingness that men's narration typically link to such acts of immolation. It is indeed part of a male narration of these acts to highlight women's willingness to carry out such deeds but, as one can acknowledge by Mehta's account, women did not even seem to be in control of themselves, when they undertook such acts (Misri, 66).

Thus, from the concept of fearlessness of women, which pervades male narrations and that gives the idea that women perform these acts in total self-consciousness, one shifts to an idea of women who do undertake such acts, but not willingly; on the contrary, they seem to be pervaded by helplessness and a lack of humanity. Interestingly, the description of these women made my Mehta seems to intertwine well with the figure of the *Musselmann* (Misri, 66), i.e. the figure of the soulless skin-and-bone camp prisoner which pervades the scene in Holocaust writing, who was not able to observe, nor to remember, nor to express his or her feelings and thoughts. Therefore, Mehta's testimony proved that, in the moment of self-immolation, these women were as if taken out of their bodies: they were absent from themselves.

As a matter of fact, Mehta's final consideration of committing suicide leads her to eventually avoid her project of a honorable self-immolation, and the only reason behind her shift of perspective on the matter comes from her conviction that she has to stay alive for the sake of her husband. Indeed, Mehta says to her son: "Don't you think I could jump into the river if I wanted to? But do you forget your father? When Papa hears about it, he will be utterly miserable. I must know first what has befallen him. Then only I can know what to do" (Mehta, 42). Thus, "in Mehta's writing, survival becomes a duty not to herself, nor even to her children, but to her husband" (Misri, 68). Therefore, Mehta's perspective is still impregnated with patriarchal discourse, since her salvation aims at her husband's sake, and not to her personal one or to that of her children.

Another remarkable text to take into consideration when it comes to womens' account on gendered violence during Partition is *What the Body Remembers* (1999) by the diasporic Sikh Canadian writer Shauna Singh Baldwin, who tells the story of Partition specifically from the point of view of the Sikhs, to whom Rupi Kaur also belongs.

Because of the particular perspective taken by Baldwin, her work reflects not only a critique against gendered violence, but also a critique against India as a nation-state which betrayed the population of the Sikhs. As a matter of fact, Baldwin publishes her work some years after Operation Bluestar took place, during which the Indian central state occupied the holy Golden Temple of the Sikhs in Amritsar, which triggered the riots, the mass violence and eventually the assassination of India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, after which even more violence added up (Misri, 69).

The way in which *What the Body Remembers* reveals gendered violence focuses on the element of the woman's body and its representation. Baldwin's work tells the story of a girl named Roop, who lives in Punjab before the time of Indian Partition. Roop has always been told that marriage and maternity are going to be her duties as a girl, so she accepts the marriage proposal of a middle-aged landowner named Sardarji, who had to find another wife after his first wife Satya found out that she could not have children. Satya's reaction to Roop and Sardarji's marriage is quite intense: she commits suicide right before Partition occurs. After Satya's death and after the announcement of Partition, the newly married couple has to leave Pakistan, in which they are now officially standing, according to the partition which had just been drawn. Therefore, they start their journey to reach a newly shaped India, in order to start their family life there.

It is interesting to point out that Baldwin's work reflects very much on the power of storytelling. By bringing together accounts from many characters in the work, Baldwin is able to pursue the pedagogical aim of writing, which is that of teaching, and not the mere telling of a story. Indeed, the several and diverse accounts of the characters in the book offer a wide range of opinions and ideas about Partition, violence and India in general, which may help the reader to reflect upon these themes as well. And even though Baldwin's story is dominated by the role of men, nonetheless Baldwin is able to offer a feminist framework to her work, which reveals an important kind of feminist discourse (Misri, 72).

The old narrations of violence perpetrated against the Sikhs since the time of the Muslim tyrants trigger an instinct psychic and physical reaction in the Sikh community imagined by Baldwin:

the forty Sikhs who stood by the Guru at his last battle against a Mughal tyrant; Sikhs cut limb from limb by Muslim tyrants; two sons of the tenth Guru bricked up alive in a wall for their refusal to convert to Islam; martyrs whose scalps were removed; men who were tied to wheels and their bodies broken to pieces; men and women who were cut by saws and flayed alive by Mughal emperors for their faith, but did not convert to Islam
(Baldwin, 50).

According to Misri: “it is through such remembrance rituals and narrative practices that the memory of historical violence, and of other violated bodies, descends into the body of the listener and hardens into instinct” (Misri, 73). Therefore, it is no coincidence that, in Baldwin’s novel, Sardarji is very much worried and scared of the Muslims, because of the memories emerging from himself of his mother’s narrations about the tyrant Muslims, and because of his visit to the Golden Temple of Amritsar which, he remembers, showed paintings, poems and stories about the violence that the Sikhs had to experience on their skin. Consequently, Sardarji’s body has become a sort of an archive of communal Sikh memories (Misri, 73).

It is indeed because of the legacy of communal Sikh memories that women are convinced of their task of procreation: it is indeed this conception about the woman that had led Roop’s mother to death, whilst giving birth to yet another child. This ideology about the woman as a bearer of children is also what led Roop herself to become Sardarji’s wife, and what pushed Satya to committing suicide. Therefore, in Baldwin’s novel, it is the woman’s fertility and capacity of giving birth that literally decides her path in life. The most tragic moment in the novel in which this ideology shows its utmost insensitivity and insensibility is when the women of Pari Darwaza are sorted out on the basis of such capacities. This horrible sort of estimation will prove to be mortal for Roop’s sister-in-law Kusum who, during the confusion created by Partition, is killed, gets her womb removed and her body ripped limb to limb.

In the novel, Kusum’s tragic destiny is followed by the accounts of Kusum’s husband and father-in-law to Roop, regarding Kusum’s death. Roop is indeed curious to know what happened to her sister-in-law, and also to the maidservant of the house, Gujri. The narrations of the two men are led in a kind of heroic mode, which highlights “the valour of the dead woman through a strict disavowal of fear and pain” (Misri, 74). Such male narrations will then be followed by women’s narrations, which, “on the other hand, necessarily engage with the gendered realities of their lived experiences - even though they might appear broadly to resemble the dominant narration of the men, they depart at significant points to challenge male narrations, if only implicitly” (Misri 74). Especially, “ethnographers have found that it is often the silences of women (often signaling non-agreement for instance), rather than what it explicitly said, that draw the tangent from male narrations” (Misri, 74).

The complex male-female mix of descriptions and storytelling that Baldwin offers in her book is the starting point from which to acknowledge the difference between male and female conceptions of gendered violence and of the woman’s role in communal life. Indeed, the way in which Kusum’s husband, Jeevan, reacts to Kusum’s horrible death shows how the man has a clear, almost stereotyped, idea in mind, when it comes to thinking about such violent acts against women:

rape occurs first, and only afterwards is a woman killed or mutilated. What Jeevan is indeed wondering in Mehta's story is why Kusum was not raped, but only killed and cut into pieces: "Jeevan's own reckoning that the dismemberment was a waste if rape was not involved reveals his own clear understanding of what such an act would and should properly comprise in order to be effective: first rape, then mutilation" (Misri, 77).

Jeevan's confusion about the situation that befell his wife derives from his belief that rape is actually an act of "violation between men, one man's message to another, rather than an embodied violation against the woman in question" (Misri, 77), meaning that, when a wife is raped, or killed, or mutilated, it is the dishonor brought to the husband by the rape of his wife which makes the husband the real victim of such a deed. Thus, according to such a view, Kusum's death is only considered as a means through which Jeevan's masculinity as a Sikh man was violated when his wife was killed and ripped limb to limb. Therefore, Jeevan's point of view in this novel is merely patriarchal and sexist, since it does not take into consideration the suffering and the fear that Kusum must have endured, as well as the outrage to her corpse.

A different, yet still uttermost patriarchal, viewpoint on Kusum's death is that of her father-in-law, Bachan Singh. It is only while presenting Bachan Singh's perspective on the matter, that Baldwin reveals who the murderer was, i.e. Bachan Singh himself, who describes Kusum's killing as necessary, because of the dishonor she brought to their family for not being able to bear children.

Baldwin describes the way in which Bachan Singh depicts the scene of the killing in a way that highlights the murderer's grief and fear, along with his tears, when he is about to undertake the unavoidable deed, as if Bachan Singh were another victim of that situation and, again, Kusum were the original creator of the dishonor that was lingering in their family:

"She turned her back, so I should not see her face, took off her chunni to bare her neck before me, and then..." Here he doubles over in grief and tears - a reminder of the affective complexities underlying male self-constructions of victimhood - but then resumes: "I raised my kirpan high above her head. Vaheguru did not stop it; it came down. Her lips still moved, as mine did, murmuring 'Vaheguru, Vaheguru', as her head rolled from my stroke" (Mehta, 456)

Bachan's testimony to Roop highlights that fatalism, fiction, imagination, even surrealism are necessary elements when it comes to give a meaning to such a death as the one that befell Kusum (Misri, 80). In Bachan's speech, even God (Vaheguru) is invoked as the actual force that encourages Bachan to kill Kusum, almost as if Bachan wanted to convince himself that the deed he was about to undertake was righteous and just.

It is only through the descriptive testimonies of Jeevan and Bachan that the reader is presented with the death of Kusum. As a consequence, Kusum's dead body "appears once more as an image, somewhat fuzzy, and not entirely distinct in its contours" (Misri, 84). The process by which a dead body becomes an image is called *percepticide* by theatre scholar Diana Taylor (*Percepticide*, 1997), whose term refers to the disappearance of the violence towards a woman or a man, which, from being physical and real, is transformed into pure metaphor, along the lines of a myth (Misri, 84).

Thus, by offering such male narrations of gendered violence, as the ones of Jeevan and Bachan, Baldwin "attempts to release the woman's injured body from its deployment as pure signifier" (Misri, 85); on the contrary, women's bodies are to be considered as memorial archives, which have to project the violence suffered by women not in a metaphorical or mythical way, but as realistically as possible.

Another possible interpretation of Kusum's death in Baldwin's narration might be that Kusum's dead body may also represent the suffering of the Indian nation-state, which, as it happened to Kusum's body, was humiliated, violated, dehumanized, when Partition occurred. Indeed: "the trope of the dismembered body allegorizes most pointedly the violent effects of the prior troping of women's bodies in the discourses of patriarchy – a trope for nation, a trope for community, a trope for male honor. After all, it is the prior troping of woman as nation that makes the woman's dissected body meaningful as a trope for Partition" (Misri, 85).

Nakedness as a Weapon

In 2004, a group of Meitei women, the Meitei being a community living in North-East India, set up a naked protest in Manipur, a state that has been claiming independence from India for many years. This group of women were protesting the torture, rape and consequent murder of Manorama, a girl who had been in custody of the Indian Army, which had accused her of militancy, for protesting naked (Misri, 113).

Again, in 2007, a twenty-two-year-old woman from the state of Gujarat showed up in her underwear in the streets, followed by TV cameras. She was holding a baseball bat in one hand, and in the other a rose. She was protesting police inaction after her unheard complaints about her in-laws harassing her mentally and physically, and even threatened to kill her if she would not be able to bear a male child for their son (Misri, 113).

Both these protests were received with good sympathy from commentators in India, even though there was not much analysis about why they had to protest naked. As a matter of fact,

nakedness carries along particular meanings which may vary in specific contexts. It is undeniable that nakedness is a breach in the everyday norms of Indian femininity. Yet, there seems to have been an increase of representations of naked women, whose nakedness stands for their shamelessness (Misri, 114).

Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi offers such a rendition of nakedness in her short story *Draupadi*, in which the story is set during the rebellion of the peasant low-caste cultivators against their landowners in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal. The protagonist is Draupadi who, along with her husband, is participating in guerrillas against the landowners. In the story, Indian Army forces are fighting the rebellion quite intensely, given that the rebellious are attacking police stations, stealing weapons and arms and are even trying to kill their landowners (Misri, 114-115).

During the conflict, Draupadi's husband is killed, and Draupadi is caught as prisoner by the army. During the time of Draupadi's arrest, Senanayak, a government specialist, tells the men in the army to "make her. *Do the needful*" (Devi, 195), referring to Draupadi, who is then raped. After this vicious act, Draupadi is called at the presence of Senanayak and is thrown her clothes back. Draupadi responds to him by tearing her clothes apart, refusing to cover herself up, since to cover her body would mean to hide the signs and the proofs of the rape the men of the army carried out on her (Misri, 115).

Indeed, Draupadi's will is to show to Senanayak the injuries she is carrying on her body; that's why she addresses to Senanayak with such words: "You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (Devi, 196). Draupadi even challenges Senanayak by spitting blood on his clothes after telling him: "What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you cloth me again? Are you a man? [...] There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my cloth on me. What more can you do?" (Devi, 196). With her speech, Draupadi is challenging Senanayak and is pushing him into reconsidering the act that he ordered his men to undertake on her. Senanayak's patriarchy and masculinity seem to fall over because of Draupadi's speech and unarmed nakedness.

Therefore, "the moment at which the raped subject refuses the obedient, shame-ridden femininity that is scripted for her is the moment when administrative masculinity falls apart, if only for a moment" (Misri, 117). Thus, Draupadi represents here the disruption between a patriarchal-male conception of femininity and the authentic power of femininity that she is showing through her naked body and her stinging words. Indeed, Draupadi's body represents the unknown in the eyes of Senanayak, even though Draupadi's body has just been used, and abused, by many. Therefore, Draupadi's almost theatrical performance instills in her "the power of signification over

her own raped body by rendering that body *unreadable* - resistant to patriarchal scripting, while producing its own script” (Misri, 118).

The utmost confusion and incomprehensibility of Senanayak derives from the disruption between what Draupadi’s body looks like and how Draupadi’s body is acting, because “Draupadi *looks* like a victim but *acts* like an agent” (Misri, 118). Indeed, standing naked in front of Senanayak and the men who abused her is like using a weapon against them, a weapon that they don’t have anything to counterattack with. By this act of naked protest, Draupadi is refusing to be characterized as a victim, and is even refusing to be seen as the weakest part in the events that have just occurred. On the contrary, after her speech and her naked protest, Draupadi is prevailing over the men who captured her, who are instead in defense, while Draupadi is in attack with the only weapon she can hold, i.e. her nakedness and her pride as a woman.

The examples of Draupadi’s protest, along with the ones held by the Meitei women and the woman in Gujarat that I have presented above, can be considered as theatrical modes of showing one’s discomfort, and anger even, in a way that is not easily forgettable. As a matter of fact, the aim of all these protests was to destabilize the patriarchal role that used authority against women in order to highlight the inequality of genders. The success of these attempts is to be searched in the analysis of the responses of the local, regional, national and transnational communities, which might encourage or discourage such acts, on the basis of their authenticity and meaning. Moreover, the success of such protests can also be measured by the weight of the discussions and the debates that such protests contribute to originate (Misri, 124).

The (fictional and non-fictional) protests I have discussed about seem to have been successful, since they broke with traditional discourses of patriarchy which may, in extreme cases, represent rape, and even murder, as a necessary event in the life of a woman who is not responding to the demands of the patriarchal community she lives in. As a matter of fact, Draupadi’s protest is shifting the reader’s attention and conscience from what is considered to be a necessity in patriarchal discourse to what instead rape actually is, i.e. an atrocious act. The naked protests of the Meitei women and the woman in Gujarat also aimed at shifting the perspective from a discourse of shame and victimhood, which are the representative terms in a discourse of patriarchal vision of womanhood, to a discourse of resistance and pride.

Gendered cultural narrative has typically reproduced the roles of “women as subjects by shame, fear and violence, and men as subjects of aggression backed up by physical prowess” (Misri, 131). Therefore, when used in sign of protest, nakedness can really be a militant way to reclaim back women’s role in society, in which women have too often been given preconceived scripts, which has typically placed women in a position of inferiority and defense, in opposition to the role

of superiority and attack, typical of the men. We must yet be careful in positioning the woman's body in such a role, since, if it is not invested in an authentic protest, it might trigger those same discourses of violence, sexuality, penetrability that feminists have been trying to fight in the last decades (Misri, 132).

