Pull it Back:
The Plaited Storytelling of Indian and Colombian Voices

A THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis explores the importance of hair among Colombian and Indian literatures in relation to their status as formerly colonized regions. In both Latin American literature and South Asian literature, the cutting of hair works as metaphor for larger mechanisms of The State, especially when severed or cut. The act of severing ties and roots to a homeland or cultural practice features prominently in both A Fine Balance by Rohinton Mistry and “Nada” by Lido Pimienta. Borrowing from African hair discourse—wherein nation, femininity, and spirituality predominate—this thesis will apply the same inquiries to a discussion of India and Colombia. The texts, A Fine Balance and “Nada,” feature most prominently in this conversation because they emphasize the parallels between representations of formerly colonized peoples in both Latin America and South Asia. Though set in the relative present, the works of art explored here demonstrate how subjugated pasts bleed into present inequalities in the Global South.

Keywords: hair discourse / phenomenology / Latin America / India

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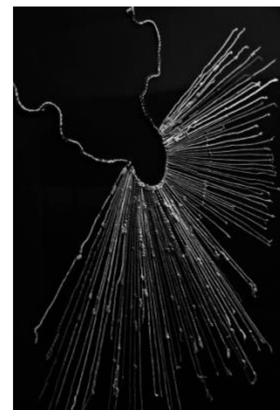
Introduction

Queda la mapa entrezado *en cabezas superdotadas* *raíz de cráneos sudorsosos* *que son partuduras perfectas* *donde se traza* *el dolor y la bravura*	The map is braided in gifted heads from sweaty skulls which are perfect parts where is traced pain and bravery

Gloriann Sacha Antonetty Lebrón,
Brújela Trenzada

I have an impulse toward analogies tied, woven, and knotted—born from my Latin American ancestry. I come from Ecuador, part of the Gran-Colombia that is now separated into several countries. But before Simón Bolívar and liberation from Spanish rule, the countries of Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador made up an Incan Empire—one of gold and beauty. Not without its own strife and inequities, the Inca Empire still inspires the pride I have in my culture, in the Spanish words I speak in between broken Quechua. Words like taita or pacha or ñaños (whose spelling I am and will always be unsure of) represent the resistance found in Indigenous communities.

My ancestors once used a writing system called *quipu* to record our history, whose remnants are found in museums today. A *quipu* is made of strings that are tied in several knots, resembling strands of hair because of the semi-circular shape it holds. Though made illegible by conquest and time, the *quipu* gives me a sense of history and place with its strands intertwined and its knots tied.



This knowledge, I found in a history book about Huascar, Atahualpa, and Rumiñahui. I read all about the Incas in a single chapter of the book, looking through my indigenous roots on

pages filled with images that reminded me of my homeland. It was then that I looked, and really looked, at the picture of the *quipu* and all of the wisdom it held.

The bonds descend in colors bright, marking stories and folk tales as well as bureaucratic records. These recordings speak, in the patterned variation of each tie: *I was here.* I come back to this image with the same love, fascination, and distance as I had then. I now feel that I can record a story out of knots—little strands of something that, when juxtaposed, weave together—about post-colonialism and hair.

I am not the first, and by no means will I be the last person to find the connection between hair, history, and lineage. For instance, the epigraph of this thesis comes from Gloriann Sacha Antonetty Lebrón, who writes on Black history in Colombia. She interlaces hair and Black womanhood to speak of enslavement in Cartagena. The lines of poetry in "Brújela Trenzada," read as a historical reimagining of the enslaved women who risked their lives with braids like maps of escape routes to freedom.

The story of women using their braids as escape routes is an often forgotten one, of love, sacrifice, and community. Their past sacrifice bleeds into the affective poetry of Lebrón concerning her hair and her ancestry in the book of poems *Hebras*. Though from Puerto Rico, Lebrón feels an affinity towards the women who escaped their enslavement through the knots on their head near Cartagena, Colombia. Most Latin American countries are rooted in colorism and denial—denial of the constant denigration of Black lives upheld by colonial *blanqueamiento* policies that live on in the phrase "mejorar la raza" (or 'better the race'). Still, Lebrón writes from a place of love and radical resistance. In recognizing her ancestry, woven with strands of hair, she recognizes the sacrifice of those who came before herself.

