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A Review of Decolonial Feminist Research: Haunting, Rememory and Mothers (Futures of Data Analytics in Qualitative Research)

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Abstract

How do we begin to connect to those who are no longer living, those who have been historically silenced, and those whose memory becomes a faint existence in our modern, colonial imaginary? Within *Decolonial Feminist Research: Haunting, Rememory, and Mothers*, Jeong-eun Rhee, a qualitative educational researcher, examines the tension that often accompanies the implementation of decolonial feminist knowledges, methodologies, and epistemologies, especially when these theoretical perspectives challenge the academic canon rooted in modernity and social scientific empirical realities. This review addresses Rhee's major theoretical conceptualizations such as *Rememory*, *M/others* and *Haunting* throughout the various processes that often connect individuals through death and grieving. Rhee demonstrates that the production of knowledge being constructed through the *rememory* of those who have since passed, not only provides existence to their stories, but makes their lives, histories, and memories "very much alive and present." Rhee challenges notions of the living/dead, remembrance/forgotten, time, national borders, and the fragmented self in an effort to establish new decolonial imaginaries and methodologies for bringing the silenced voices of women of color to the forefront of our modern reality. This book is recommended for any qualitative researchers and decolonial feminist scholars who are interested in challenging colonial matrices of power that often silence voices/stories from being included in western canons of academia, and those who want to examine the very notions of academic scholarship, epistemology, ontology, and methodology in order to secure a place where the *rememory* of those silenced out of existence can thrive and whose haunting enacts a decolonial resistance to the continued systems of oppression dominating the colonized other.

Keywords

decolonial feminism, feminist research, rememory, haunting, qualitative research

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A Review of *Decolonial Feminist Research: Haunting, Rememory and Mothers* (Futures of Data Analytics in Qualitative Research)

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How do we begin to connect to those who are no longer living, those who have been historically silenced, and those whose memory becomes a faint existence in our modern, colonial imaginary? Within *Decolonial Feminist Research: Haunting, Rememory, and Mothers*, Jeong-eun Rhee, a qualitative educational researcher, examines the tension that often accompanies the implementation of decolonial feminist knowledges, methodologies, and epistemologies, especially when these theoretical perspectives challenge the academic canon rooted in modernity and social scientific empirical realities. This review addresses Rhee's major theoretical conceptualizations such as *Rememory*, *M/others* and *Haunting* throughout the various processes that often connect individuals through death and grieving. Rhee demonstrates that the production of knowledge being constructed through the *rememory* of those who have since passed, not only provides existence to their stories, but makes their lives, histories, and memories "very much alive and present." Rhee challenges notions of the living/dead, remembrance/forgotten, time, national borders, and the fragmented self in an effort to establish new decolonial imaginaries and methodologies for bringing the silenced voices of women of color to the forefront of our modern reality. This book is recommended for any qualitative researchers and decolonial feminist scholars who are interested in challenging colonial matrices of power that often silence voices/stories from being included in western canons of academia, and those who want to examine the very notions of academic scholarship, epistemology, ontology, and methodology in order to secure a place where the *rememory* of those silenced out of existence can thrive and whose haunting enacts a decolonial resistance to the continued systems of oppression dominating the colonized other.

Keywords: decolonial feminism, feminist research, rememory, haunting, qualitative research

Current research in decolonial and postcolonial studies has become essential to the comprehension of the structure of modernity, and to understand the subjectivity of those relegated to a colonized status. The global system has become divided between what some scholars refer to as the Global North and the Global South, where the Global South represents much of the southern hemisphere that has been subjugated to colonized rule, imposing a system of exploitation, enslavement, indentured servitude, sociopolitical marginalization, and subalternity. As over half the world's nations move through a postcolonial trajectory, and continue to challenge the notion of modernity, it has become essential and critical to expand the scholarship within decolonial work as the status of modernity has only privileged those nations who were and who are currently colonial, imperialist powers.

Many of the current obstacles associated with the scholarship of Decoloniality and Postcoloniality deals with the relationship between the presence of academic colonization, linguistics, and colonizing methodologies placed upon those nations depicted as simply

agents of observation and study. Although, it is critical that academia become available to future scholarship and research within these domains, it is also important to question whether current fields of academia allow for themselves to become reflective in their own practices and pedagogies, and whether their research trajectories are currently rooted in colonial matrices of power. This structure of power not only questions the research being conducted regarding decolonial and postcolonial studies but also the intent behind this scholarship. Do current methodologies, pedagogies, and theoretical frameworks provide the space necessary to produce knowledge and epistemologies that can benefit developing nations and individuals relegated to subaltern statuses, or do these foundations need to be completely reconfigured and simultaneously dismantled in order to properly decolonize postcolonial futures?