A more recent rendition of the idea of the powerful naked female body is that present in Kaur's poetry, for example in poem thirty-one of *the hurting*, in *milk and honey*:

apparently it is ungraceful of me
to mention my period in public
cause the actual biology
of my body is too real

it is okay to sell what's
between a woman's legs
more than it is okay to
mention its inner workings

the recreational use of
this body is seen as
beautiful while
its nature is
seen as ugly
(*milk and honey*, 177)

In this poem, the author idealizes the monthly ritual of menstruation as a symbol of femininity which should not be disregarded or hidden when it comes to define femininity and womanhood. As Rupi Kaur argues in the poem, it would be vulgar of her to mention her period in public, as if the biological construction of the womanly body were too real, and rough, that no mention has to be done about it, since the modern Western model of femininity has been shaped and represented by very much different standards and elements.

Like Draupadi, the female protagonist of Devi's short story, also Rupi Kaur is aiming at re-shaping the male consideration of the woman and her body. With the following poem, Kaur wants to break the tradition of considering the woman on the mere basis of her exterior beauty, showing that, even biologically, a woman is much more than that, and that a female body is, as Draupadi proved to the men who had raped her, much more powerful than weapons and arms; it is:

[...] a museum
of natural disasters
can you grasp how
stunning that is
(*milk and honey*, 173)

Devi and Rupi Kaur's narrations share a common "battleground" then: they are both fighting against diverse patriarchal expectations on women: in the case of Devi's character Draupadi, she is fighting against the violence perpetrated to women's bodies only because they are women; on the other hand, Kaur fights against the expectations that society has on women's bodies, only because they are women.

Rupi Kaur's Post-Modern Feminist Resistance

With her poetry, Rupi Kaur aims at spreading a post-modern kind of feminist resistance against gendered violence and patriarchal expectations. As argued by bell hooks, feminism is "the struggle to end sexist oppression" (bell hooks, 26); and as expanded by Pamela B. June, the kind of resistance which is necessary in order for this aim to be reached is the unity of women, since it is only in unity that women may be able to put an end to patriarchy and sexist oppression (June, 3). As June's expansion of bell hooks' definition suggests, the bond among women can become the means through which to contest and reverse sexist oppression. Indeed, to create a bond means to create connection and solidarity. Consequently, feminist bonds may include any type of relationship among women which may result in female empowerment and the weakening, up to the annihilation, of patriarchal authority.

The concept of feminism intertwines with that of post-modernism as the latter is also focused on challenging authorities and conventions. Post-modernism can be considered both in a stylistic and temporal sense as the whole of artistic strategies, especially disjointed narratives, shifting perspectives, challenges to authorities, which have been occurring in literature and artistic expression in general starting from the 40s-50s. Post-modern art and literature are characterized by what Jameson describes as "depthlessness" and a "weakening of historicity" (Jameson, 6). As a matter of fact, post-modernism acquires a "disappearance of a sense of history" along with a "fragmentation of time into a series of perpetual presents" (Jameson, 125). Thus, at first sight, it may appear as if Post-modernism lacked connection with history, which would mean the impossibility of generating political activism out of it.

Supportive of Jameson's claim seems to be Ann Bomberger's argument about post-modern fiction as being a blend of styles and genres which show impudence and blatancy. Such features would not enable post-modernism to become effectively helpful for the community of women also because of the role of capitalism in modern society, which is powerful enough to annihilate any political claim of feminists (June, 7). Yet, June claims that "women's historical fragmentation is reflected in many postmodern, feminist novels, and that bodily wounding or scarring become metaphors for the women's historical fragmentation" (5), moreover, June argues, "the symbol of the bodily wound or scar effectively connects women, through its recognition, to their daughters, mothers, grandmothers, lovers, or other women, and suggests sisterhood, matrilineage, and community as potential solutions to historical fragmentation" (5). Therefore, "not only does a feminist postmodern style claim a history for these marginalized groups, but it also acts as a tool for resistance and empowerment of multiethnic women" (June, 6).

Furthermore, as June adds, it is impossible to create feminist post-modern fiction without having to refuse at least some conventional narrative structures. As a matter of fact, when the woman's consciousness is fragmented, her narrative cannot be linear or chronological as one would expect narrative to be. It is indeed a subversive type of style that allows feminist post-modern writers to remember, reclaim, re-discuss and even celebrate both their familial and collective histories (June, 6).

Thus, Feminism and post-modernism intertwines with another concept which is particularly recurrent in feminist and post-modern writers, and in Rupi Kaur's poetry too, i.e. *fragmentation*. Fragmentation is intended to include in its meaning both a disjointed kind of narrative and the state of the female bodies, identities, memories and relationships as they are at a time of patriarchy, but also of racism, homophobia and other kinds of oppressions (June, 5-6). Indeed, patriarchal and hetero-normative discourses are still predominant in nowadays' society, and the women who, more than others, seem to be victimized by such discourses are those of racial and ethnic minority groups. This might be why it has been women of racial and ethnic minorities in particular who have been writing in purposefully fragmentary ways, in a way that can be described as feminist and post-modern. To write in a feminist, post-modern style is allowing them to "claim a history for these marginalized groups, but it also acts as a tool for resistance and empowerment of multiethnic women" (June, 6).

Moreover, women have been taught by patriarchal and capitalist doctrines that they should be in competition with one another, especially for male approval. Thus, no bonds or solidarity should be generated among women. This belief has also contributed, and it is still contributing, to the reinforcement of patriarchal and hetero-normative structures which cannot but oppress women,

particularly those of ethnic or racial minorities. Yet, “when female body fragmentations are recognized among women who suffered from similar events, then they are likely to generate identification and connection among each other, since their body is not only “a passive site of inscription, but rather, is an active and performing agent” (June, 11), which may enable women to get together and resist patriarchy and injustice.

The fragmented body becomes the home for the historical oppressions suffered by women, who, in return, may actively try to decipher, share and heal such wounds. Therefore, the power of the body to be a reminder of historical oppressions derives from the visibility that is intrinsic of the body, which may easily trigger recognition, sisterhood, healing and resistance. Indeed, “connections with women allow for the contesting of patriarchy that has fragmented their experiences and bodies. Even though women are socialized to be competitive and to seek male approval, [...] women often bond if they have a shared problem” (June, 11). And when such a problem is patriarchy, matrilineal and feminine relationships may offer a bond between women which “strengthens resistance struggle” (bell hooks, 44).

The importance of matrilineal relationships in a context of resistance against patriarchy is particularly evident in Rupi Kaur’s poetry too, as in poem five of *blooming*:

i am the product of all the ancestors getting together
and deciding these stories need to be told
(*the sun and her flowers*, 201)

In this poem, the author highlights how, by writing down her poetry and by sharing it, she is contributing to remember her ancestors and to honor their lives as proofs of the strength and resistance of women.

Such a discourse of resistance becomes as well the central underlying motif of poem fifteen of *blooming*:

i am the first woman in my lineage with freedom of
choice. to craft her future whichever way i choose. say
what is on my mind when i want to. without the whip of
the lash. there are hundreds of firsts i am thankful for.
that my mother and her mother and her mother did not
have the privilege of feeling. what an honour. to be the
first woman in the family who gets to taste her desires.
no wonder i am starving to fill up on this life. i have
generations of bellies to eat for. the grandmothers must

be howling with laughter. huddled around a mud stove
in the afterlife. sipping on steaming glasses of milky
masala chai. how wild it must be for them to see one of
their own living so boldly
(*the sun and her flowers*, 211)

Rupi Kaur is here dedicating an ode to her female ancestors, as she recognizes that their lives must not have been easy on them; they must not have been as free as she is; they must not have had the chance of choosing their life path for themselves; there must have been someone else who chose what their life had to be like; they must not have had the possibility of speaking up their minds and be heard, without being subject to violence and suffering. Kaur also recognizes that, along her matrilineal line, she must be the first woman to experience complete freedom, especially freedom of making her voice be heard, of choosing for herself, which she must be thankful for, knowing the impossibility of her ancestors of doing so.

Therefore, the poet understands that she can experience the possibility of acting as a free woman because of the previous suffering, resistance and resilience of other women, especially her female ancestors, without whom she would not be, even physically, in this world.

Yet, Kaur is aware that change must be continued, and that patriarchy will always have to be fought until women and men will have exactly the same possibilities and responsibilities. For this reason, Rupi Kaur's seventeen poem in *blooming* recites:

i stand
on the sacrifices
of a million women before me
thinking
what can i do
to make this mountain taller
so the women after me
can see farther

-*legacy*
(*the sun and her flowers*, 213)

Rupi Kaur recognizes that the situation of women can be even better than this, and must become better than this. As a consequence, not only does she admit that she herself can be who she is thanks to the resilient lives of the women who lived before her, she also admits that she herself will become, for the next generations, what her female ancestors have been for her, i.e. an example of

resilience and resistance, that may contribute to push even further the limits in which women are still living in today; limits which are going to keep changing if this legacy is carried on and remembered.

What Kaur claims to be essential in women's progress, in a world which is still, at least partially, patriarchy-oriented, is women's realization that they are not in any way inferior to men. This is the focus of Rupi Kaur's thirty-seventh poem of *blooming*:

what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn

that since day one
she's already had everything she needs within herself
it's the world that convinced her she did not
(*the sun and her flowers*, 233)

Women's resistance and resilience, which Kaur claims to be an intrinsic element in the female spirit, intertwine with women's bodies, which may even act as the carriers of women's wounds and scars. As I have already mentioned above, the fragmentation of women's bodies, visible by wounds, scars, even mutilations, are usually means that express the trauma of a woman and that of her community, enabling solidarity among those with the same, or similar, wounds or scars. It is indeed the recognition of wounds and scars among women which "become the means through which women can heal, and more importantly, can begin to contest those wounds" (June, 12). Thus the woman's body and soul cannot remain separate from each other, since one needs the other in order to show women's resistance and resilience, and to claim back their independence.

The idea of a duality between the woman's body and identity is a central trait in Kaur's poetry too. For instance, the twenty-fifth poem of *the healing* recites:

our backs
tell stories
no books have
the spine to
carry

-women of color
(*milk and honey*, 171)

Rupi Kaur shows to consider the female body as the visible symbol of women's stories. Therefore, Kaur's consideration of the female body seems to be very similar to the notion of duality between

body and mind which June reports in her feminist work. Yet, the combination of body and mind as the key point in women's resistance seems to be a notion that has missed in Western philosophical thought, which led to the origin of a dichotomy between body and mind, which have been considered as being opposite categories and, thus, irreconcilable (June, 13).

Feminists, Rupi Kaur included, have nonetheless contributed to question such a dichotomy, mainly because the clear distinction between body and mind seems to be preventing "a holistic understanding of identity" (June, 13). Therefore, Kaur, in line with feminist thought, is also challenging the idea of dualism which has been typical of Western thought. It is actually since the time of Plato that body and mind are distinctively separate from one another, and such a classification implies a subtle hierarchy too. For example, Plato perceived the elements of light, soul, knowledge and goodness as the opposites of darkness, body, ignorance and evil. This classical idea of dualism has developed along the centuries and has generated distinct associations which are, even nowadays, difficult to dissociate, even though it is possible to do so. Such associations are for example those of gender: male/female; race: white/non-white; sexuality: heterosexual/LGBTQ; and many others (June, 14).

Indeed, in line with this philosophical tradition is Aristotle's influence on the dualism between male/female, according to which the male and the female are "diametrically opposed (and certainly hierarchized) beings" (June, 14). Aristotle claims that women are "weaker and colder in nature" (Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, Princeton UP, 1985) and representatives of incapacity: they are passive recipients. On the other hand, men are stronger, warmer and representatives of capacity: they represent the active agents (June, 14). Both Plato and Aristotle's ideas about the dichotomy between man and woman may contribute to our understanding of the development of the role of the woman and that of the man along the centuries. As a matter of fact, the different consideration of the male and the female, originated in ancient Greek thought, has contributed "not only in creating a lasting division between body and mind, but in linking this division to our very identities as women and men" (June, 14).

Apart from Plato and Aristotle, Descartes is also considered to be one of the main influence in the understanding of the dualism between body and mind. As a matter of fact, he separates the notions of body and soul into what is the intellectual substance, which is the mind, from the extended substance, which is the body. Thus, according to Descartes, and modern Western thought, the body and the mind "are part of a dualistic system in which mind and body are distinct and separable, and in which mind is privileged over body" (June, 14). Christianity has also contributed to highlight the mind, or the soul, as the element of purity and salvation, whilst the body as the element of sin and damnation, and "because women are more closely associated with the body vis-

à-vis these binaries, they are perceived as more connected to the natural world and to the lower functions of the body. They are viewed as more nurturing, since their bodies prepare them for childbearing, and as less capable of higher orders of thinking” (June, 14-15).

Yet, as post-modern and feminist authors and scholars have demonstrated in more recent times, the body must be the vehicle which enables humans to experience the world, therefore the bodily and the psychological processes of a person are always inextricable and necessary one for the other (June, 15). Therefore, the connection between body and mind that feminists and post-modernists have re-evaluated, has contributed to deconstruct the previously assumed thought of Western philosophy of the body and the mind as separate elements, which has brought to the origin of too many oppressions in the history of humanity as a whole, not only of women. Thus, the woman’s body and identity must be owned back from the men by the woman herself, which cannot leave her body and identity to men’s considerations and appropriations (June, 15).

Moreover, according to French scholar Cixous, women may achieve the freedom of their bodies from their fragmentary state by writing, especially by achieving an insurgent kind of writing, which enables the woman to claim back her history and her past, in which she can identify as an independent being, outside of a male-dominated sphere, creating her own sphere instead, with the help and solidarity of other women (June, 15).

Therefore, in line with Cixous’ argument, women’s bonds can be used in literature in order to confront social, historical and political oppressions, specific for a particular group of women. As a matter of fact, oppressions on women may take such diverse paths that it may be more productive to focus on particular kinds of oppression only, especially when it comes to literature, as women are all part of different and complex social communities and realities that to talk about a “communal” ground of oppression might hide the particularities of each sub-group.

If bonds among women can generate from women’s wounds and scars, then women’s bonds are necessarily strong, since they are based on real, even physical, evidence. Moreover, this discourse on women’s bonds should not suggest that women have more chances of forming bonds with one another than men have. As it is also to avoid to think about women as more capable of feeling attachment or empathy than men are. Such a line of thought would originate what feminism is itself trying to dismantle, i.e. the idea of a biological essentialism that would put women in a position of superiority over men, when it comes to an emotional and compassionate ground. On the contrary, a feminist, post-modern discourse such as the one I have been discussing, should aim to highlight multiethnic women’s bonds as the literary antidote to the oppression that these women have experienced in their lives, and in the post-memory of their ancestors.

Post-colonialism and Diaspora

Post-colonialism deals with the outcomes that colonization had on societies and cultures. The term had at first a chronological meaning, referring to the period of post-independence of a state from its colonizer. Yet, from the 70's, the term started to focus more on the cultural results of colonization. It is indeed in the 70's that a colonial discourse theory originated, thanks to the works by Said, Spivak and Bhabha, among others (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 168). Such a discourse was shaped on notions given by the colonizers, without considering the side of the colonized, which seemed to outdistance the actual effects that colonialism left in colonized states and their populations. Thus, a discourse of post-colonialism started to differentiate from a colonial discourse theory, whose difference is still persisting (168-169).

Nowadays, the term *Post-Colonialism* refers to

the study and analysis of European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre-and post-independence nations and communities. While its use has tended to focus on the cultural production of such communities, it is becoming widely used in historical, political, sociological and economic analyses, as these disciplines continue to engage with the impact of European imperialism upon world societies.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 169)

Thus, in a discourse of post-colonialism, the analysis of the communities' responses to colonialism are taken into consideration from different points of view: culturally, politically, historically, sociologically and economically.

As Professor Stephen Slemon argues, the discourse of post-colonialism can be considered to be a subset of the notions of post-modernism and post-structuralism "and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge" ("The Scramble for Post-colonialism", *De-scribing Empire: Postcolonialism and Textuality*, 16-17). Moreover, Slemon claims that the discourse of post-colonialism has proven to be as problematic as the discourse of patriarchy is; indeed, both concepts are "transhistorical and unspecific, [...] used in relation to very different kinds of historical oppression and economic control" ('Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World', *World Literature Written in English*, 30); nonetheless, it is necessary to keep discussing about patriarchy and post-colonialism as both these terms are crucial in the search for understanding of some of the most

influential issues of modern times, especially in relation to resistance. Such issues include indeed feminism, equality, freedom, among others.

Yet, when discussing post-colonialism, there might be the risk of generating an excessive homogenization among diverse post-colonial groups, which should instead be considered separately, as each group may have to deal with different sets of events and emotions regarding post-colonialism, since “every colonial encounter or ‘contact zone’ is different, and each ‘postcolonial’ occasion needs [...] to be precisely located and analyzed for its specific interplay. A vigorous debate has revolved around the potentially homogenizing effect of the term ‘post-colonial’” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 171).