The hair of Black women and the *quipu* made from woven strands of fabric, tell a story that is often ignored about the ancestry of Latin America. The plaited hair on Indigenous and Black women's heads, be they straight or curly, find a way into the DNA of South American culture; strands give way to the bonds between people that go as deep as blood, as far as roots. Moreover, hair is infused with spirituality and the wisdom of those who came before.

Finding knowledge in the body, in hair, inspires a new way of framing the post-colonial and the feminine. In a discussion of hair and metaphor, I hope to tell a story that resonates deeply and holds true among other works pertaining to the effects of Imperialism. Many of the observations I come to in this work and the associations I make between art, novels, and music stem from my own lived experience and affective responses. Because everything I do is informed by my past and my perspective, I will not feign objectivity in my academic scholarship.

I will examine the role of cut and severed hair in a novel, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry, and the music video, "Nada" by Lido Pimienta, to uncover its symbolic ties to colonial pasts and present strife in India and Colombia. Both Rohinton Mistry and Lido Pimienta focus on inequality faced in their countries through the direct use of hair discourse—the breaking of hair, the unraveling of ties, and the split that occurs when hair is cut acts as a metaphor for the violence imposed upon regions of South Asia and Latin America during their colonization. Such ruptures do not exist in an isolated moment but can be felt and understood today as an amalgamation of many moments.

As someone deeply imbedded in the questions of Latin American immigrant life, I find myself relating to South Asian diasporic art for the similar yet distinct stories they tell about women's hair. I have found poems and visual imagery by South Asian and Latin American artists alike

that touch on the same oppressive beauty standards and detail similar personal stories, that are both tender and tragic, about ancestry.

Still, my juxtaposition of India and Colombia incites the questions: "Why compare decimation to partition? Why compare *our* Latin American acculturation to a vivid and distinct culture in South Asia?" These questions ring in my ears after explaining my thesis concept to friends and family. My only answer comes from Mercedes Sosa and René Pérez, two artists that differ wildly, yet come together for a common purpose. Both Sosa and Pérez are deeply embedded in anticolonial activism, albeit through different avenues of their careers in music.

Mercedes Sosa is an Indigenous woman who became an emblem of resistance to unjust governing practices in Argentina with her inspiring folk music. She eventually had to escape her country because of her powerful presence as an artist and performer, which undermined Argentine fascist political movements and regimes. Her persecution did not impede her from using her voice to represent the downtrodden of Latin America, as she performed for an international stage, bringing awareness and hope to many.

René Pérez, in contrast, became famous for his band, Calle 13. Though the group originally gained fame with, *Atrévete-te-te,* a club song, Calle 13 predominantly raps about political movements in Puerto Rico. Though Pérez's rap is deemed explicit, the story he tells about U.S. Neo-Imperialism is viewed as problematic to many Puerto Ricans—especially because Puerto Rico is a territory that reaps the benefits of U.S. citizenship. Calle 13 is regarded as controversial for their politics to this day. Still, they are known for elevating the Latin American reggaeton scene with socially conscious, intellectually moving lyricism.

Argentine folk singers and Puerto Rican rappers do not often collide, much less feature on one another's tracks. Yet, released in 2009, shortly before Mercedes Sosa's death, the song

"Cancion para un niño de la calle" (translated "Song for a Street Child") made a solid impact on the children in the streets of Latin America. The song was for them, and yet, listening to it then, I imagined India. René Pérez rapped words I could barely understand, but I did catch a couple of verses:

Por si los tigres me escupen un balazo mi vida es como un circo pero sin payaso Voy caminando por la zanja haciendo malabares con cinco naranjas	In case the tigers spit a bullet at me, my life is like a circus but without a clown I'm walking through the ditch juggling five oranges

This translation feels lackluster to me, with no end rhyme, but demonstrates my point. There are no tigers in South America. The circus is an import with origins from Rome and animals from South Asia. Our jaguars do not compare with Asian tigers, yet they find themselves on the same continent, with the same problems: a colonial past that dictates their future.