Subsequently, another major issue in current decolonial/ postcolonial studies is regarding the individuals of the Global South. For much of my research, I have chosen to focus on third world subaltern women and gender non-conforming individuals who are often subjugated to multiple systems of oppression and experience what has been classified as double or even triple colonization. Even as many independent nations begin their transition through a postcolonial, sociopolitical movement, systems of oppressive power such as patriarchy and concepts such as sexual immorality, remain structures in these movements. Therefore, third world women are sometimes the last individuals to feel the effects of postcolonial social movements since they are still often marginalized through patriarchal systems of oppression. These systems continue to dominate the spheres of gender performance throughout these spaces, including women's access to education, self-determination, bodily agency, emancipation from enslavement, etc. Third-world women are continually disenfranchised individuals who are perpetually relegated to the same harmful conditions that their mothers, grandmothers, and great grandmothers faced under colonial rule. Therefore, the exploration and evaluation of these experiences and the collecting of women's stories has become paramount in the expansion of decolonial praxis and postcolonial studies.

In 1986, Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford proposed a new postcolonial feminist theory to examine women found within the postcolonial world, called "Double Colonization." Petersen and Rutherford developed this concept to investigate the postcolonial identities of women who were being colonized two-fold by imperialist powers and patriarchy. This theory revolutionized the discussion in which third-world women and subaltern women contended with multiple forces of colonial power from various institutions, an issue with whom male members of that society did not have to contend. In an effort to further expound upon postcolonial feminist theories such as "Double Colonization," Jeong-eun Rhee, Professor of Education at Long Island University proposes a new collection of methodologies designed to elicit new epistemologies through Decolonial Feminist research in the areas of Haunting, rememory, and mothers. These concepts allow for the researcher to dive into the lives of women who have historically been silenced, beaten, disregarded, and ignored, without any regard to their existence, to conceptualize their past lived-experiences through rememory of their mother's experiences, trauma, pains, and how the haunting of these lived-experiences disrupts even one's sense of time and own memory. For far too long, women of the third world have faced brutal subjugation by forces of colonization and patriarchy which have rendered them receivers of violence and suffering, however, these women have contended with these oppressive systems and fought through years of suppression and degradation to become agents of change, community leaders, revolutionaries, and forces of resistance. Their histories have been lost, erased, hidden, and suppressed for generations, and forced into the dark corners of our memory and imagination. The act of decolonizing is not only visible in sociopolitical movements on a macroscale, rather the act of decolonizing one's self-embodiment and one's community become paramount in the process of relinquishing

stories of resistance, refusal, violence, and trauma which then often lead to the acts of repairing, rebuilding, and reinvention of the self, necessary for decolonization.

Rhee initiates her journey into decolonial feminist practice through the exploration of her mother's rememory. Within Chapter 1: *Writing mothers' rememory: Connectivity as/of self*, Rhee introduces the foundation of her work as a daughter writing and retelling the stories of her mother's rememory. Rhee describes the journey into her work as an act of relinquishing oneself to boundless rememory that "narrates a haunting tale of mothers who stay with us even after their deaths" (Rhee, 2021, p. 1). Rhee explains that those wronged experiences, pains, traumas, and struggles by mothers remain unsaid during their lifetime and tend to reproduce what is marked as history, and continuously haunt us to teach the work of rememory. Rhee borrows the concept of "rememory" from Toni Morrison, African American writer, who Rhee mentions is now in our rememory. Despite the challenges associated with conceptualizing rememory to her readers, Rhee asks that you allow yourself to become vulnerable and feel "this particular onto-epistemological tension that rememory generates for most of us" (Rhee, 2021, p. 2). In order to conceptualize the idea of rememory, it requires an adjustment of the self and one's sense of time and memory, as it does to an adjustment to new research methodology. Rhee (2021) begins by defining rememory as "simultaneously refer[ing] to both forgetting and remembering and rememory in both doing and (non) being, both of these at the same time. In addition, rememory exists both inside and outside an individual's experience, thinking, and knowing" (p. 2).