Thus, it might be counter-productive to group under one same post-colonial category all those communities who have dealt, or are dealing, with the effects of post-colonialism. As a matter of fact, a great range of cultures have been subjected to post-colonialism. Therefore, even though similarities among diverse post-colonial groups might be found and studied, to group all of them under one same community might annihilate each group’s peculiarities and differences.

Then, while discussing about post-colonialism, it is the richest and most detailed analysis of a specific group that a researcher should aim at, in order to avoid over-simplification and to understand more deeply the consequences of colonialism and post-colonialism on each different group. At the same time, it is yet important to remember that a comparative type of methodology in the study of post-colonialism might rise important questions and even find answers that a strictly local, narrower, research could probably not be able to pose nor to answer (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffini, 172-173).

Specifically related to Kaur’s situation as a Sikh girl living in Canada is the issue of diaspora. As a matter of fact, diaspora is “the voluntary or forcible movement of peoples from their homelands into new regions” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 61); indeed, the term *diaspora* means ‘to disperse’ in ancient Greek, and it was first used in the third Century BCE in the *Septuagint*, the translation in Greek of the Hebrew Scriptures, to refer to the plight of the Jewish dispersion from Palestine. Later, the term started to refer generally to all kinds of “dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries” (Braziel, Mannur, 1).

Diaspora is actually a concept of central importance in a discourse of colonialism, because “colonialism itself was a radically diasporic movement, involving the temporary or permanent dispersion and settlement of millions of Europeans over the entire world” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 61). Then, as a consequence of colonial slavery, big diasporic movements of people from one side of the world to the other started to generate. As a matter of fact, one of the earliest

diasporic events, after the Jewish dispersion, was the slave trade of the sixteenth century, during which Africans started to be sold as slaves in the New World. Later, when slavery became illegal, the demand for manpower, especially in plantation economies, started to be satisfied by indentured labor, which was possible only through movements of large parts of a population, particularly from highly populated countries such as China or India, to areas where manpower was need (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, 61).

Starting from the end of the twentieth century, with the inauguration of *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, in 1991, the discourse of diaspora has become relevant in many literary, sociologic, anthropological, ethnic studies. Since then, the term has often been used to refer to many situations of movements and dislocation, even when such journeys were privileged or only symbolic (Brazier, Mannur, 2-3). Yet, in order for diaspora to be recognized as such, it should always involve a certain grade of historical and cultural specificity. Because of this, more recent examples of diasporic movements are those happened in the twentieth century and undertaken by people fleeing from wars, from recently decolonized areas and severe economic crisis, especially after World War II (Brazier, Mannur, 4).

As I have discussed above about post-colonialism, also the discourse on diaspora has to avoid homogenization of too wide groups of people. For instance, Professor Paul Gilroy disapproves of “earlier critical formations of the African diaspora that see all African diasporic individuals everywhere – scattered across several countries – as linked by a common heritage, history, and racial descent” (Brazier, Mannur, 4); according to Gilroy, such a perception would only lead to what he calls *ethnic absolutism*, which is the basis for the colonial discourse theory (Brazier, Mannur, 4). Ethnic absolutism works in a way that the identification of people and their stories are based on oppositions like Africa versus Europe, or Africa versus America, without considering the many possible ways in which communities can differentiate from others even in one same country.

Thus, ethnic absolutism would be a superficial and reductive way to consider peoples, their origins and their identities. Therefore, ethnic absolutism can be linked to that kind of essentialism that, in Western thought, has created a dichotomy between the figure of the male and the female, as well as a dichotomy between the white and the non white. On the contrary, diasporic individuals, as all individuals in general, should be “marked by hybridity and heterogeneity – cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national” (Brazier, Mannur, 5).

Furthermore, what is important to remember is that diaspora is above all a human phenomenon, both lived and experienced; thus, studies of diaspora may then force us to reconsider what we thought about the concepts of nation and of citizen, especially in a time of globalization. Indeed, the discourse of diaspora seems to be quickly evolving through time, becoming always

more and more detailed, mainly because of the urgency of such a discourse to emerge in the globalized and evolving contemporary society, in which, in spite of scientific and technological progress, which allows people to move and resettle abroad always more easily, many people seem to be scared of migration and multi-culturalism, and support the idea of closing borders, limiting people's freedom. Rupi Kaur is indeed referring to such a limiting view in poem 10 of *rooting*:

borders
are man-made
they only divide us physically
don't let them make us
turn on each other

-we are not enemies
(*the sun and her flowers*, 128)

In line with the idea of borders as being fixed by men and, therefore, unnatural, is also poem nineteen of *rooting*:

you split the world
into pieces and
called them countries
declared ownership on
what never belonged to you
and left the rest with nothing

-colonise
(*the sun and her flowers*, 137)

In this poem, Kaur is criticizing the way in which colonization has occurred by claiming control on territories that were originally free, and by exploiting the richness of such countries for the sake of the colonizers only, leaving the colonized with nothing left.

Yet, despite the fact that moving and travelling on Earth have become accessible to almost anyone now, people's reactions to changes in environment, society, language and culture, especially when they are long-lasting or even ever-lasting, can be very much diverse, and easily influenced by a myriad of possible causes. Regarding this, Kaur tells her readers, in poem twenty-two of *rooting*, what their parents experienced, and sacrificed, in order to give her and her siblings a better future:

for years they were separated by oceans
left with nothing but little photographs of each other
smaller than pass-port size photos
hers was tucked into a golden locket
his slipped inside his wallet
at the end of the day
when their worlds went quiet
studying them was their only intimacy

this was a time long before computers
when families in that part of the world
had not seen a telephone or laid their
almond eyes on a coloured television screen
long before you and i

[...]
when she saw the shadows circling his eyes
and shoulders carrying an invisible weight
it looked like the life had been drained out of him

where was the person she had wed
she wondered
reaching for the golden locket
the one with the photo of the man
her husband did not look like anymore

*-the new world had drained him
(the sun and her flowers, 141)*

In this poem, Kaur argues how his father changed, after having left his motherland; he changed so much that her mother, after a long time without seeing him, and full of excitement to join her husband in their new home, immediately noticed how life in the New World had changed him, since he did not seem to be the same person he was before leaving.

Yet, not only did Kaur's father suffer from diaspora, also her mother had to deal with suffering for leaving her country:

leaving her country
was not easy for my mother
i still catch her searching for it

in foreign films
and the international food aisle
(*the sun and her flowers*, 123)

Relevant to the main discourse of my dissertation is indeed the Indian diaspora, and in particular the Sikh diaspora, of which Kaur and her family are representatives. Leaving their country of origin left an unforgettable mark on Rupri Kaur's parents:

my parents never sat us down in the evening to share
stories of their younger days. one was always working.
the other too tired. perhaps being an immigrant does
that to you.

the cold terrain of the north engulfed them. their bodies
were hard at work paying in blood and sweat for their
citizenship. perhaps the weight of the new world was
too much. and the pain and sorrow of the old was better
left buried.

[...]

(*the sun and her flowers*, 138)

For the poet herself, being the daughter of two Punjabi refugees who settled in Canada, her experience as a Punjabi-Canadian girl led her to struggle with refusal and exclusion, just because she was not Canadian of origin:

my voice
is the offspring
of two countries colliding
what is there to be ashamed of
if english
and my mother tongue
made love
my voice
is her father's words
and mother's accent
what does it matter if
my mouth carries two worlds

-accent

(*the sun and her flowers*, 139)

With this poem, Rupi Kaur aims to encourage all those who might find themselves in a same situation as hers, and to claim that they are exactly equal to anyone else; that their origin does not make them any less valuable or any less entitled to live in a country instead of another; that there is nothing wrong in carrying two worlds within oneself.

20th Century's Sikh Diaspora

With the advent of the automobile, the airplane, the camera, the computer, the telephone and the origin of the Internet, “we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighbourliness, even with those most distant from ourselves” (Appadurai, 2003, 27). Just like that, a *collective transnationalism across borders* (Gautam, 9) generated, and this allowed the Indian diaspora to take a more definite shape.

An element of central importance in the issue of contemporary Indian, as well as Sikh, diaspora is imagination. Indeed, imagination “is a social force, running across national borders and producing locality as a spatial fact” (Gautam, 9). Thus, imagination encouraged the politics of globalization among Indians and their social structures, by allowing Indian migrants to build social connections with each other in a trans-national context. What follows is that:

[...] the imagination is no longer a matter of individual genius, escapism from ordinary life, or just a dimension of aesthetics. It is a faculty that informs the daily life of ordinary people in myriad ways: It allows people to consider migration, resist state violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national lines.

(Appadurai, 2000, 6)

Therefore, imagination has a brand new meaning in our globalized society: Appadurai even proposes a framework that aims at understanding what imagining a world means, and what an imagined world is like. According to anthropologist Appadurai, there are five important dimensions which make up our imagined world, which are: ethnoscape, mediascape, technoscape, financescape and ideoscape. The interactions among these dimensions influence the individuals' imagined world (Appadurai, 2003, 31).

By ethnoscape Appadurai refers to “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and

persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (Appadurai, 2003, 32).

By technoscape Appadurai refers to “the global configuration, also ever fluid, of technology, and of the fact that technology, both high and low, both mechanical and informational, now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries” (Appadurai, 2003, 32), and this effects the way in which human communication is being modified. As a matter of fact, an important means to communicate information nowadays is the World Wide Web, which may allow diasporic communities to remain in contact with their homeland or with activities associated with their homeland. Yet, technoscape is not always available to diasporic communities. As it is the case for the World Wide Web, and other forms of digital technology, only those who can afford a PC and an Internet connection can benefit from the possibilities offered by the World Wide Web. On the contrary, those who live in a situation of poverty or limitation will not be able to enjoy this set of technological opportunities.

A third element taken into consideration by Appadurai is financescape, which refers to the rapid flow of currency which is not even physical anymore, indeed “the disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before” (Appadurai, 2003, 33).

The last two elements which make up our imagined world are mediascape and ideoscape, both of which are closely related to the area of imagery. The term mediascape indicates “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film production studios), which are now available to an increasing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai, 2003, 33). Clear examples of mediascape are social networks, which “tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places” (Appadurai, 2003, 34).

On other hand, even though ideoscape is centered on imagery and narration too, it is “directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state-power or a piece of it” (Appadurai, 2003, 34).

The elements proposed by Appadurai as making up the concept of an *imagined world* are indeed the elements that also appear in many anthropological studies and research about the Indian diaspora. For example Anderson (*Imagined Communities*, London: Veco, 1983) and Werbner (*Imagined Diaspora among the Manchester Muslims: the Public Performances of Pakistani*

transnational Identity Politics, Oxford: James Curry, 2002), have described the Indian diaspora as being characterized by the origin of a trans-national homogenous group, in which members share with one another an imagined cultural and social structure that is felt like an actual boundary of ethnic belonging (Gautam, 9).

Moreover, some people's imagined worlds influence the imagined worlds of other people, in a reactive circle: the concept of an imagined world contributes to shape the idea of who one was, of who one is, and even of who one will be in the future. For example, to new generations of Indian immigrants, India is the motherland of their fathers and forefathers and "to them, Indianness is an imagined idea based on the birth of their forefathers" (Gautam, 10). In this way, the idea of India becomes the result of collective imagination: new generations of European or American Indians do not seem to base their ideas of India "on the notion of birthplace, citizenship and patriotism" (Gautam, 10); instead, it is on imagination that their ideas of India are built.

Indeed, the process of building *a mental imagined kind of India* might be what is behind poem 38 of *the healing*, in which Kaur praises her family name as the sign that makes her who she is as a human being:

the name kaur
makes me a free woman
it removes the shackles that
try to bind me
uplifts me
to remind me i am equal to
any man even though the state
of this world screams to me i am not
[..]
and the universe
it humbles me
calls out and says i have a
universal duty to share with
humanity to nurture
and serve the sisterhood
to raise those that need raising
the name kaur runs in my blood
it was in me before the word itself existed
it is my identity and my liberation

-kaur

a woman of sikhi

(milk and honey, 184)

In this poem, Kaur claims that her origins as a Sikh woman does have a role in the identification of herself: Punjab, India, is where she comes from and, through imagination, that place binds her to all those who come from that same place. Her family name is then the proof that she has a history of her own, that she is here on Earth because her parents, and their ancestors before them, gave her the chance to be here.

In the process of imagining her place of origin, the poet overtly opens up to a discourse of solidarity, which connects her personal self to all those who might have a similar diasporic identity. It is indeed through imagination that the poet is able to create an imagined community in which its components aim at helping each other, at being supportive to one another.

Moreover, even though in her poetry Kaur never tells the reader explicitly about her political view on the issues of Punjab, it is yet clear that the poet supports the people of Punjab and is willing to inform her readers about the situation of living as a minority that Sikhs have to deal with, both in India and abroad.

As a matter of fact, Sikhs are a minority in India, and have been historically treated as such. The clearest example of this might be the siege of Punjab's Golden Temple in 1984 by India's central government, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, right after manifestations and requests for an independent Punjab had already taken place (Singh, 113). The central government's siege to the Golden Temple was considered a sacrilege by the Sikhs, the Golden Temple being sacred to all Sikh believers. The action led by the government was therefore seen in the eyes of the Sikhs as a way to devaluate and eventually destroy their culture and faith (Singh, 113). As predictable, the siege to the Golden Temple was followed by many protests and even violent manifestations, which demanded independence from India, which eventually led, this time unpredictably, to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi being shot dead by her same Sikh bodyguards (Singh, 115-116).

To this sudden event, a likewise sudden backlash hit the Sikhs, who became the target of violence and aggressions. Meanwhile, the formal response of the Indian central government to the demands of an independent Punjab revolved around the certainty of India's unity as a country, which did not envisage any call for multi-nationality:

The Indian people do not accept the proposition that India is a multi-national society. The Indian people constitute one nation. India has expressed through her civilization over the ages, her strong underlying unity in the midst of diversity of language, religion etc. The affirmation of India's nationhood after a long and historic confrontation with imperialism

does not brook any challenge. (*White Paper*, Government of India Press, New Dehli, 1984, p. 17)

As a matter of fact, killing Indira Gandhi was even more detrimental to the cause of the Sikhs, both within the national borders and outside, because of the negative perception of the Sikhs' cause and demands in the eyes both of the national government and the rest of the world (Singh, 115). As reported on Rupi Kaur's online blog, hatred against the Sikhs in India was actually the main reason behind her father's decision to flee from Punjab and reach Canada as a political refugee.

After hearing about the violent upheaval in their motherland, Sikhs from all over the world started participating even more in the daily activities of their gurdwaras: the meeting points for Sikh believers (Singh, 122). Starting from 1984, gurdwaras started to aim mostly at raising awareness on the issues that Punjab was dealing with, at that time. Some of these gurdwaras even became the basis for the collection of funds that Sikhs abroad were committed to raise, in order to help their people back in Punjab (Singh, 122).

Moreover, since 1984, media and journals, even internationally, were able to show their support to the issue of Punjab: not necessarily for its independence, but for the need of officially recognizing multi-ethnicity as a feature of the Indian nation (Singh, 124-125). As a matter of fact, it is impossible to deny that the historical development of India, especially after the time of the British colonialism, has evidently favored the communities of Hindus to the detriment of others.

The Indian central government's favoring of Hindus over other groups has been shown for example by the act of recruiting civil, military and government representatives within the major Hindu group only. Such a preference was repeated when it came to define the features and values of India as a nation, which became represented by the attributes of Hindus, leaving all other groups aside, "thus the Indian national identity is neither ethnically neutral nor multiethnic, but derived from a Hindu world serving the language of universalism. The state's institutions, its constitution, its laws and monopolization of power have had different effects on different communities, empowering the dominant ethnic community, a common feature of postcolonial states" (Singh, 36).

Therefore, it was not only the minority group of the Sikhs which was disadvantaged in India; on the contrary, it seems that all non-Hindu groups were considered as less representative of *Indianness*, with all the consequences that this belief brought about: "In country after country a single ethnic group has taken control over the state and used its powers to exercise control over others ... in retrospect there has been far less 'nation-building' than many analysts had expected or

hoped, for the process of state building has rendered many ethnic groups devoid of power or influence” (Singh, 36, from Myron Weiner, 1987, 36-7).