Since listening to René Pérez and his verses, I have continued to see many ways Latin America and India are interconnected. I was eleven when I made out the lyrics to *"Cancion para un niño de la calle,"* and now, associations between India and Latin America abound.

For example, *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry (the focus of this thesis) depicts poverty in ways similar to Latin America. Rohinton Mistry writes: "There are thousands of poor children in the city, doing boot polishing at railway stations, or collecting papers, bottles, plastic––plus going to school at night. *Why are you complaining*?" (27, emphasis mine). Mistry's mention of, "why are you complaining?" reminds me of my own upbringing and the comparisons my parents made between impoverished children and myself. Instead of at the railway stations, children in Ecuador line intersections selling fruit and chiclets among the car exhaust. As I sat in the car, I often wondered what distinguished me from them, and promptly felt guilty about complaining about anything I had said at the dinner table.

Be it at a railway station or intersection, poverty is a universal. Whether the children of the streets speak Spanish, Portuguese, or Hindi, they fend for themselves with the little they have—often times with some shoe polish and a rag in hand. Children line the city streets because South Asia and Latin America are informed by gross poverty due to rampant inequity. This commonality allows for comparisons that move from dinner table chastisements of "why are you complaining?" to six-hundred-page novels—both of which trace similarities between South Asia and Latin America.

Finally, I must admit that I only recognize India from history books that detail Salt Marches and Partition, and I know I will never become attuned to the particularities of Indian life. I imagine Mumbai's shores, but never having met them, I do not understand many of the intricacies of *A Fine Balance* by Rohinton Mistry. But I do know that I feel a kinship, a similarity to the plight of the post-colonial, and therefore, a kinship with India. I also know that the further I research the more questions I have, and the more surprises I encounter, resulting in my deep appreciation for the literature and culture of India

Further Grounds for Comparison

Invisible threads are the strongest ties.

-Friedrich Nietzsche

The Dominican Republic and India were once confused for one another by Christopher Columbus, and both regions, of Latin America and South Asia, bring forth similar questions concerning post-coloniality. How does post-colonialism impact burgeoning nations, with religious differences and ethnic erasures? How do newly formed nations care for their people when defined by subjugation and otherhood?

The most salient question, though, comes from the poverty and inequity among the higher classes and the lower—mostly dark-skinned, mostly indigenous—classes. Why does the same hierarchical vestige of colonial rule define the way nations of South Asia and Latin America are run today? How does the artistic expression of immigrants demonstrate the myopia of their mother countries?

Immigrants have unique perspectives on their home countries due to fondness for their origins. Both Rohinton Mistry and Lido Pimienta immigrated to Canada, and from there created a body of work that speaks to colonial pasts. There they became decorated for the novels and songs they produced that reflect their homelands, in fiction and music respectively. In fact, Lido Pimienta was the recipient of the Polaris music prize in 2017, and Rohinton Mistry received his honorary doctorate from Ryerson in 2012 (Yun). Both Pimienta and Mistry know and understand the questions posed above, and from these questions, created art that interrogates the 'first world.'

A Fine Balance, by Rohinton Mistry was on Oprah's Book Club, and garnered incredible attention from readers in the early 2000s. His story asks questions about inequality, political turmoil, and solidarity. His epigraph to *A Fine Balance* from Honoré de Balzac states:

> Holding this book in your hand, sinking back into your soft armchair, you will say to yourself: Perhaps it will amuse me. And after you have read this story of great misfortunes, you will no doubt dine well, blaming the author for your own insensitivity, accusing him of wild exaggeration and flights of fancy. But rest assured: *this tragedy is not a fiction*. All is true.