This concept of rememory further challenges and disturbs our conceptualization of modernity and the colonial foundations of knowing and understanding the world around us. Rhee (2021) asserts that "a sovereign self is not in possession or control of one's interiority – mind, memory, or thinking (my rememory is floating around outside my head); there is no such division between a self and her environment (my rememory will happen again to you when you bump into it); temporality is not linear (my rememory will happen again even after I die); space and time are intertwined (my rememory will happen again right in the place it happened); and materiality and spirituality are not separate (my rememory even after I die is still out there in the world)" (p.3). It now becomes quite apparent that the act of rememory is much more than simply remembering. It is a production and act that transports the individual across many of the boundaries that have been constructed through the processes of coloniality and modernity. When much of the research currently being conducted across field of academia limit and separate the individual from community, past and future from the present, modernity from antiquity, self from other, we dichotomize space, time, and narratives of the self into fragments of identities that make our stories digestible for the canon of colonial literature. Rhee suggests that the stories our mothers teach us produce a different sort of knowledge that challenges and transforms what we once believed to be universal. According to Rhee (2021), "our schooled and disciplined (and thus modern colonial) ways of knowing are unhinged. There is more to what we (are trained to) see and hear. What we see, hear and thus we think we know depends on or is a product of what we do not see, do not hear, and do not know" (p. 3). Therefore, how can we begin to understand the histories, stories, and epistemologies of those we've been trained to ignore?

As Rhee is faced with the painful reality of her mother slowly dying from lung cancer, Rhee explains that within the days leading up to her mother's passing, she contended with the rememories of her mother's past. Stories about her mother, her family, collective secrets between nations, were being filtered into Rhee's rememory of her mother even years after her passing. This constant feeling of rememory of her mother began to haunt Rhee and contested what she believed she once knew of her mother, contradicting a memory of childhood experiences, changing the dynamics of her past, present, and future selves. Many of these stories of her mother, similar to many of the stories of third world women, are "not to be

shared because it is too painful, too traumatic, too shameful, and perhaps because [they] do not know how to tell [their] stor[ies]" (Rhee, 2021, p. 16). Rhee continues to question why her mother never felt compelled to share these experiences with her, and whether women such as her mother are really "voiceless." Often women of the third world and subaltern are regarded as "voiceless," subjecting them to a reality where they do not possess the ability to tell their story or choose to not share their stories. Rhee argues that there is really no such thing as "voiceless" and that many of these women are purposely silenced and preferably unheard. This is a critical distinction argued by Rhee because once again we see how simple it is to allow for even critical theory within academia to utilize language such as "voiceless" to relegate communities of women to a status of lacking the ability to speak or tell their stories. This could not be further from the truth. The deliberate silencing of third world women has allowed for colonial matrices of power to continue to reside within academia and canons of literature without ever being contested or opposed. As long as the voices of these women are kept suppressed, we perpetuate legacies of narratives, dominated by male, European voices, that tell the falsehoods of women who loved the conqueror, whose bodies are perfect for the colonizer's gaze, whose sexualization is only moral with it is used and manipulated by the colonizer.

The second theoretical concept explored by Rhee is the notion of haunting. As Rhee revives her mother's rememory and continues to come into existence with this rememory, this repetitive feeling of being pulled back and forth through time and space begins to paralyze or haunt the self. Rhee (2021) refers to haunting as "those unfamiliar yet repetitive instances when home becomes unfamiliar, when your bearings on the world lose direction, when the over and done with comes alive and when what's been in your blind spot comes into view" (p. 16). Haunting alters our experiences of time, and the way we understand and conceptualize temporality. This haunting experience also impacts Rhee as she begins to remember the ways she dismissed her mother's feelings of a mental-health diagnosis and referred to only the medical practitioners about her mother's state of being. This moment of intersecting theoretical connections between rememory and haunting lead Rhee to acknowledge that even as a decolonial feminist researcher, her "habitual deference toward patriarchal authority of reason and logic, and western-educated addiction to agency and choice" failed her (Rhee, 2021, p. 17). At this moment Rhee realizes that she forgot how to listen to her m/other, the connections and the experiences of being and doing and knowing. That connection can only be found in the rememory of her m/other and self-reflection of her own positionality as an academic surrounded by colonial notions of being and doing.