The act of favoring the Hindu ethnicity over others can be seen even nowadays by the way in which education, TV, arts and literature are mainly based on the Hindi language, the official language of India, as well as on Hindu traditions (36). Therefore, it seems that it is up to the dominant ethnicity of the Hindus to create the basis for a multi-ethnic Indian society, and to pass from a centralized vision of India to a pluralist, federalist one, seeing that “India’s increasingly hinduized identity and centralization are likely to alienate the Sikh community, both symbolically and materially. The Sikh dilemma and its search for statehood will continue to feed periods of accommodation and rebellion until the Indian state incorporates or subjugates it” (Singh, 38-9) .

The marginalization of non-Hindu groups in India might have contributed to the fact that, after the British and the Chinese, the Indian diaspora is the third in line in terms of number of migrants, who might have wanted to look for a better life prospect abroad. Indeed, the first big wave of Indian migration is the one that happened during the colonial era. This side of the Indian diaspora is referred to as the *old diaspora*, and includes Indians who migrated to other countries in Asia, or in Africa, as well as in the Caribbean and in Far Eastern countries, gradually between 19th – 20th century (Gautam, 10). The second wave of Indian migration had instead origin in post-colonial times, with countries of destination in Western Europe and America especially, as well as in Australia, New Zealand and Saudi Arabia. Those belonging to this second group are referred to as the *new diaspora*. In opposition to the first wave of Indian migration, which included mostly contract laborers, traders, and in a smaller part professionals and students, this second wave of migration included mostly students and technical workers, who, in spite of having arrived as migrants, became then immigrants, since they ended up settling in these countries with their families (Gautam, 10).

Thus, migrants from Punjab, and neighboring areas, who fled from the violence of 1984’s Indian political turmoil, belong to the category of the new diaspora. As a matter of fact, since 1984’s riots and violent outburst, the cry for an independent Punjab has reached an almost utopian status, meaning that the idea of an officially recognized region of the Sikhs has been intertwined with both Sikhs’ imagination and delusion. And the fact that Punjabi culture and legacy is an important focal point in Kaur’s poems highlights how the Sikh diaspora is still felt as a current issue of anxiety and confusion even among the youngest generations of Sikhs, even among that big part of the Sikh youth who was either born abroad or raised abroad, as Rupri Kaur has been.

Ethnic and Cultural Identity

The reason beyond the importance of remembering Sikh culture and history among the Sikh youth might be due to the youth's recognition of their family's struggle to identify with the new culture they immersed in, after they left Punjab. Indeed, the idealization of Punjab as the home of the Sikhs "has become 'naturalized' with the Sikh psyche" (Singh, 34). Therefore, Rupri Kaur's trauma as a child torn between two cultures seems to infiltrate in all aspects of her life.

As I have argued in the first chapter of my dissertation, it is only through revival and revisiting of one's trauma that a victim might be able to finally process their traumatic experiences. This means that even daily life may become harsh a the victim of trauma who, even after many years from their traumatic experience, may still find themselves thinking about their trauma, reflecting about it, trying to give a sense to it.

In *milk and honey*, Kaur depicts the effects that diaspora had on her family, in respect to her mother, her father and herself. While her mother is described as "offering more love / than you can carry" (32), the way in which Kaur represents the figure of her father seems to show the utter disillusionment of her emotions towards her paternal figure: "your father is absent" (32). The lack of tenderness that her father showed to his daughter might be due to his experience as a young immigrant, who fled from his native land to a foreign country for fear of being imprisoned or even killed, i.e. a series of events that the poet herself describes as heaving left in his father a sense of void, which might have prevented him from showing his love towards his children. Then, in the third and last paragraph of this same poem, Kaur interestingly identifies herself as "a war / the border between two countries / the collateral damage / the paradox that joins the two / but also splits them apart" (32). From the way in which the poet defines herself here, it seems as if Rupri felt the consequences of diaspora deeply on her life. She describes her status as that of one who is not entirely belonging to neither a nation nor another, but is instead divided between two, making it hard to establish a clear identification of the self, and this may indeed have been a source of her infantile trauma.

Having been raised in Canada by a Punjabi family, Kaur might have experienced a lack of consistency and coherence between her parent's teachings and believes and those of her newly adoptive culture, originating uncertainties about the uncovering and understanding of her personal identity. Indeed, post-colonial theorist Radhakrishnan explains how immigrants might follow a specific *narrative of ethnicity* after moving into their adoptive country: "During the initial phase, immigrants suppress ethnicity in the name of pragmatism and opportunism. To be successful in the New World, they must actively assimilate and, therefore, hide their distinct ethnicity. This phase

[...] gives way to a Du Boisian period that refuses to subsume political, civil, and moral revolutions under mere strategies of economic betterment” (Radhakrishnan, 121). During this phase away from the homeland, it is quite the norm to discover a sort of enlightenment or a positive sense of estrangement, since to experience another culture is likely to result in an analysis of one’s original culture, in order to acknowledge both its positive and negative sides (Radhakrishnan, 121).

In a second phase of cultural re-adaptation, “immigrants reassert ethnicity in all its autonomy” (Radhakrsihnan, 121). This second phase often begins when the immigrant starts perceiving that the newly adoptive country is not perfect; that injustices are occurring in it. In this second phase, the homeland can be imagined almost with a divine aura, as a way to remember that there is a place where such injustices do not take place. Nonetheless, these imaginary mental projections are usually tricks of the mind, since they might be detached from the truth of facts, and might instead be the way in which we idealize our homeland, to which we might feel attached and affectionate as never before. This second phase is the most dangerous and risky, since it can result in an obsession with one’s homeland’s traditions and culture, which might lead one to disrespect the culture of the adoptive country, being considered as unworthy and too far from homeland, especially in a moral sense.

Yet, when the second phase results in a positive outcome of self-knowledge and self-consciousness, then a third and last phase of the cultural adjustment process begins. This last phase “seeks the hyphenated integration of ethnic identity with national identity under conditions that do not privilege the *national* at the expense of the *ethnic*”, which, for example, would cause the origin of one’s identification as a Sikh-American, an Indian-American, a Chinese-American and so on (Radhakrishnan, 121).

Diaspora and migration have created such diverse scenarios that the identities of people, their inner selves, their traditions and their viewpoints are all likely to change during and after moving abroad, and there is nothing bad about this mutability, it is indeed what allows humans to integrate into other societies and be accepted by these. Nonetheless, Indian-American post-colonial theorist Radhakrishnan reported that many children who were born in America, but whose parents came from India, identified themselves as Indian. Yet, these same children were “natural” American citizens, being born there. What Radhakrishnan argues is that these children “had grown up with a strong sense of being exclusively Indian, and the reason was that they had experienced little during their growing years that held out promise of first-class American citizenship. Most of them felt they could not escape being *marked* as different by virtue of their skin color, their family background, and other ethnic and unassimilated traits” (Radhakrishnan, 122), which resulted in these children

living a double life: “the ethnic private life and the *American* public life, with very little mediation between the two” (Radhakrishnan, 122).

Regarding such a matter, sociologist Stuart Hall investigates on cultural identity’s authority and authenticity, and explains that identity is “a *production* which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall, 234). Moreover, Stuart argues that the concept of cultural identity can be considered in two different ways: “the first position defines *cultural identity* in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective *one true self*, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed *selves*, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” (Hall, 234). This first concept of cultural identity is what played an important role “in all post-colonial struggles which have so profoundly reshaped our world” (Hall, 234).

There is yet another way of considering cultural identity, which revolves around the concepts of *becoming* and *being*. According to this view, cultural identity “belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists [...]. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power” (Hall, 236).

In Kaur’s case, this second view of cultural identity makes clear why she is struggling with finding her own identity: because identity is not something that you can just read about and understand, it does not come with explanations on books, as it does not only come with precise facts. On the contrary, cultural identity “is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth” (Hall, 237).

As a matter of fact, to recognize oneself and one’s native culture becomes much more difficult and complicated when you have to deal with other cultures and other ways of living, especially when they do not seem to be similar to your original one. This may eventually even lead to traumatic experiences, as it happens to Kaur, since the perception of her native Sikh-Indian culture may have become more abstract and “much less familiar, and more unsettling” (Hall, 237), since she was not immersed in that same culture, but in another one: “If identity does not proceed in a straight unbroken line from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?” (Hall, 237).

Thus, Rupi Kaur’s cultural identity is an *evolving* cultural identity that is not only open to change, but rather strives for change, in order to evolve and improve. This process of cultural evolution seems to be the main point in Kaur’s thirty-nine poem in *the healing*:

the world
gives you
so much pain
and here you are
making gold out of it

- *there is nothing purer than that*
(*milk and honey*, 185)

In this poem, the author is reflecting on the way in which immigrants, including herself, might have the chance to transform their status of outcasts into that of creators of their own, original, story.

Rupi Kaur is one of the many clear exponents of what an evolving cultural identity implies. For example, in “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian-American Differences” (*Theorizing Diaspora*, pp. 132-155), Lisa Lowe presents the poem of the Japanese-American writer Janice Mirikitani as an example of how new generations can transform and modify their original culture very quickly. In this poem, Mirikitani talks about the rebellion of her daughter against her culture of origin, which reminds the writer that she herself denied parts of her original Japanese culture when she was her daughter’s age:

I want to break tradition – unlock this room
where women dress in the dark.
Discover the lies my mother told me.
The lies that we are small and powerless
that our possibilities must be compressed
to the size of pearls, displayed only as
passive chokers, charms around our neck.
Break Tradition.
[...]
My daughter denies she is like me...
[...]
She mirrors my aging.
She is breaking tradition.
(Janice Mirikitani, *Breaking Tradition*, 1988)

In this poem, three generations of women are represented, and they are distinguished by the particular conceptions of what being female and Japanese means to them.

Similar traits are to be identified in Mirikitani’s poems and Kaur’s. As a matter of fact, the issue of rebellion is found in both authors’ works: the rebellion from one’s family traditions and

expectations is the proof that both Mirikitani's daughter and Kaur are indeed breaking tradition, which means that they are modifying their cultural identity, step by step. Thus, cultural identity might at first seem to be something stable and fixed by strict rules but, on the contrary, cultural identity is in a continuous process of change and redefinition. Yet, the possibility of bringing deeper changes to one's cultural identity comes together with the struggle of identifying one's self, since to deal with two, or more, cultures and their expectations might result in a feeling of non-belonging to neither one culture nor the other.

Another example that shows how cultural identities are likely to be transformed quickly, when one is transplanted abroad, is in Lydia Lowe's poem, which describes a scene starring two Chinese workers, showing their different attitudes towards their work:

The long bell blared,
And then the *lo-ban*¹
made me search all your bags
before you could leave.
Inside he sighed
about slow work, fast hands, missing spools of thread –
and I said nothing.
I remember that day
you came in to show me
I added your tickets six zippers short.
It was just a mistake.
You squinted down
at the check in your hands
like an old village woman peers
at some magician's trick.
That afternoon
when you thrust me your bags
I couldn't look or raise my face.
*Doi m-jyu*².
(Lydia Lowe, *Quitting Time*, 1988)

This poem aims at representing the different behavior of two Chinese workers, one being an English-speaking young girl, the other one being a Cantonese-speaking old lady, when it comes to acknowledge the mistake they made in their work. The young girl does not seem to be much

¹ "The business owner".

² "Sorry, I can't face you".

worried about the mistake she made. On the other hand, the old lady seems almost not to believe her eyes, as if she had been caught in a magician's trick.

Thus, this poem recalls the breaking of tradition too. To start with, the structure of the American factory, in which these women work, does not seem to allow the maintenance of the Chinese traditional hierarchical order, and the consequent high respect younger generations have to show to elders. On the contrary, in this poem the young girl is the supervisor, who has to discipline the old lady about her work. Because of this, the young girl is extremely ashamed of talking directly to the old lady, since she is aware of the reverence that she would need to show to elders, were she in China. Therefore, this poem can be considered as a testimony of the breaking of traditional cultural practices, such as the Chinese practice of respecting age hierarchies, which can be easily distorted in a Western country like the United States, where class stratification and the construction of social roles are much more different from those typical of China.

As a matter of fact, relocation outside one's country can only bring to a modification of one's original culture. The adoptive culture is usually detrimental towards one's original culture, since the newly adopted culture would not allow the complete conservation of the original one. Moreover, the structure of the family itself must be re-imagined in a new cultural context. Indeed, two different generations, as those of the parents and their children, are likely to have different approaches to life in the a country of settlement. This process of rupture occurring in one same community, that of the family, might lead to deep and even insuperable breaches if empathy and desire to communicate are not overtly and continuously applied to family life, in a way that both sides of the family, the parents and the children, are led "to understand and appreciate patterns of experience not their own" (Radhakrishnan, 123).

Furthermore, as argued by Radhakrishnan, in contexts of diaspora and immigration, "the home country is not real in its own terms and yet it is real enough to impede Americanization, and the present home is materially real and yet not real enough to feel authentic" (Radhakrishnan, 123). Thus, when people migrate, it is natural that identities, perspectives and viewpoints may change along with the change in one's social and cultural environment.

Radhakrishnan also claims that "if the category *Indian* seemed secure, positive, and affirmative within India, the same term takes on a reactive, strategic character when it is pruned loose from its nativity" (Radhakrishnan, 123). Also because of this, Radhakrishnan's interviews to immigrant's children born in America proved that children belonging to ethnic minorities are likely to feel in coalition with other minorities. A relevant amount of these children agreed to identify themselves under the "third world" umbrella. Radhakrishnan specifies that the term "third world" might be cause of "an insensitive dedifferentiation of the many histories that comprise the third

world” (Radhakrishnan, 125), yet, the reason why most students belonging to minority groups proved to identify themselves with members of other minorities is that such an identification “has the potential to resist the dominant groups’ divide-and-rule strategies” (Radhakrishnan, 125).

In any case, Radhakrishnan argues that it is a real pity to just let go of one’s ethnic origin and culture, since “it is in the nature of a racist, capitalist society to isolate and privatize the individual and to foster the myth of the equal and free individual unencumbered by either a sense of community or a critical sense of the past” (124).

In spite of the different approaches that may enable the understanding of cultural diversities, I would claim that Kaur’s poetry might be able to unify all those who are struggling with the cultural problem of self-identification. Indeed, with her poetry, Kaur celebrates the freedom of expressing one’s own culture and, especially, of accepting yourself for who you are, even though this might imply to disregard particular cultural practices of your original culture, in favor of those of your adoptive one, and vice versa.

Moreover, Kaur highlights the importance of accepting who you are even physically. For instance, Western culture’s prototype of feminine beauty seems to include only features that are found in Caucasian ethnicity exclusively. And young immigrant girls might believe that they are not good enough for the culture they were brought to, since they do not seem to mirror the characteristics of the women they see in the adverts or on the media.

Finally, I would like to discuss Lowe’s concepts of heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity, as they are connected to the issue of the cultural identification of the self. By *heterogeneity* Lowe means “to indicate the existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category ” (Lowe, 138). For example in the category of Indian-Canadians, to which Rupi Kaur belongs, there are many differences inside the category itself, such as those of gender, religion, class backgrounds or economic conditions.

Hybridity stands for:

the formation of cultural objects and practices that are produced by the histories of uneven and unsynthetic power relations; for example, the racial and linguistic mixings in the Philippines and among Filipinos in the United States are the material trace of the history of Spanish colonialism, US colonization, and US neocolonialism. Hybridity, in this sense, does not suggest the assimilation of Asian or immigrant practices to dominant forms but instead marks the history of survival within relationships of unequal power and domination (Lowe, 138)

One of the first to have analyzed the concept of hybridity on the basis of colonizer/colonized relationships was Bhabha. According to the Indian philosopher, cultural identity always emerges in a “Third Space of enunciation” (Bhabha, 37), in which it is impossible to identify different levels of cultural purity, which results in the recognition of cultural hybridity:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory ... may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity

(Bhabha, 38)

With *multiplicity*, Lowe refers to the “ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power” (Lowe, 138), there are indeed a myriad of multiple factors that have a say in the construction of one's cultural identity.

If put together, heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity are key elements in the understanding of the evolution of cultural identities. Thus, even though the West may still try to represent all that is “oriental” by drawing a huge amount of people, objects, histories together into one group, it is essential to subdivide this group in a way that shows the differences that make up each sub-culture and each subject on their own.

Nonetheless, the Western manner of grouping Asian ethnicities without taking into consideration their particularities allowed the creation of a so called *counter-hegemony*. This is, in other terms, what was also argued by Radhakrishnan by the term *third world*, under which ethnic minorities may feel entitled to identify themselves with, being in contrast with the ethnic majority.