In his epigraph, Rohinton Mistry addresses the disparity among Western readers and his characters while asserting the truth found in his stories. Mistry, himself, shows that fiction can be both powerful and real in his brave portrayal of the lives of his characters—people who often go forgotten and silenced. In his work, he chooses subjects that demonstrate the politics of India in

illuminating ways that bring awareness to hardship and suffering. By imaginatively retelling sterile stories about the Emergency or the 1980 Sikh riots found in Political Science journals and history books (often written by the English), Mistry depicts India with compassion.

Rohinton Mistry was born in Mumbai in 1952. He studied Mathematics in India, but when he immigrated, he pursued a degree in English at the University of Toronto. At the University of Toronto, he won several prizes for his writing. When he published his first novel *Such a Long Journey* in 1991, he received wide acclaim. From then on, he continued to write successful novels that trouble Indian politics and history. Works such as *Family Matters, A Fine Balance,* and *The Scream* challenge norms by way of representation. Mistry renders clear images of India, its politics, and its peoples through his impactful writing (Britannica).

Similarly, by offering representation to Black and Indigenous people, Lido Pimienta challenges cultural norms in her career as a musician. Her identity enables her to discuss the multiple dualities she occupies as an Afro-Indigenous woman and Colombian/Canadian citizen. Her work on the albums *Color* and *La Papessa* established her as a vulnerable and bold award-winning artist, and her latest work *Miss Colombia* delves even deeper into her national identity as it relates to beauty and ancestry (Shore Fire Media).

Miss Colombia, was inspired by the Miss Universe mishap in 2015, where Paulina Vega of Colombia was given the crown by mistake. Instead, Ms. Philippines (Pia Wurtzbach) was named the victor of the beauty contest. At that moment, Lido Pimienta realized she was idolizing her country instead of critiquing its shallow standards of beauty and its ethnic erasures (Lido Pimienta). She notes that “beauty is a construct” in her documentary entitled, “The Road to Miss Colombia.” She chooses to find beauty in her roots and her duality by using subject matter that appeals to Black and Indigenous Colombians. By “cutting nostalgia out of [her] narrative” and

recognizing her feelings of exclusion, Lido Pimienta made space and gave love to those similarly overlooked due to race and class (Pimienta).

Pimienta and Mistry, as immigrants and artists, give voice to the ignored narratives of Colombia and India. I chose them as subject matter for this thesis because their narrative constructions—which always pay close attention to the silenced—differ in form but not function. And their similarities go even further. The author and musician biographies above do not include what makes them so integral to this project, which is, their close attention to hair.

Lido Pimienta and Rohinton Mistry use hair as metaphor, sending a message about the harm of past colonialism. They both, in their own ways and filled with particularities, communicate a similar message about inequality and hair. Moving forward I will use hair discourse to trace the messages Lido Pimienta and Rohinton Mistry share about identity, loss, and ancestry.

Uses of Hair: The Human Personality

It is not only a part of the human body, it is also a part of the human personality—part of one's identity. Hair is so simple—but it is also so fundamental.

Jacek Nowakowski
Holocaust Memorial Museum curator[1]

I plucked the quote above from a New Yorker article about hair exhibitions in the Washington D.C. Holocaust Museum. The inclusion of hair into the exhibit was highly contested despite its proof of the atrocities that occurred in the Second World War (Ryback). The chilling exhibitions reveal that when hair from the remnants of the Holocaust was tested in medical labs, it showed signs of Zyklon B cyanide. The presence of cyanide in the human remains stand as a testament to Holocaust deniers and as a memory to the world. The disciplines of law and medicine inform the

plaques on exhibition walls, detailing the truth of the Third Reich. This is only one example of the times hair intersects with various disciplines to tell a larger story about loss and love.