At this moment within her work, Rhee begins to refer to her mother as "m/other," her third important contribution to decolonial feminist methodology. Rhee (2021), states "I refer to my mother as *m/other* to acknowledge the dis/connection between the mother who gave a birth to my embodied self and whose life I continue through my being/connection and the other part of my mother whose life was separated, hidden, dismissed, misunderstood, silenced, violated, and repressed from and by my educated knowledge, memory, or world" (p. 17). Here it becomes apparent that through colonial states of being Rhee's dismissal of her mother's stories and experiences produced an "othering," where the mother she once knew, she was now distanced from, the ultimate realization that Rhee had participated in the same systems of power that had silenced her mother's stories for years. As Rhee begins to try and recall her mother's stories and what she once heard from her mother, she soon realizes that she had forgotten what she heard and had forgotten that she had forgotten. Now in an effort of trying to remember what she forgot, "demanded of, or being haunted by, [her] mother's rememory, [Rhee] desperately looks for more of her [mother's] stories to connect, and to know" (Rhee, 2021 p. 17). Yet, this haunting rememory of her m/other does not yield any new stories or memories of her mother, as Audre Lorde (1984) once warned, "Death is the

final silence” (p. 41). By multiplying the experiences of Rhee and her mother’s haunting rememory to the millions of third world women who live silenced by oppression and colonial subjugation, how can we find new ways to connect to their “her/stories”? (Rhee, 2021, p. 20) What methodological practices can be utilized to listen and engage with those who are silenced?

Finally, Rhee connects her conceptualizations of rememory, haunting, and m/other to Sociologist Avery Gordon’s (2008) work, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. By interconnecting Gordon (2008) and Rhee’s (2021) scholarship, the production of affective connectivity as decolonial feminist onto-epistemological methodology emerges. One of many reasons Rhee connects with the work of Gordon (2008), is due to Gordon’s disruption of sociological frameworks, suggesting that “sociology, like all its academic disciplines, has never proved capable of grasping and welcoming as equal...subjugated knowledge from below and outside the institutions of official knowledge production and that names what official knowledge represses” (p. xviii). Rhee (2021) develops a new methodology to further understand her mother’s “ghostly matters” through a “method of knowledge production and writing that can overcome “the extended intellectual consequences of the historically constituted divide between the social and the individual, the abstract and the concrete, the analytical and the imaginary as well as to richly conjure, describe, narrate, and explain the liens, the costs, the forfeits, and the losses of modern systems of abusive power in their immediacy and worldly significance” (p. 18). Rhee gradually comes to the realization that life is not simply for the living, and that we owe it to those passed to continue on with their stories as if no border exists between the living and the dead. The haunting rememory of her mother follows Rhee from Korea to the United States and therefore makes national borders seem borderless. It is at this moment that Rhee (2021) comes to the conclusion that even in her own home she is presented with the haunting rememory of her mother which suggests that “loss does not mean a disappearance” (p. 19). In actuality, the feeling and experience of haunting allows you to notice that what has been lost is “very much alive and present” (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi). Rhee (2021) argues that “haunting demands you to remember those parts of the past disappeared and dis(re)membered from what (you think) you remember into a new past that you now must imagine” (p. 19). The author understands that for many academics this becomes a challenging notion of methodology as the dead do not represent something that is visible or concrete and therefore lack empirical epistemology. However, many of the stories, memories, and rememories of those who have passed hold the opportunity to confront the many colonial, patriarchal narratives that continue to suppress women’s existence and experiences to this day.

The conceptualization of rememory, haunting, and m/othering produced and expanded upon by Jeong-Eun Rhee have the potential to revolutionize the methods in which decolonization scholars are forced to contend. Under these new epistemologies and decolonial feminist methodologies, third world women and women within the subaltern are no longer seen as “voiceless,” but rather libraries of stories that have not been heard. Furthermore, we are allowed to remember the stories and experiences of women who have been lost through colonial violence and suppression and challenge the notion of necropolitics. If necropolitics defined by Achille Mbembe, demonstrates the use of social and political power to dictate the life and death of the subaltern/ colonized individual, what if by forcing the world to deal with the haunting of stories and rememory of the subjugated and oppressed, we bring those forced to death figuratively back to life? We must utilize their stories and their rememory, specifically from communities of third world women, to dismantle oppressive systems of colonial patriarchal power still present in postcolonial societies. We must utilize their stories and rememory as a way to challenge the canon of colonial literature and colonial epistemologies dominating academic scholarship. This new methodology is a call to all

academics to examine the very notions of academic scholarship, epistemology, ontology, and methodology in order to secure a place where the rememory of those silenced out of existence can thrive and whose haunting enacts a decolonial resistance to the continued systems of oppression dominating the Global South.

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