As a matter of fact, hegemonic dominance is never fixed, just like cultural identity. Indeed, according to Gramsci's thought, hegemony refers both to “the social processes through which a particular dominance is maintained, as well as the processes through which that dominance is challenged and new forces are articulated. When a hegemony representing the interests of a dominant group exists, it is always within the context of resistance from emerging groups” (Gramsci, History of Subaltern Classes: Methodological Criteria, *Prison Notebooks*, 52-60).

Thus, only an open counter-hegemony that welcomes all categories of origin, social class, gender and sexuality can become the starting point for the demolition of a hegemony that only strives for the exclusion of the “different”. Such a counter-hegemony can indeed prove the existence of the elements of heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity, which all play a role in the

conception of cultures and their respective identities. As a matter of fact, all cultures are both similar and different one to the other, since they all influence and get influenced by one another. No culture is totally open or totally close, on the contrary, cultures are always open to re-definition and re-characterization, as people's cultural identities are. Consequently, those who refuse or denigrate other cultures, for instance by claiming that cultural homogenization will result from cultural hybridity, are implicitly negating their own culture, since all cultures depend on each other's similarities and differences.

Chapter III

The Healing Process

In this chapter, I am going to focus on Rupi Kaur's process of healing from her post-memorial kind of trauma. The hint of such a healing is already given in Kaur's first book, *milk and honey*, in which the narrative voice shifts perspective completely between the beginning and the end of the book. Such a shift could be achieved thanks to the awareness that she is not the only one suffering from traumatic post-memory, and that solidarity and unity with others can effectively help to overcome one's personal struggles. The community Kaur is able to identify with, is actually a very diverse one: it comprehends women and immigrants in particular, but it also includes anyone who might be experiencing a struggle similar to hers, and might then be able to empathize with her. The struggle referred to, here, is that of being accepted into society for what one is, without hiding oneself. Because of this, Kaur's poetry can be directly helpful to anyone who belongs to a minority, whichever minority it is.

As Kaur demonstrates with her poetry, being part of a minority can have a double-edged effect: on the one hand, it can offer the minority members the possibility of binding together and strive for solidarity. On the other hand, it may highlight the divergence between the minority members and all others, making it harder for those members to integrate outside one's group. Yet, the vulnerability of one who is part of a minority group also entails the possibility of resilience and resistance, since it is from being vulnerable that one can find the strength to oppose to discrimination and injustice. Kaur's state of vulnerability as the daughter of diasporic Sikh immigrants is indeed what enables her to look for solidarity in others and, in return, to offer her example and her support, through her poetry, to all those who need it.

In Kaur's case, it is through writing that solidarity and support are achieved. Writing is the activity that allows the poet to feel closer to others, as well as to rethink her story, and to appreciate what life gave her. If, at the beginning of *milk and honey*, the author is trying to recover from her traumatic post-memory, as the daughter of diasporic immigrants and as a refused brown girl in a Western country, by the end of the book, Kaur is able to gain the necessary self-confidence and self-awareness that are essential in understanding that she is actually lucky for the life she was given.

It might be that growing up allowed her to witness all the unfairness that still lingers in the world, which might even be lethal, especially for some minorities. Moreover, the enthusiast responses from her readers have allowed enabled the author to understand the importance of her writing and the

telling of her story as a way to help others, and as a way to point out humans' necessity of binding together, in order to reach equality and freedom.

The poet seems to aim at transposing her process of healing to all those who read her poetry. In this way, Kaur's poetry becomes an antidote to one's suffering and a way of realizing one's position in the world. As a matter of fact, to acknowledge others' situations of crisis, as well as to identify oneself with others, both of which are possible through literature, is likely to originate appreciation for one's own life, in spite of its ups and downs.

Vulnerability, Resilience and Resistance

The traditional view on vulnerability presupposes that vulnerability is synonymous with victimization, passivity and inaction. Yet, a subversive, more recent, consideration of vulnerability claims that vulnerability entails in itself the very possibility of resistance (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 1). Focusing on Kaur's case, it is indeed her vulnerability as a diasporic immigrant girl who enables her to resist post-memory, racism, sexism and allows resilience to generate in herself.

From this point of view, vulnerability can indeed become an essential "part of resistance, made manifest by new forms of embodied political interventions and modes of alliance that are characterized by interdependency and public action. These hold the promise of developing new modes of collective agency that do not deny vulnerability as a resource and that aspire to equality, freedom, and justice as their political aims" (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 7).

Looking at the way in which her poetry has changed shape from her first book *milk and honey* to her second *the sun and her flowers*, it is clear how Kaur was able to find strength in herself, allowing her personal vulnerability to become active resistance. As a matter of fact, in *milk and honey*, especially in its first half, Kaur's poetry highlights her personal disillusionment, as in poem eleven of *the hurting*:

if i knew what
safety looked like
i would have spent
less time falling into
arms that were not
(21)

In this poem, her vulnerability is depicted along with her search for safety, which she does not seem to find in men, for example. Possibly, this poem might hint at the way in which she was raised by

her parents and, especially, by her father, who might not have been able to instill in her a sense of safety, which she is now not able to find in men. Yet, Kaur might also be hinting at the possibility that the way in which she has tried to look for safety was wrong from the start, since she would need to feel safe within herself first and foremost. This seems to be the only way in which, from a condition of open vulnerability, one can try to generate strength within oneself, which would lead the way to a consequent open resistance.

The author's vulnerability is depicted also in poem eight of *the hurting*:

she was a rose
in the hands of those
who had no intention
of keeping her
(*milk and honey*, 18)

In this poem, Kaur might be referring both to her personal state of vulnerability as a brown girl in a Western country, and to that of any other girl who might have faced refusal, rejection or limitation only for being a girl or, as it is in Kaur's case, an immigrant girl.

In spite of the vulnerability that the author shows in these first poems, she seems to be open to reconsideration about herself and others. A slight shift of perspective seems to be shown already in poem thirteen of *the hurting*:

the idea that we are
so capable of love
but still choose
to be toxic
(*milk and honey*, 23)

In this poem, Kaur argues that the waste of love humans seem to pursue and to replace with toxicity is in itself harmful. Nonetheless, all humans are vulnerable, and this does not mean that humans are weak; on the contrary, humans have the possibility of being influenced by others, of changing, of improving, of replacing toxicity with love. It is this kind of vulnerability that will be ennobled by Kaur in the poems that follow, and that Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay discuss about in *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016).

In poem forty-five of *the healing*, Kaur seems to have reached the kind of awareness that is enabling her to consider vulnerability in its wide sense, and not only as a negative side of herself:

We all move forward when
We recognize how resilient
And striking the women
Around us are
(*milk and honey*, 191)

To be resilient and striking means to state that women are vulnerable too, and “vulnerability, reconceived as bodily exposure, is part of the very meaning and practice of resistance” (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 8).

Yet, freedom to achieve resistance can be exercised only when there is enough support for it. Any subject who acts with speech or moves on a public space, even across borders, must be one who is given the possibility to do so. Without this initial freedom, no subject can show their resistance effectively. As a matter of fact, “no one moves without a supportive environment and set of technologies. And when those environments start to fall apart or are empathically unsupportive, we are left to *fall* in some ways, and our very capacity to exercise most basic rights is imperiled” (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 14-15).

In most contemporary cases of resistance, it is a group of people who have found themselves in precarious positions that publically demand the end of such precariousness by openly showing their vulnerability. Indeed, vulnerability, resistance and solidarity constitute the powerful network that is necessary when a group, such as that of feminists, aims at criticizing and destabilizing the institutions that try to relegate them to positions of inequality and injustice.

Therefore, a minority’s tripartite network of vulnerability, resistance and solidarity is considered dangerous, and the reason behind it is that a powerful resistance can generate from the cohesion of these three elements, which might for instance threaten patriarchal institutions. It is no surprising to “hear from government authorities in several parts of the world that what women and minority populations regard as basics of equality and freedom go against the *common norms* of a national culture, or that their goals are unrealistic or ungrateful, or what they call equality and freedom are actually dangerous, posing grave security risks to the nation or to Europe or, indeed, to civilization itself” (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 21). In this sense, the issues that feminist movements face are the issues that ethnic minority groups or LGBT minority groups face as well, in spite of the ideas of some that such groups should know where to stop asking for more rights. Thus, feminist, LGBT, ethnic minority groups, among many others, are at the same time vulnerable and resistant.

In such a context, vulnerability does not have to be seen as something unwanted or detrimental, on the contrary, it is from the basis of vulnerability that resilience and resistance can

generate; “of course, there are many reasons *not* to like vulnerability. Most of us wish we were less vulnerable under conditions in which we are impinged on in ways we do not choose, and *vulnerability* names this very condition. But that alone is no reason to reject a theoretical consideration of its uses” (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 22), since “vulnerability, understood as a deliberate exposure to power, is part of the very meaning of political resistance as an embodied enactment” (22).

Moreover, looking at the contrast between majority and minority groups, it is possible to understand that all of us are intrinsically vulnerable, even those who belong to majorities. As a matter of fact, to disagree, contest and manifest against, for example, patriarchy, implies that patriarchy is in itself vulnerable too, since it is vulnerable to being dismantled. This is indeed the origin of the fear of some of becoming targets of minority groups. For example, minority groups may be criticized for putting at risk the majority group and the *common norms* of contemporary society. For example, national identities are considered by some to be at risk, because of the large immigration process that occurs worldwide every day, and that reshapes the configuration of social communities.

Thus, the term “vulnerability” should not be restricted to the description of minority groups specifically, as it may occur that a majority group can be vulnerable, too. Therefore, we can understand vulnerability as a double-edged force, one that implies being exposed to judgments and counter-attacks; one that is instead active and addresses such attacks. As vulnerability and resistance work together, it is then wrong to consider vulnerable groups as being necessarily linked to powerlessness and lack of agency. Instead, vulnerability “can be affirmed as an existential condition, since we are all subject to accidents, illness, and attacks that can expunge our lives quite quickly” (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 25). Vulnerability is neither only passive nor only active: it positions itself on a middle level which leads all humans to be contemporarily acting and acted upon.

In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt argues that “although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed and word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure” (Arendt, 180). Here, Arendt claims that when the human acts, in whatever way, he or she always has to expose him or herself to others, enabling the possibility of criticism and judgment, which are related to risk and a lack of security. Yet, the kind of vulnerability that is generated by human acts is also the presumption of any human act. Thus, according to Arendt, it is only after stepping out of one’s comfort zone that one might be able to have an impact on the world by positioning him or herself on a specific level of discourse and action (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 33-34). Thus, the act of doing is always intertwined with that of suffering, at least to a certain

extent. Any action will have consequences on further actions and such consequences are limitless, since they can never be completely foreseen. Therefore, when one decides to speak up for oneself, in order to stand for one's rights or to support another or others in their cause, one also has to foresee that he or she will be exposed; yet, exposure is the only way to transform vulnerability into resistance.

In the process of transformation of vulnerability into resistance, a central role is played by resilience. According to sociologist Bouchard, the ability to recover after shock, also known as resilience, can be achieved in three ways: "by resisting stress and returning to a prior state [...], but also by adapting to a new situation through adjustment, negotiation, and compromise, and finally by seizing on the occasion by creatively responding to the challenge of the shock or trauma. Bouchard calls these different modes (respectively) conservative, adaptive, and progressive forms of resilience" (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 55). Hall and Lamont add another type of resilience to this classification: a social type of resilience. Here, *social* involves "the capacity of groups of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or nation to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it" (Hall, Lamont, 2). In the context of social resilience, the perspective is shifted from an individual point of view to a collective one. In particular, social resilience includes the cultural and social networks that enable people to bind together and seek well-being out of a situation of crisis (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 55-56).

Social resilience is indeed what transpires from Kaur's poetry and ideals. Kaur is aiming at binding together all those who are in search of freedom and equality. The poet often addresses to women in her poetry, and specifically to women of color, as they constitute a minority in a minority. Not only do they face inequality because of their gender, but also because of their skin color. In poem forty-one of *the hurting*, the type of social resilience that I have just presented above, becomes clear in Kaur's words:

my heart aches for sisters more than anything
it aches for women helping women
like flowers ache for spring
(*milk and honey*, 187)

Here, the poet expresses the solidarity that binds herself to other women, who she calls sisters. Calling other women "sisters" points out the familial type of support that Kaur is willing to demonstrate to other women, which she shows to the public through her same poetry.

If exposure is necessary for resistance and resilience to be triggered, another element that is necessary in order for a group of people to bind together is the possibility of risk or threat. If women

like Kaur are able to show their support to other women, and are willing to spread solidarity among them, this is due to the menace of patriarchy and racism that, still nowadays, seem to put women and immigrants at risk. It is plausible that such a threat should persist, in order for resilience and resistance to generate. As a matter of fact, if no threat were presented, then vulnerability itself would not originate and, as a consequence, resistance and resilience would not follow. The main purpose of social resilience might then be to spread the moral code of resilience, convincing as many people as possible to spread it even further, in order for resistance to generate and, consequently, to challenge a situation of crisis that is persisting.

Yet, it is one's agency that enables one to act according to a resilient moral code. Agency "thus refers to the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of actions, and these capacities and skills are acquired precisely through submitting to particular disciplines. [...] Crucial to these skills is the capacity of losing much or perhaps almost everything [...] and building up everything all over again" (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 63). The concept of resilience is also bound to a specific temporality, since "resilience involves an apprehension of the future, but a future projected both as a disaster and recovery from disaster" (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 63). Thus, resilience includes the capacity of "preparedness", which enables the resilient subject to expect nothing less than what may occur (63). Indeed, in poem thirty-six of *the hurting*, Kaur calls for patience, as the basis for the hope of a better future:

if the hurt comes
so will the happiness

-be patient
(182)

In this poem, Kaur's resilient spirit comes up clearly, as well as her empathy towards others.

Kaur's call for a better future is in line with the shift in what we may call *normative femininity*, i.e. the traditional roles of fragility and vulnerability that have characterized the figure of the woman for centuries seem, in more recent times, to have left space to new feminine ideals, according to a neo-liberal, post-feminist perspective (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 66-67). According to such a perspective, women must overcome their traditional social roles, transforming damage into resource and human capital. According to neo-liberalism and post-feminism, women now have the possibility to overcome the disadvantages that were traditionally bound to the figure of the woman. Not to overcome such disadvantages would then originate a mark of distinction and even accusation towards all those women who have not engaged in such a transformation of damage into

resource. In a neo-liberal, post-feminist perspective, the “bad girls” are now those who remain in a position of vulnerability, dependence and frailty; on the other hand, the “good girls” are those who engage in actions of resistance (Butler, Gambetti, Sabsay, 66-67). Kaur seems to support such a modern rendition of what a “good girl” should be like:

now
is not the time
to be quiet
or make room for you
when we have had no room at all
now
is our time
to be mouthy
get as loud as we need
to be heard
(the sun and her flowers, 238)

Yet, such a conception of a “good” girl is here only considered under the perspective of a neo-liberal, post-feminist society. As a matter of fact, the values of such a society have not spread equally worldwide. This means that not all girls are given the same possibilities of resistance. Kaur seems to understand this issue, as she writes:

our work should equip
the next generation of women
to outdo us in every field
this is the legacy we’ll leave behind

-progress
(the sun and her flowers, 241)

Kaur is aware that the change in how women are treated and treat themselves will still take time to be reached fully, and it may even never be reached completely. As she claims:

the road to changing the world
is never-ending

-pace yourself
(the sun and her flowers, 242)

Through her poetry, Kaur is then clearly contributing to that process of change that she is encouraging her readers to pursue. In this sense, her writing works as the means through which the author can spread social resilience, in order for resilience and resistance to be achieved by her readers. Thus, writing is not only a method through which the poet is able to consider herself and her situation introspectively; writing is also allowing the author to generate a sense of solidarity between herself and her readers (and among her readers themselves). It is under this perspective that Kaur's writing acquires a healing power, both for her and for others. Not only is her writing a testimony to the author's resilience and healing, in the face of traumatic post-memory, patriarchy and racism; Kaur's poetry becomes the general witness of the social change that is occurring in the world among many minority groups, which, binding together with one another, both inside and outside their group, may have allowed resistance to generate against inequality and injustice, enabling healing to generate on a wider scale, i.e. not only individually, but rather collectively.