Hair discourse is not one dimensional or unidirectional. The study of hair has many avenues and many affective entryways. Hair discourse does not have any one point of origin, but stems from anthropological, literary, and philosophical branches of knowledge which extend outwards to other disciplines and fields (Pergament 44). Further, the study of hair acknowledges difference, building off of the many layered meanings of hair practices across cultures and through time (Omotoso 6-7). And still, many people do not consider hair discourse a compelling area of study because hair belongs to a sheer 'isness' that is taken for granted. As mentioned above, however, the study of hair uncovers truths about oppression, generational trauma, racial difference, as well as intense care for lineage, ethnicity, and culture. Nonetheless, many more people view hair as fact and biological vestige instead of acknowledging its integral place in our culture. Hair is so much more. Hair is racial, spiritual, personal, and loved.

In the case of *A Fine Balance* and "Nada," hair is representational and often finds meaning in the human personality to which it is attached. When hair represents grief, grief for the whole of indigenous peoples' plight arises. When hair is exploited, the reader gains empathy for impoverished people. And though hair represents groups, individual characters—like individual strands of hair—make up the images and patterns that shine through in each narrative.

Uses of Hair: Hair Politics and Phenomenology

Usefulness does not dangle in mid-air. It is conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity and has no existence apart from the latter.

Karl Marx
Capital

Hair is not useless. Hair does not live beyond the realm of commodification. Though a natural extension of the body, hair is just as commercial as any other beauty product, as meaningful as the economic forces that guide its use. The job of hair discourse is to uncover the ways in which hair is motivated by political and economic forces—forces that impose norms and mitigate modes of being (Omotoso 17). The greatest strides in hair discourse come from within and outside the African diaspora. Not only do Black women theorize the most about hair, they often link hair and subsequent beauty standards to politics in impactful ways.

Sharon Omotoso works in philosophy, and she writes: "The politics of hair remain a subtle worm, quietly eating into the fabrics of Africa, and must not be treated with levity; it is a growing avenue for re-colonization which must be fought with vigor" (Omotoso 15). She is, of course, speaking of the Western beauty standards that prioritize straight hair. Western beauty standards are consistently imposed upon Black women, and these strict standards usually seek to shame them for their natural hair.

Omotoso's use of the word 're-colonize' affirms the political aspects of hair while uncovering harmful societal norms that seek to 'buy Africa' (Omotoso 16). Because whiteness is viewed as central to the beauty industry, long, straight hair is deemed as the model. Thus, hair markets emerge wherein Indian men and women, who have straight black hair, sell their hair to African women to support Western re-colonization. Indian people are thus exploited for their hair to satisfy the consumption of African women who are pressured to wear their hair straight (14). Hair discourse, in effect, addresses racial inequality, post-colonialism, and re-colonization in nuanced ways.

Like Omotoso's writings, this thesis relies on schools of philosophy to understand the many complicated relationships between hair and ancestry. I will be using the philosophy of

phenomenology in particular to explore intersections of gender, post-colonialism, and object relations as they pertain to my perceptions of hair. As I cannot give in depth insights on each of the aforementioned topics, I will mediate them through a phenomenological lens. I will also discuss *A Fine Balance* and "Nada" in terms of the personal.

As I uncover the complicated relationships between hair and ancestry, I must take into account the different cultural hair practices among peoples in different geographies. For instance, the people of Latin America and South Asia encounter vastly different relationships between hair, both of which differ wildly from African hair practices. Though *all* geographies and peoples inspire different questions about hair, their link lies in the universality of hair: we all have hair; we will always have a difficult relationship to our hair, no matter who we are or where we come from.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will stay confined to the geographies of India and Colombia—and Mumbai and the Colombian Rain Forest specifically. When applying hair discourse to Latin America and South Asia, specific questions of a multi-ethnic identity and the commodification of the body arise, along with its ties to femininity, beauty, and personal expression. Black scholarship demonstrates the political valence of these questions, and I owe all my findings to the dynamic interrogations that emerge from Black women's work on hair discourse. Though I stray from the origins of hair discourse, I find it necessary to pay homage to the rich tradition of Black women's study of hair and its politics.

My Approach to *A Fine Balance*

i. prithvi
my hands don't work before cha *is why*
she never did my hair before school is why
I never did my hair before school is why
it looks better when you straighten it.

scissor to eyebrow, razor to leg, needle to skin
ugh, pass

ii. jal
play with my hair please?
follow the strands from root to tip
repeat endlessly
flow like water, I can't wait to
feel this way for years

Shivani Davé,
Mudra

Prithvi and Jal mean Earth and Water in Hindi. The roman numerals of the poem above—Prithvi and Jal—set the tone for a conversation about hair rooted in nature. Shivani Divé, the brilliant poet and author of the piece above, blends together contemporary and cultural worlds to explore the feminine and her relationship to Indian culture. Her full poem is reproduced in four parts, not two, and comes with a photo collage of hair and graphic design, which is included in the endnotes of this thesis[2]. Yet in the first two sections of "Mudra," Davé unearths the strife and difficulty of beauty standards; she also showers love and appreciation for her origins and culture just as *A Fine Balance* does. Although I love Davé's poetry, and I feel her verses somewhere in my bones, I had to look up the meaning of Prithvi and Jal, and I had to learn about the beauty of Davé's connections through a search engine. As mentioned in an earlier section, I cannot read *A Fine Balance* with innate cultural understanding—however much I empathize with its characters.

I originally read *A Fine Balance* when I was fourteen. The cover of the book—that of a child balancing on a rod, with an outstretched hand—signaled intense curiosity within me. I read the novel in three days—three days which were spent in utter praise of Rohinton Mistry. Even after reading the book, I saw the world differently because of his prose. My initial reading of *A Fine Balance* is scribbled somewhere in the margins of my original copy, which is now lost. I

remember writing phrases like *Dina is India!* Ew, *I hate the hair collector… What is the Emergency and how did it start?* I remember these epiphanies, feelings, and questions so clearly, and they are my introduction to research and academic inquiry.

I approach the following readings of *A Fine Balance* with the same questions I had when I was fourteen. As I read for meaning, my methodology is phenomenological—which is to say that I follow my sensations, I describe, and I use my intuition. In this way, I conduct a reparative reading, which is based on curiosity, pleasure, and love instead of paranoia (Sedgewick 128). Eve Sedgewick coins and elaborates on the ideas of reparative reading, offering an alternative to the hermeneutics of suspicion wherein a lens is predetermined and set before the actual reading of the text. This allows for little surprise and care for literature. Reparative reading relies on description first, where reading incites questions and epiphanies that are only later analyzed upon. So, I make bold claims that are read with a focus on instinct and perception as I describe the plot of *A Fine Balance* to the best of my abilities. In later sections, I will connect my readings of both "Nada" and *A Fine Balance* to theory by Sara Ahmed and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but the next four sections will entail the thin description of a fourteen-year-old's curiosities and interpretations.

Mother and Child in *A Fine Balance*

Mama, who were you
Before your man

Raveena
"Mama"

The feminine is portrayed sparsely in the novel *A Fine Balance*, with only one female protagonist in a group of four, yet it is portrayed impactfully. Dina Dalal is a middle-class Indian woman who houses her employees and a student boarder during the political crisis known as the Emergency which lasted from 1975-1977. *A Fine Balance* shows Dina's tumultuous place as

both an authority and an Other, singled out for her widowhood and her age—distinguished by her relative wealth. Yet, before then, her womanhood and her youth placed her as vulnerable and weak in her male dominated household. Early in her life, she learned the art of willfulness, strength, and pride in herself to combat the many difficulties placed before her.

As Rohinton Mistry traces Dina Dalal's journey, he tells a story of bodily metaphor—where her hair represents India—while also exploring the personal, tender moments of hair and its place in the private sphere. In this section I will focus on Dina's quiet moments with her mother, since Dina's mother, Mrs. Shroff, demonstrates their connection through hair practices.

Dina's very first encounter with hair in *A Fine Balance* occurs as it falls off the body into the drain. Mother and child—Mrs. Shroff and Dina—experience role reversals as Dina begins to care for her ailing mother. The narrator notes that, "for Dina, the most unpleasant task was helping her mother wash her hair—it fell out in clumps in the bathroom floor and more followed when she combed it for her" (Mistry 19). Despite the unpleasantness, the care and love shown through the handling of Mrs. Shroff's hair overpowers the sadness of the reversal. Washing hair and grooming a loved one, in this instance, becomes a touching ritual where the rules of mother and daughter bend and brake.