Healing Through Narration

Kaur's vulnerable state as a diasporic Sikh immigrant girl in Canada turned into a resistant kind of vulnerability thanks to her awareness that her poetry could heal herself from the wounds of her past. Kaur herself claims that, when she grew up, she started "feeling in extremes" (*milk and honey*, 109). Indeed, growing up let her understand her own particular condition as a post-memorial witness of diaspora, divided between two cultures and, consequently, two different ways of living.

According to Freud, traumatic events can be classified as traumatic only after they have happened, through symptoms and flashbacks from one's past trauma. This means that traumatic memory is "*completely absent from the patient's memory when they are in a normal psychological state*" but which persists below the threshold of consciousness "*astonishingly intact*" and with "*remarkable sensory force*" (Luckhurst, 8). As Luckhurst continues to argue: "There is the claim that psychoanalysis and literature are particularly privileged forms of writing that can attend to these perplexing paradoxes of trauma" (5). Indeed, artistic expression allows "representing the unrepresentable" (5). This is likely what the poet may have tried to achieve while writing her collection of poems, which are often accompanied by sketches which, as visual aids, should help the reader understand the poems.

Indeed, if artistic expression helps representing what cannot be clearly explained and understood, such as traumatic memories, then art must be a way to liberate oneself from the burden of traumatic experiences, at least up to a certain extent. Interestingly, as argued in Luckhurst's *The*

Trauma Question, the way art can release one's angst from one's traumatic experiences was actually of central importance in Romantic poetry already, in which "figurative language is a form of 'perpetual troping' around a primary experience that can never be captured" (7). And as in Romantic poetry, Kaur's poetry collection aims at expressing one's feelings, in order to release them, as well as to help all those who are in a same situation and might be reading her poetry. Yet, Kaur's second poem in *the healing* recites: "the thing about writing is / i can't tell if it's healing / or destroying me" (148). Then, the author argues that writing makes her recall what she had to live through her childhood: her traumatic past as a young immigrant in a new country seems to come to life whenever she writes. Nonetheless, writing seems to be the author's only way to give a sense to her post-memorial diasporic trauma.

Thus, Luckhurst and Kaur seem to share the same belief: trauma is difficult to be put into words, but doing so will eventually help you overcome that same trauma, at least partially. Indeed Luckhurst argues that "trauma, in effect, issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge. In its shock impact trauma is anti-narrative, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (79). As a matter of fact, challenging traumatic events, although it is a hard process that may even bring to more confusion, will eventually be explicatory for the understanding of one's own trauma, seeing that "narrative memory is not passively endured; rather, it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self" (Luckhurst, 82). Thus, to narrate trauma might at first seem to weaken one's resistance to trauma but, in the end, when narrative becomes consistent, traumatic events will start to gain order and this will eventually bring to a "productive transformation or even final resolution of trauma" (Luckhurst, 82).

On the other hand, the French post-modern philosopher Lyotard argues that "trauma freezes time, and therefore any possibility of narrative" (Luckhurst, 80). Thus, according to Lyotard, traumatic events could not be put into words on paper, because trauma is such a violent event that "cannot be integrated into diachrony" (Luckhurst, 80), i.e. that cannot be described in terms of narration, since it has neither clear boundaries nor grounds. And this would also be the reason why traumatic experiences remain, through time, as "in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time" (Luckhurst, 81, Lyotard 1984:82). Time passing by would make trauma become a faded memory, an everlasting confused flashback.

Lyotard and Luckhurst come to the conclusion that trying to give trauma a new life by recalling it while writing it, or expressing it in any way, is only "a form of tyranny or totalization" (Luckhurst, 81). It is like bringing pain back to its original state, as it was when one first felt it, as

an act of subjugation to one's own sorrows. Moreover, Lyotard proposes trauma as being "an aporia in narrative" (Luckhurst, 81), which is: "an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction" (Oxford English Dictionary), being an event to which a final satisfactory answer is impossible to find, since it is only approachable if considered back in the time when, and in the place where, it originally occurred. As a consequence, trying to look for its answer by making trauma objective and definite will only lead to even more turmoil in one's spirit.

A similar belief to Lyotard and Luckhurst's is that of the sociologist Arthur Frank, according to whom traumatic events are only possible to be included in narrative in a disrupting way. Only disrupted narrative would allow to talk about trauma. Taking as example the traumatic events caused by the Holocaust, Frank argues that to put the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust into narrative form would only be "an attempt to 'mediate atrocity' by domesticating it" (Luckhurst, 81), as if the trauma were minimized and could not be considered in its totality.

Luckhurst argues that such a discordance of opinions about trauma and its correlation to narrative is "somewhat artificial" (82), and I feel to agree with Luckhurst regarding this matter, because those who negate the possibility of trauma's narration only sustain their theory by claiming that trauma would lead to "difficulty, rupture and impossibility" (Luckhurst, 83) in a text. Nonetheless, "our culture is saturated with stories that see trauma not as a blockage but a positive spur to narrative" (Luckhurst, 83), and this might be due to the fact that real, deeply felt, narrative might be less concerned with aesthetic textual requirements and focused more on significance instead. In this way, narrative might be able to express the issues of trauma in a manner that might earn the reader's attention and interest, even when narration is not necessarily clear and proceeds in an apparent confused way, since no other ways are possible when it comes to trauma. Therefore, as quoted by Luckhurst (84), narrative would be "an act of concordance, which 'grasps together' and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events" (Ricoeur 1984: x).

The French philosopher Ricoeur particularly convinces me of the importance of narrative in understanding and giving a sense to trauma when he claims that, as quoted by Luckhurst (84): "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (1984: 52). As a consequence, trauma should pass through narrative, since narrative seems to be one of the few ways through which time can be comprehended by humans. As a matter of fact, time helps recreating one's traumatic events in one's own mind, making possible to work through trauma retrospectively. Luckhurst goes on quoting Ricoeur's discourse by claiming that Ricoeur's use of the terms "discordance" and "concordance" to describe the relation between narrative, trauma and time (which are concordant among each other), may be translated with the easier terms "blockage" and "flow". According to Luckhurst, these terms would allow one to understand how narrative, trauma

and time are concordant with one another. Indeed, time and narrative would allow a better “flow” of traumatic memories in the mind of a victim, who would be able to consider their trauma in a clearer way, with fewer possibilities of “blockage”. Yet, as specified by Luckhurst, narrative “can never finally seal over the wounds of temporal existence, and that discordance will always propel further narrative apprehensions” (85). Thus, the concordance among narrative, trauma and time that I have discussed above, would only be partially satisfactory when it comes to healing from trauma.

Thus, even if scientific discourse describes trauma as an aporia or a discordance, trauma itself might be partially considered in terms of concordance thanks to narrative, which may be able to give new shapes to trauma. Its new shape might be able to lead the victim of trauma to a new understanding of their traumatic memories, which might in turn result in a partial recovery from trauma.

Moreover, Freud would agree both with Ricoeur and Luckhurst, since he claimed that “trauma is *nachträglich*” (Luckhurst, 81), which means that trauma carries something with itself through time, something that will find its completeness and satisfaction only retrospectively, i.e. looking back in time to the original traumatic events. Freud himself argues, as quoted by Luckhurst (8), that one’s attempt to liberate oneself from trauma is by “*bringing clearly to light the memory of the event...and in arousing its accompanying affect, and when the patient had described the event in the greatest possible detail and had put the affect into words*” (Freud 1895:57). By stating thus, Freud claims that one may even get a release from the angst and sorrows generated by traumatic experiences, if s/he is able to shed light on them - writing being a way to do so. As a matter of fact, Freud claims that trauma tends to emerge more effectively at adult age because of the activity of one’s psyche, which would try to comprehend one’s trauma by representing it into one’s own mind, in order to understand it at least partially. Freud calls this phenomenon “repetition compulsion”, which leads the victim of traumatic events to experience “cycles of uncomprehending repetition unless the traumatic event is translated from repetition to the healthy analytic process of ‘working through’” (Luckhurst, 9).

Freud’s process of “working through” seems to be what Kaur is achieving by putting her traumatic experience on paper: she aims at working through her trauma and possibly come out with a satisfactory answer, which could help her get rid of the angst provoked by her trauma.

Furthermore, in the late 1980s, it was found out that traumas reemerge in adults many years after they first occurred by “unearthing pristine memories of repressed or dissociated childhood traumas” (Luckhurst, 11). Traumatic memories from one’s childhood might be recalled only during adult age because “childhood memories were highly malleable, subject to ceaseless revision and interpretation:

It may indeed be questioned whether we have any memories at all from our childhood: memories *relating* to our childhood may be all that we possess. Our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at later periods when the memories were aroused.”

(Luckhurst, 12)

Trauma memoir began to originate from the 80s: on the one hand because of the evolution of the studies of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), on the other hand because of identity politics which became always more important. Post-colonial, African-American, Latin American, Feminist, Gay and Lesbian writers (and many others) started to include cases of trauma in their works, so as to show how trauma shaped their lives, in order to spread the knowledge about problems of violence and discrimination that they had to bear. Kaur might easily be considered as a representative of at least two of these minorities: the feminist and the post-colonial ones.

With the hope of helping others who might find themselves in a similar situation, Kaur is able to create a sense of communality in her poems, both when she speaks about diaspora, abuse and when she speaks about daily issues, such as her break-up with her boyfriend. As a matter of fact, “traumatized identities become privileged sites of communality” (Luckhurst, 131). Those who share the same, or similar, traumatic experiences are likely to feel relieved when they become aware that others have gone through what they have gone through in the first place, since this shows that trauma can reach anyone, although minorities are especially involved, being fragile parts of society. Yet, in order for this sense of communality to grow, it is necessary that traumatized identities are “compulsively restaged” (Luckhurst, 131) and “represented, over and over” (131). According to Luckhurst, this would be the only way to make trauma be perceived as communal, and this inevitably brings to “the culture of celebrity” (131), of which Kaur is nowadays a representative, especially among younger generations.

Luckhurst gives an example of how celebrity and communality can work together to help people put up with the consequences of their trauma: he reports the case of the famous African-American TV presenter and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey. She started holding her talk-show in 1984, and became particularly famous after her personal confession while she was interviewing her guests about surviving sexual abuse. Her confessions revolved around being a victim of abuse by her uncle and cousin since she was 12 years old, as well as being abandoned by her parents as a child. It is on the basis of these first personal confessions that her career began to develop: starting from her personal experiences, Winfrey kept discussing about how to survive trauma, and not only trauma of sexual abuse. On the contrary, Winfrey happened to talk about others of her traumatic life

experiences, such as eating disorders, low self-esteem, teenage pregnancy and consequent miscarriage and so on. All her confessions were aimed at helping herself and others to find a way to overcome the consequences of trauma. And the discussions that arose were the key points of her TV-show: discussions create confrontation and eventually a possible answer to issues that many might feel in their lives and are looking forward to overcoming. Indeed, Luckhurst (133) reports Marshall's claim that Winfrey is so popular nowadays because the "sense of intimacy with her mass audience positions her as 'structured to reinforce the feeling of close proximity to the real and the familial'" (Marshall 1998:192). Winfrey's TV show became then a real form of therapeutic narrative, especially thanks to Winfrey's demonstration of empathy with any kind of confession and consequent vulnerability.

Kaur's poetry seems to act in the exact same way as Winfrey's TV show does: her poems take both the author herself and her readers on a journey through vulnerability, sharing and solidarity. As quoted by Luckhurst (134), Illouz claims that: "The trauma narrative is a powerful identity narrative that provides a 'centre' to the self by stitching together past and present in a narrative of self-knowledge" (Illouz, 2003: 97). And because they were able to pursue such a narrative path of self-knowledge, Oprah Winfrey and more recently Rupi Kaur are two clear examples of 'trauma celebrities'.

the healing

The last section of Kaur's *milk and honey* is entitled *the healing*. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what Kaur has gained at the end of her poetry writing: she has been healing herself by transforming her feelings into words. At the same time, she is helping her readers who might identify themselves with her story and this creates a communal sense of solidarity between the author and her readers.

Kaur's ninth poem in *the healing* recites:

do not look for healing
at the feet of those
who broke you



(*milk and honey*, 155)

Here, the narrative voice seems to have understood that the only one who can save her is actually herself.

Kaur seems to have reached a new level of self-confidence and self-awareness by the end of her first book *milk and honey*, already shown in poem ten of *the healing*, which recites:

if you were born with
the weakness to fall
you were born with
the strength to rise
(*milk and honey*, 156)

In particular, the poet seems to have become aware that everybody can find strength in themselves, if only they want to.

This is why she addresses directly to her reader in poem twelve of *the healing*, as if to highlight the importance of solidarity when it comes to heal and be healed in return. Poem twelve recites:

stay strong from your pain
grow flowers from it
you have helped me
grow flowers out of mine so
bloom beautifully
dangerously
loudly
bloom softly

however you need
just bloom

- *to the reader*
(*milk and honey*, 158)

These lines highlight the importance of supporting and being supported: of sharing with others what one may have learnt from one's grief, while learning from others in return.

In *the healing*, Kaur wants to point out how the writing process proved to be useful to her, in order to be able to express and communicate her feelings. Moreover, *the healing* seems to include all the issues that the author has been presenting to the reader along the whole collection of poetry of *milk and honey*. For instance, poem seventeen might be a final answer to her former lover, who has been a central character in both *the loving* and *the breaking*. Indeed, poem seventeen recites:

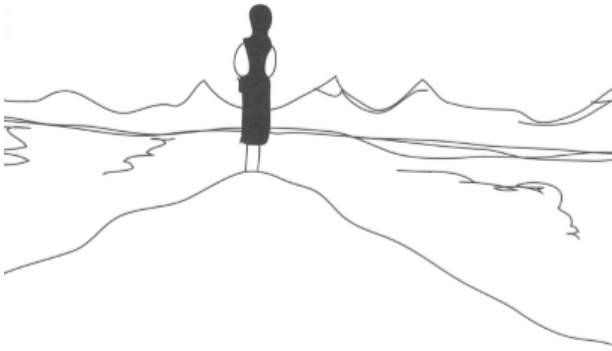
sometimes
the apology
never comes
when it is wanted
and when it comes
it is neither wanted
nor needed

- *you are too late*
(*milk and honey*, 163)

Kaur was able to forget her former lover, to regain self-confidence and self-awareness, which were put in danger by her extreme need of this male figure, as if she depended completely on him.

On the contrary, she is now able to count on herself, and this is clearly shown in poem fifteen:

fall
in love
with your solitude



(*milk and honey*, 161)

In poem thirty-five, the reader is presented with another poem highlighting the positive attitude towards life that the author seems to have finally reached by now, and is trying to pass it over to others. Poem thirty-five recites:

you look at me and cry
everything hurts
i hold you and whisper
but everything can heal



(*milk and honey*, 181)

Healing is what the author is aiming at and, being the central point in the last section of her collection, it represents the perfect ending to a book that does not aim at remaining unheard but that, on the contrary, aims at supporting and helping others.

In poem fifty-four, Kaur claims that her “heartbeat quickens at / the thought of birthing poems / which is why i will never stop / opening myself up to conceive them / the lovemaking / to the words / is so erotic / i am either in love / or in lust with / the writing / or both” (*milk and honey*, 200). In this poem, her necessity to express her emotions through writing becomes the subject of the poem and, hopefully, the poet might as well convince her readers to try writing down their feelings and experiences, in order for them to feel better afterwards. Because of this, also poem 46 revolves around the importance of art, and why it has become such an essential part of her life. She claims:

your art
is not about how many people
like your work
your art
is about
if your heart likes your work
if your soul likes your work
it's about how honest
you are with yourself
and you
must never
trade honesty
for relatability

- *to all young poets*
(*milk and honey*, 202)

According to Kaur, being accepted and approved by others is not the key to happiness, because it is not the way one can find relief from one's sorrows and reach self-awareness. On the contrary, art, writing included, must be honest, it must represent what the artist feels, not what the audience expects the artist to feel, otherwise it would not be authentic, i.e. it would not have true meaning. Kaur dedicates this poem '*to all young poets*' with the aim of persuading them to do art for themselves first. Success should never be the primal reason for them to do art.

If, on the one hand, a writer should work on the basis of their authentic feelings and opinions, on the other hand the audience might be able to instill passion and determinacy in the writer, who might feel the support of the audience and, because of this, might be able to work even more passionately. Indeed, the last poem of Kaur's first collection is again dedicated to her readers, to whom she express gratitude:

you split me open
in the most honest
way there is
to split a soul open
and forced me to write
at a time i was sure i
could not write again

- *thank you*
(*milk and honey*, 204)

The book actually ends with “- *a love letter from me to you*”, in which the author shows her thankfulness to her readers for reading her book and sharing their time with her. Therefore, the author thanks her reader “for being tender with the most delicate part of me” (206), acknowledging that:

[...] i would be nowhere if it were not for you. you’ve helped me become the woman i wanted to be. but was too afraid to be. [...] i am sending my love to your eyes. may they always find goodness in people. and may you always practice kindness. may we see each other as one. may we be nothing short of in love with everything the universe has to offer. and may we always stay grounded. rooted. our feet planted firmly onto the earth
(*milk and honey*, 206).

The Best Form of Healing Narrative

Kaur’s process of healing by writing seems to back up the research and the studies presented in DeSalvo’s *Writing as a Way of Healing*, in which the author introduces the most important research in the field of artistic expression, with the aim of healing from one’s state of unhappiness or even trauma. DeSalvo highlights how writing should not be considered a luxury, but rather “a simple, significant, yet necessary way to achieve spiritual, emotional, and psychic wholeness” (DeSalvo, 6); in order to make her readers realize how writing may actually have such an important role in one’s psychological well-being, DeSalvo metaphorically discusses about writing as if it were a fixer, since it can help “to see where I am, where I’ve been, and where I’m going” (DeSalvo, 7).

With her book, DeSalvo would then like to invite her readers to take up writing, even if only for a personal diary, since, if done purposefully, writing can generate healing. Indeed, DeSalvo argues that writing “can enable us to accomplish that shift in perspective marked by acceptance,

authenticity, depth, serenity, and wisdom that is the hallmark of genuine healing” (12). Since you cannot simply erase your sadness or even your traumatic memories, you might as well learn how to gain self awareness out of it. DeSalvo underlines that sharing might be what makes writing the best healing means for an ached soul, since solidarity can be generated from sharing. Moreover, writing can be achieved in all occasions and in any mood one is in. When one is happy, one may better realize the benefits of their happiness if they temporarily detach themselves from that same happiness through the process of writing, in order to appreciate their happiness even more. But writing might be even more helpful when one is living through a hard time, since to detach oneself from a hard moment may help you regain balance and self-awareness, which a sad moment may have obscured. DeSalvo cares to precise that no talent is needed in order for writing to activate its beneficial effects, even though “we become more skilled as we write, especially when we pay careful attention to the process of our writing” (DeSalvo, 15).

Backing up DeSalvo’s considerations on writing seems to be Pennebaker’s *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others* (New York: Morrow, 1990), which contains relevant scientific research supporting the relation between opening oneself up through the act of writing and one’s possibility of, at least partial, healing. Pennebaker’s book is a milestone in recent research in this psychological field. While Pennebaker was Professor of psychology in the United States, he and his associates were able to prove that “writing can be an avenue to that interior place where... we can confront traumas and put them to rest – and heal both body and mind” (DeSalvo, 20). Thus, his book is one of the scientific proofs that confirmed what was just an intuition for many: writing can really help the healing process, both psychologically and physiologically.

Nonetheless, Pennebaker and his associates confirmed that only one particular type of writing is actually helpful to achieve healing, and they proved this by studying how traumatized university students reacted to different types of writing. At first, they asked their students to write for fifteen minutes a day, for four days. Yet, they divided the students into three main groups: some would write about venting emotions related to their traumas, some would just describe the traumatic events they lived, and the rest of them would link their traumas with their deepest emotions. It is interesting to notice how the first two groups immediately started feeling optimistic about their writing and the results that their writing was having on their mood; the third group instead did not show particularly positive results initially; on the contrary, they would feel pushed back by their emotions, which prevented them from generating a flow of words. Yet, four months after these initial, negative, results, this third group of students started reporting an increase in their confidence in writing, which was accompanied by an improvement in letting go of their feelings. Thus, the

most important discovery in this research was that “*to significantly improve your spirits long-term, you must endure difficult feelings initially*” (DeSalvo, 22).

Pennebaker and Beall kept checking their students’ improvement, and after six months from the start of their research, their students’ visit to the student health service dropped by approximately 50 per cent. At this point, after half a year through the experiment, Pennebaker and Beall could eventually uphold that: “*to improve health, we must write detailed accounts, linking feelings with events*” (22), this is when writing becomes true narrative: “the more writing succeeds as narrative - by being detailed, organized, compelling, vivid, lucid - the more health and emotional benefits are derived from writing” (DeSalvo, 22). Pennebaker and Beall witnessed a true catharsis in the attitude and emotions of these students, who were able to integrate their trauma with their deepest emotions, in order for their trauma to be - at least partially - comprehended and accepted into their lives: “they assimilated the meaning of this event into their lives, thereby diffusing its power over them” (DeSalvo, 22).

Another research by Pennebaker, which confirmed his first findings, is *Confession, Inhibition, and Disease* (1989), which analyzed the wave activity in the brains of people dealing with traumatic experiences. Pennebaker was able to prove that the students who dealt with their emotions whilst writing about their trauma showed involvement of both their right and left brain hemispheres in their writing. This means that “both emotional and linguistic information was being processed and integrated simultaneously” (DeSalvo 23). Moreover, to be able to connect and express one’s deep feelings with one’s traumatic experiences was proven to have similar effects as activities such as meditation and yoga, which explains why “people who begin writing report feeling a greater sense of well-being – why they become calmer, more capable of coping with stress, more serene, even when facing life’s challenges, than they’d been before” (DeSalvo, 23). Also behavioral changes were produced as positive results of thoughtful writing; for example students’ grades improved, people were able to find jobs more quickly, people were less absent from work and so on (DeSalvo, 24). Thus, writing as an activity of expressing oneself, might then be considered as a starting point towards one’s mental well-being, especially when one is facing a traumatic experience.

On the contrary, when feelings are repressed, even the smallest sorrow can be seen as insuperable and unbearable. As Pennebaker proved, to repress one’s real emotions may lead to actual damage to one’s immune system, to the heart and the vascular system, and even to the functions of the brain and the nervous system; whilst “writing thoughtfully and emotionally about traumatic experiences, rather than writing about superficial topics or venting feelings or simply describing what happens, seems to improve our immune system” (DeSalvo, 23).

People who were seriously traumatized, for example by sexual abuse, suicides or deaths of close friends or family members were less likely found to be victims of serious illness if they discussed these events and accepted psychological help. Yet, often people who have been more or less touched by traumatic experiences do not accept help and would not even share their experiences with others, because of many different reasons. Embarrassment, punishment or disapproval are the main reasons preventing traumatized individuals to accept others' help. Yet, traumatic events cannot simply be forgotten. Therefore, to confront oneself with the chaos of trauma is the only effective way to gain control over trauma itself and, hopefully, to integrate it into one's own personal story of self-awareness. Eventually, the liberation from one's repression of trauma alleviates "the stress of holding back our stories and repressing or hiding our emotions, and so our health improves" (DeSalvo, 24-5) .

DeSalvo specifies how writing should be done, in order to be thoughtful and, therefore, beneficial. Firstly, writing should aim at being specific: writing should be able to describe details about traumatic events, and after the events have been described, one should try to relate one's own feelings to these events. "In other words, we can't improve health by free-writing [...] or by writing objective descriptions of our traumas or by venting emotions. We cannot simply use writing as catharsis. Nor can we use it only as a record of what we've experienced. *We must write in a way that links detailed descriptions of what happened with feelings – then and now – about what happened*" (DeSalvo, 25). Indeed, with no linking between one's feelings and one's personal story there would be no real benefits from writing; on the contrary, if feelings are released without canalizing them in a way that retraces our personal stories, then these same feelings would be likely to become violently intense and could eventually create even more sickness.

Thus, thinking and feeling are both to be included in a beneficial type of writing, which has to take into consideration both the past, when traumatic events originated, and the present, considering what traumatic events left us with and how we changed through time because of them. And if this type of writing is done regularly, then it is very likely that it will improve one's emotional and physical health. As a matter of fact, the more time is dedicated to writing, the more beneficial writing will be.

"Desperation, grief, loss, longing" (DeSalvo, 31) are the emotions that usually push you towards starting writing a diary, for instance. DeSalvo herself felt these same emotions, only, she says: "I didn't know that if you want to write, you must follow your desire to write. And that your writing will help you unravel the knots in your heart. I didn't know that you could write simply to take care of yourself, even if you have no desire to publish your work" (31). Thus, it is only when

writing does not aim specifically at others' approval, but firstly to your personal approval, that it can become "soul-satisfying, deeply nurturing" (DeSalvo, 31).

In DeSalvo's book, readers are presented with several cases of popular female writers who started their careers out of grief or depression, and found their way of liberation in writing, just like Rupi Kaur has recently shown to have done. One relevant case is that of Isabel Allende, whose masterpiece *The House of the Spirits* was initially conceived as a personal diary, which could embrace Allende's personal confessions and their consequent intimate feelings. Indeed, this book might even be considered as a letter that Allende addresses to her father. Before she started writing, Allende never thought she could ever become a real writer, mainly because she was never taught that women could become writers. Despite the patriarchal family situation she was raised in, she decided that it was high time she put her thoughts and emotions on paper, in order to release her soul from the weight of her father's impending death, which became her only concern in life. Thus, what was at first conceived as a personal letter grew into an actual book. Also Allende's *Of Love and Shadows* (1984) and *Paula* (1994) are, for different reasons, products of Allende's deepest personal emotions. The former originated from Allende's will of remembering "the disappeared, the tortured, the dead, the brutal repression throughout Latin America" (DeSalvo, 39). The latter is yet originated from the grief of her daughter's loss, which would inspire Allende "to recover memories others have forgotten, to remember what never happened and what still may happen" (DeSalvo, 38).

Allende claims her works to have been therapeutic on herself: "other people go to a therapist... to talk about the world and about life and the pain of living. I do it through my writing" (DeSalvo, 38). Writing allowed her "to integrate this and other traumatic experiences into her life" (DeSalvo, 39). For instance, even from the death of her daughter, Allende claims to have learnt "the virtues of *patience, courage, resignation, dignity*" (39). As a matter of fact, "loss is a universal human experience, something we all must learn to deal with. Sharing our stories of loss, and accepting loss as a common feature of life, Allende says, helps us *enjoy the good moments all the more*" (39). For this reason, Allende is not only "*simply a story-teller, she's a story giver*" (39).

For DeSalvo, another notable example of this sort is Virginia Woolf. Woolf argued that there were some personal experiences that pushed her towards the world of writing and, also in Woolf's case, such experiences generated intense emotions that needed to find a way of liberation. One of Woolf's traumatic memories was her father's violence towards herself and her mother. Through writing, Woolf claimed to have gained self-awareness as well as her pride as a woman. Writing helped her achieve "*what psychoanalysts do for their patients*" (DeSalvo, 40). By expressing her deep emotions on paper, Woolf could release her inner self, achieving inner peace.

Even though writing cannot replace actual therapy, “writing permits the construction of a cohesive, elaborate, thoughtful personal narrative in the way that simply speaking about our experiences doesn’t. [...] Through writing, suffering can be translated into art” (DeSalvo, 41). Moreover, writing can even work “as a form of public testimony in a way that the private act of therapy doesn’t” (41). As a matter of fact, all that is brought about by the therapeutic process is not usually aimed at helping others, it remains a one-to-one relationship between the patient and the therapist. On the contrary, writing allows to overstep the boundaries of this tight connection, and brings to the outside world something that might be useful and inspiring for others too.

Therefore, Woolf would *deliberately* use “her writing as self-analysis to examine and integrate deeply felt yet unexpressed emotions linked to the troubling events of her past” (DeSalvo, 40). For example, in her work *A Sketch of the Past*, she recalls a traumatic moment of her childhood, when she was sexually assaulted by her half-brother at the age of six. The description of that moment is particularly accurate and detailed. Through her description of this event, Woolf “wanted to discover the source of her difficult adult feelings and character traits: her hopelessness, despair, shame, depression, but also her creativity, resilience, strength, intellectual curiosity, integrity, and courage” (DeSalvo, 42). By writing down her story, Woolf was able to offer a meaning to what had happened to her, to reconstruct her wounded reality, “redefining herself” (DeSalvo, 42).

Another effect that writing had on Woolf was her realization that when one writes down the events from one’s life, these same events may become more clear after the process of writing has occurred. An example is in Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*. This work focuses on the character of Jacob, which is itself based on Woolf’s brother Thoby. Woolf claimed that while she was writing about her brother, she was able to reach awareness about who her brother really was, in a way that she would not have acknowledged otherwise. This would not necessarily change Woolf’s affection towards his brother, but rather Woolf started seeing her brother’s racism and sexism more clearly. Thus, writing about Thoby allowed Woolf to stop idealizing his brother, and this allowed her to see him as honestly and clearly as she had never seen him before.

What Woolf and Allende both describe seems to match perfectly with DeSalvo’s arguments: when writing is done thoughtfully, then it may really become beneficial for the healing of one’s trauma.

Another writer who shares a similar story to that of Allende and Woolf is Henry Miller. The examples of these writers all show that writing can be beneficial for anyone, with no difference of gender or any other sort. Even though these three writers I have reported had different traumatic experiences, and different ways of telling their stories, they can still be grouped in terms of how

they found liberation from their traumatic personal stories, i.e. by writing. For instance, Miller's traumatic moment in life was the realization that his wife was cheating on him with another woman, who was a mutual friend of the couple. After finding this, many different emotions started to take control over Miller, and this re-opened wounds that Miller thought were healed, such as the memories of his difficult childhood: his father being an alcoholic, his mother being physically abusive, him being sexually abused as a child. The re-opening of these wounds would add up to the shock of his wife's betrayal, up to a point to which he thought about committing suicide as the only possible way out of the grief he was feeling.

Yet, Miller eventually decided to write down everything that he could not express in any other way. All of his novels would therefore be inspired by his trauma, which allowed him to search in his deepest inner-self for self-awareness and order: "before his loss, he lived his life unconsciously" (DeSalvo, 44). Expressing himself on paper let Miller reconsider himself as a whole and righteous man.

As a matter of fact, also Kaur's beginnings as a writer originated from her need of expressing what she had been keeping inside of herself for many years during her childhood and adolescence. And as it happens in her poetry, one has to allow one's wounds to re-open to consideration and reflection, in order for one's traumatic memories to start healing. Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind that no writer can give their readers the final answer to their life problems or sorrows: there is no perfect answer. Nonetheless, what writers can do is "to enter so deeply into human suffering" (DeSalvo, 54) that their words become healing instruments for whomever needs them.

An important tool that allows to revisit one's trauma and that might even lead to its resolution is imagination. As studied by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), dreams are triggered by one's imagination, and they represent an attempt that aims at the understanding of memories, especially of traumatic memories. Therefore, the imaginative process may be itself triggered by traumatic experiences. Thus imagination supports the healing of traumatic wounds, since it can give a symbolic meaning to trauma. And a way to turn victims' dreams and imagination into useful tools is to put them into words, through narrative (DeSalvo, 55).

Aberbach also claims in his book *Surviving Trauma* (1989) that creative work such as writing helps to get along with trauma, and eventually overcome it, by functioning like the mechanism of mourning, which is a natural consequence of grief. What mainly differentiates the outcome of mourning from that of writing though, is that writing can be done "at a safe and symbolic distance" (DeSalvo, 56). As a matter of fact, mourning is a natural response to grief and sorrow, and it may eventually lead one to being released from one's despair. Yet, the process of

mourning is very intense and occasionally dangerous for one's own health and well-being; on the contrary, a creative process like writing seems to produce the same benefits of mourning but, at the same time, it allows one to feel partly detached from the traumatic events one is writing about. This detachment might then be the key to finding a symbolic meaning to one's trauma. Thus the aim of writing, just like the aim of mourning, is to master the feelings of grief that traumatic events are likely to produce.

In the end, the product of the writing process becomes the proof of one's engagement in the resolution of one's trauma. "By writing, we celebrate, too, our courage and survival" (DeSalvo, 57), showing that denial can be transformed into acceptance, that conflict can be transformed into order, that grief and despair can eventually turn into growth. Furthermore, one's piece of writing is always unique, since it is never like that of any other. Thus, what one should be sure to achieve in writing is the building of one's own personal story and confessions. A healing narrative should indeed link our emotions to the events of our memories; it should use both the positive and the negative sides of our memories, since one's story is never completely negative nor completely positive. It is yet important to keep in mind that negative feelings must be used moderately in our writing, since their reenactment may lead to even more negativity. Instead, to re-enact positive feelings would only lead to more positivity. On the other hand, one should not refuse one's negative emotions derived from trauma: a balanced narrative that includes both positive and negative emotions is indeed key for a successful healing writing.

Furthermore, narrative must be coherent, organized and complete, since it has to unravel the hidden insights that derive from one's traumatic experiences, and this can be achieved only when one understands in detail how one's trauma has happened, and the more one writes, the more details one is going to unblock about one's past trauma.

Finally, narrative can be effectively healing only if it links our experience as victims to that of others, who might be either victims themselves or might instead just be empathetic towards our experience, in order to trigger solidarity, which is another important key point for the healing of trauma-related memories.

Conclusion

The main aim of my dissertation was to make the poetry of Rupi Kaur known as an example of how a young writer was able to turn her life experiences and post-memorial traumatic memories into a path of healing, which her readers may have the chance to pursue as well, were they willing to. Indeed, Kaur's poetry may be of inspiration to anyone who, struggling to find one's place in the world and to make one's voice be heard, may be able to find in her poetry an encouragement to resist social discrimination, to originate resilience in oneself and, hopefully, to even create one's own path of healing.

Kaur's claims about the injustices of society and, on the other hand, the power of social resilience and resistance, are backed up by the studies and the research of the scholars and authors that I have included in my dissertation. Indeed, the discourses of the scholars I have quoted in my dissertation proved to be able to explain Rupi Kaur's situation as a Sikh immigrant girl who, after being born in Punjab, was brought to Canada by her family, with the hope of offering her a better life. In such a context, themes like feminism, post-colonialism, diaspora and post-memory become necessary elements in the discourse that I have carried out in my dissertation, because Kaur's poetry is implicitly, but sometimes explicitly, addressing social issues which are directly related to such themes, and to know about these themes means to be able to read Kaur's poetry more consciously. In spite of the focus on post-memorial trauma, Rupi Kaur's poetry is also able to offer a positive view on life, especially because of the elements of solidarity and resilience which, if turned into a synergic purposeful movement, may be able to start a process of healing which may result in the transformation of one's trauma into one's opportunity of growing and learning.

Moreover, Kaur's poetry collections are also proofs of how art, in particular writing, may be a helpful tool in the reconfiguration of one's traumatic or post-traumatic memories, which may turn into active sites of remembrance which, instead of dragging one down, may be used by one to acknowledge one's personal or familial experiences and, by expressing oneself on paper, one might be able to reach a level of self-consciousness which may trigger one's process of healing from those same experiences.

To write my dissertation about Kaur's poetry has allowed me to widen my knowledge about some social issues that I was aware of, but that are not always given the attention from society that they would instead deserve. Sexism and racism, often depicted in Kaur's poetry, are only two examples of how society, especially modern society, tends to divide people up, on the basis of discrimination. The discourses that Kaur is able to evoke through her poetry are indeed relevant for everybody; this means that her poetry may be considered as a good starting point in the reconsideration of one's

role in society, since social individuals must understand that it is not hatred and intolerance that will make society a better place, but it is rather the consciousness of belonging to a same world and to a same species, that of humans, that should trigger one's solidarity towards others, which may eventually lead to the creation of a fair and just society. Therefore, the poetry of Kaur is indeed powerful in the messages that it releases, which make its readers reflect on a series of matters which might be otherwise difficult to ponder on, if one is not encouraged to do so:

to hate

is an easy lazy thing

but to love

takes strength

everyone has

but not all are

willing to practice

(the sun and her flowers, 207)

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Summary

milk and honey e *the sun and her flowers* sono le collezioni di poesia della giovane scrittrice Rupī Kaur. Entrambe queste opere trattano dei concetti del trauma e della guarigione, i quali sono tra loro opposti ma, allo stesso tempo, connessi, per il fatto che l'esistenza dell'uno implica spesso l'esistenza dell'altro.

Infatti, nella mia tesi di laurea ho discusso del modo in cui le opere della scrittrice Rupī Kaur sono rappresentative di un particolare tipo di letteratura: quella del post-memoria traumatico, la quale permette all'autrice, e al lettore, di riflettere sui propri ricordi traumatici, così come su quelli altrui, in modo da permettere l'origine di una presa di coscienza riguardante tali ricordi e, conseguentemente, di riappropriarsi attivamente della propria vita.

Nel primo capitolo della mia tesi ho concentrato la discussione sugli elementi che compongono il trauma: come esso può avere origine in una persona, quali sono le ragioni di tale origine, e anche di quali conseguenze esso sia generatore. Ho considerato in modo particolare il fenomeno del disturbo da stress post-traumatico, il quale comprende l'insieme di reazioni ad un evento di stress o ad una serie di eventi stressanti; la crescita post-traumatica, che si può definire come lo sforzo di imparare dal proprio passato e dalle proprie esperienze, così come dal passato e dalle esperienze altrui; il tema del post-memoria, il quale identifica la custodia dei ricordi passati, che non sono necessariamente ricordi personali, bensì, generalmente, ricordi a cui un individuo è particolarmente legato, come ricordi relativi all'ambiente familiare in cui si è cresciuti e agli individui che ne hanno fatto parte; la multi-direzionalità dei ricordi e della memoria, che si può descrivere come la caratteristica che connette tra loro i ricordi di diversi individui che, sebbene diversi, possono contenere una radice comune; il tema del post-memoria nell'era digitale e visiva, che si rifà all'influenza che il mondo digitale ha recentemente avuto sul modo in cui i ricordi vengono sviluppati e trasferiti tra vari soggetti, tra loro anche molto distanti l'uno dall'altro; il post-memoria femminile, che si riferisce al particolare tipo di post-memoria presente nelle poesie di Rupī Kaur, ovvero un post-memoria tendenzialmente orientato al femminile; l'eredità del post-memoria generata dall'interrelazione tra oggetti, tradizioni, luoghi, che, formanti un insieme, possono suscitare ricordi particolari in un individuo riguardo al suo passato.

Nel secondo capitolo della mia tesi ho analizzato in modo più specifico il post-memoria personale della scrittrice Kaur, il quale può essere approcciato grazie alla lettura delle sue poesie, che dischiudono spesso temi relativi al suo post-memoria. Ho iniziato questo secondo capitolo presentando il tema della violenza di genere, che viene spesso discussa all'interno delle opere della scrittrice, sia attraverso la poesia che attraverso i disegni che Kaur accompagna alle sue rime.

Inoltre, in questa sezione del secondo capitolo ho anche offerto una visione generale rispetto a cosa implichi la violenza di genere in un contesto indiano in cui Rupri Kaur è cresciuta; Kaur nacque infatti nella regione del Panjab, India. Per questo, ho trovato interessante introdurre nella mia tesi di laurea anche le figure di due scrittrici indiane, Krishna Mehta e Shauna Singh Baldwin, le quali, attraverso i loro libri, hanno provato ad identificare quali sono le ragioni alla base dell'origine della violenza di genere in India.

In seguito, ho discusso di come la nudità del corpo femminile possa essere utilizzata come arma, in modo da rendere chiaro come spesso la resilienza femminile venga sottovalutata e nascosta. Per questa ragione ho anche trattato il tema della resistenza femminista e post-moderna, che le donne hanno, più che mai in epoca moderna, dimostrato di perseguire, alla ricerca di uguaglianza e pari opportunità.

Successivamente ho aperto una panoramica sul tema del post-colonialismo e della diaspora, essendo che le poesie di Rupri Kaur non sono da considerare solamente come una difesa dell'uguaglianza tra uomini e donne, bensì esse possono anche essere utilizzate al fine di rivendicare l'uguaglianza tra essere umani in senso lato, che si prospetta specialmente in difesa dell'uguaglianza di tutti gli esseri umani, senza distinzione di etnia o origine. Riguardo a questo, è stato essenziale discutere del caso personale di Rupri Kaur, la quale è una giovane adulta Sikh, figlia della moderna diaspora indiana. Per questo, ho ritenuto essenziale discutere dei temi dell'identità etnica e culturale, in modo da comprendere come un'identità come quella di Rupri Kaur si sviluppi, essendo essa un'identità che, in un certo senso, è suddivisa tra due culture e che necessariamente entra in contatto con le problematiche dell'identificazione del sé, intesa in senso sia individuale, come persona singola, che collettivo, inteso in relazione ad un gruppo sociale d'appartenenza.

Il capitolo finale della mia tesi è invece focalizzato sulla possibilità di guarigione dai ricordi traumatici e dal post-memoria. In modo particolare, nel terzo ed ultimo capitolo della mia tesi ho discusso di come i concetti della vulnerabilità, della resilienza e della resistenza possano costituire le fondamenta per un eventuale, e possibile, processo di guarigione dal trauma. Inoltre, ho anche esaminato quale potere di guarigione possa contenere in sé l'attività artistica, la scrittura in primo luogo, visto che essa può permettere di esaminare i ricordi traumatici e post-traumatici di un individuo e, possibilmente, di originare guarigione da essi. Inoltre, ho anche analizzato come si sia strutturato il processo di guarigione che Rupri Kaur ha saputo creare grazie alla sua attività scrittorica, processo che è osservabile in modo particolarmente chiaro nell'ultima sezione della sua prima collezione di poesie, *milk and honey*, che la scrittrice intitola, non a caso, *the healing*, cioè "la guarigione". Poi, in quest'ultimo capitolo della tesi, ho anche esaminato il modo in cui, secondo i pareri di rinomati esperti e accademici, la scrittura e la narrativa dovrebbero essere strutturate,

quando hanno come obiettivo quello di generare guarigione da determinati eventi traumatici o post-traumatici di un individuo.

Per redigere la mia tesi, ho provveduto alla ricerca e alla raccolta di opere rappresentanti le maggiori voci nel campo degli studi del trauma, e in particolar modo degli studi post-traumatici, i quali si sono rivelati essenziali nell'analisi che ho condotto sulla particolare tipologia di post-memoria traumatico che identifica la figura, artistica e umana, di Rupī Kaur. Per questa ragione, accademici e pensatori come Caruth, Hirsch e Rothberg, tra gli altri, sono stati spesso citati nel mio lavoro di tesi, visto che essi sono stati in grado di offrire importanti indizi nel panorama del trauma e del suo relativo sviluppo negli umani, e di come esso possa anche essere trasferito alle future generazioni attraverso il cosiddetto post-memoria.

Inoltre, essendo l'esperienza post-traumatica di Rupī Kaur tendenzialmente identificabile con i temi del post-colonialismo, della diaspora e delle migrazioni in generale, oltre che con le tematiche del femminismo e del post-modernismo, studiosi e autori di importanti opere riguardanti tutti questi temi sono stati inseriti nella mia discussione, tra cui ad esempio Appadurai, bell hooks, Bhabha, Braziel, June, Mannur, Misri, Radhakrishnan, i quali hanno contribuito alla costruzione del discorso del mio elaborato di tesi. Infine, le ricerche dell'autrice DeSalvo si sono rivelate molto utili come supporto alla mia considerazione riguardo a come la scrittura, e il processo creativo ed artistico in generale, possano essere stati gli elementi chiave nella creazione di un processo di guarigione in Rupī Kaur; al contempo, l'analisi di Butler, Gambetti e Sabsay riguardo a come la vulnerabilità e la resilienza siano profondamente connesse l'una all'altra ha potuto confermare la convinzione della poetessa Kaur riguardo al fatto che, per fiorire (Kaur utilizza la metafora del fiore) una persona deve necessariamente passare attraverso i processi di appassimento, caduta, radicamento e crescita.

Personalmente, ho deciso di scrivere la mia tesi di laurea sulle poesie di Rupī Kaur perché le considero essere estremamente rilevanti nel contesto sociale contemporaneo: le poesie dell'autrice indo-canadese mi hanno infatti spinto a riflettere su molte problematiche socio-culturali dei tempi in cui viviamo, e sempre permettendomi di sentirmi connesso con le percezioni e gli ideali dell'autrice, i quali, a mio parere, sono chiari, diretti ed onesti. Rupī Kaur è infatti una giovane adulta che, sulla base delle sue origini e della sua esperienza di giovane immigrata in un paese straniero, qual è per lei il Canada, è riuscita a incanalare nelle sue collezioni di poesie un senso di continua ricerca e indagine, in relazione ai limiti della società, la quale spesso si auto-impone barriere socio-culturali, le quali non sono altro che costruzioni umane. Per esempio, le poesie di Kaur si focalizzano spesso sulla disuguaglianza che, ancora oggi, c'è tra uomini e donne, così come

tra stranieri e nativi; in entrambi i casi, la concezione di disuguaglianza alla base di tali gruppi presume un rapporto di superiorità di un gruppo sull'altro.

Oltre a questo, le poesie dell'autrice si concentrano spesso sull'importanza di ricordare le proprie origini e di farle valere, essendo che esse rappresentano non solo la storia degli antenati di ognuno, bensì la storia personale di ognuno, che identifica ciascun individuo come un essere umano unico, concedendogli di conoscere le proprie radici.

Un altro importante aspetto caratterizzante le collezioni di poesie della giovane autrice è quello relativo alla necessità di provare a comprendere le prospettive e i punti di vista dell'altro: per questo, la poesia di Kaur elogia la libertà come valore fondamentale che non dovrebbe mai essere dato per scontato, essendo che esso non è ancora garantito equamente a tutti sul pianeta. Detto ciò, è importante constatare come Rupī Kaur sia in grado, attraverso la sua esperienza personale, di dimostrare come la resilienza, specialmente se condivisa con altri soggetti di una comunità, possa generare resistenza, la quale è utile per far fronte alle sfide sociali che l'essere umano è quotidianamente chiamato a combattere e, eventualmente, ad accettare i propri ricordi traumatici, in modo da poter generare auto-guarigione dagli stessi.

Per tutti i temi che ho presentato finora, ho considerato dunque interessante discutere nella mia tesi delle poesie dell'autrice Kaur, e condividere le sue prospettive, sia personali che artistiche, con il mio lettore. Un'ulteriore ragione che mi ha convinto a basare la mia tesi di laurea sulle due opere dell'autrice Kaur è il fatto che la giovane poetessa sia stata in grado, nonostante la sua giovane età, di porre l'attenzione su determinate tematiche che sono generalmente lontane dai discorsi e dai pensieri giovanili. Di fatto, credo che sia proprio dalle nuove generazioni che si possa tentare di generare conoscenza riguardo a tali problematiche. I giovani sono infatti i soggetti che, più di tutti, riescono ad aprirsi più facilmente alla diversità, ed essendo che la diversità è diventata un elemento sostanziale nella struttura sociale delle nazioni moderne, i giovani sono spesso coloro che vedono nella diversità la norma: la globalizzazione, per esempio, ha creato un'interdipendenza di elementi quali luoghi e persone, i quali non sono più da considerare semplicemente sulla base delle loro origini e della loro etnia, così come neanche sulla base del loro genere, della loro religione o del loro orientamento sessuale, ma piuttosto come soggetti unici formanti l'intera collettività umana.

Questo è essenzialmente l'ulteriore punto di forza all'interno della poetica di Rupī Kaur: la testimonianza relativa alle esperienze che lei ha vissuto da immigrata può rivelarsi utile per riuscire a prendere posizione contro tutte quelle situazioni in cui l'uomo tende tipicamente a creare delle distinzioni e dei rapporti di superiorità e di inferiorità, che non fanno altro che evidenziare le disparità e le disuguaglianze, precludendo la via del dialogo e dell'incontro, che sarebbero invece

possibili da perseguire se solo l'essere umano riuscisse a focalizzare la propria attenzione più sulle similarità che uniscono tra loro gli esseri umani.

Tali similarità sarebbero poi, come dimostrato da Rupī Kaur nelle sue poesie, gli elementi su cui è possibile creare una connessione solidale tra più individui, i quali, anche nel caso di situazioni traumatiche, o post-traumatiche, potrebbero essere coinvolti in un processo di autoconsapevolezza riguardo a sé stessi e agli altri, in modo da percepire quanto gli esseri umani siano in grado di comprendersi l'un l'altro e di aiutarsi a vicenda in momenti che, come quelli traumatici o post-traumatici, possono richiedere la presenza dell'altro. Ciò proverebbe infatti che l'essere umano ha la necessità di vivere inserito all'interno di un gruppo sociale, il quale può permettere al singolo individuo di sentirsi più forte, e resiliente, nei riguardi delle sfide che la vita gli impone.