At this rupture, however, Mrs. Shroff's wellbeing is put into question. The simple mention of her withering hair denotes declining health—both physical and mental. Dina worries for the state of her mother, who deteriorates before her. After she is clean, Mrs. Shroff conducts prayers for her husband, Dr. Shroff, who died several years earlier. Grief and hair are intertwined in many cultures.

Dina's father was a loved person, a worried after person, a person who made their household whole. After his death Mrs. Shroff's hair falls out as a sacrifice—as a physical

manifestation of her lost love. Though her anguish shows deeply through the loss of her hair, the death of Dr. Shroff was not a catalyst that instantly shifted the household, but a slow, encroaching shadow that left Mrs. Shroff overcast and feeble over time. Her poise from the initial news waned, and "people finally understood that a doctor's wife was no more immune to grief than other mortals" (27). Her loss of hair denotes deep mourning for her husband while also foreshadowing her own death. Loss in a family breaks ties and weakens bonds, as Dina soon understands. She disassociates herself from suffering when Mrs. Shroff furthers herself into a hermetic state of being. "Faced with her mother's dreamy silences, Dina felt helpless. Soon, her concern for her mother was tempered by the instinct of youth which held her back—she would surely receive her portion of grief and sorrow in due course, there was no need to take on the burden prematurely" (20).

So, little by little Mrs. Shroff withers away just as her hair. Her death leaves a chasm where once stood a mother, and Dina is left in her older brother's care—the care of Nusswan. After their mother's death, both Nusswan and Dina find themselves in turmoil—conflict abounding. Dina cannot live with the tyrannical manner in which Nusswan runs their household while Nusswan finds it difficult to reign in the 'tigress.' The culmination of their struggle begins in the bathroom—the same place Mrs. Shroff subsided, with her hair falling in clumps.

Hair and Partition in *A Fine Balance*

When we cut our hair for the purposes of change, psychologically, we are experiencing a rebirth. The act becomes symbolic of hope that we can attract different circumstances and heal from past hurt.

Clarissa Silva
Elite Daily

One day, Dina decides to cut her hair with the help of her friend Zenobia.

She likely emulates luxurious hairstyles portrayed in French New Wave cinema by following the short-haired trend. Though steeped in femininity, and sported by Audrey Hepburn and the like, shorter hair signifies a break with tradition—especially for a South Asian girl. Moreover, shorter hair coincides with the expansion of women's freedoms, ever since the 1930's—a small symbol of women's rebellion and self-definition (Eaton). But whatever the true motivation of her decision to cut her hair, she cuts her hair against her brother, Nusswan's, wishes. When she consults him, he states, "fourteen is too young for fancy hairstyles, plaits are good for you" (Mistry 23).

Though his words are soft and curt, Nusswan's wishes are tacit demands in their small household. Yet Dina—strong willed as she is—defies him at every turn. Even when Nusswan turns to physical violence, Dina does not cower. "Despite the beatings, she never tired of provoking him" (Mistry 22). And her provocations stem from a desire to be treated with respect; her provocations stem from anger and a desire for justice. She is comfortable with the inevitability of her torment as long as she does not take it willingly.

At the same moment in time, the vast region of South Asia undergoes its own rebellion from a domineering Big Brother—the Imperial power of England. Both Dina and India struggle against parallel forces, those of violence and domination.

The year Dina and India's struggles manifest in the year of 1947—a bloody and difficult year. In this year, Jawaharlal Nehru becomes the first Prime Minister of India as soon as it is broken apart and cracked open by cartographical distinctions. British authorities vacated their presence in India but left its organization in shambles, with the internal conflict of religion raging forth between Hindus and Muslims. Consequently, on the 15th of August, the summer heat expatriated millions of Muslim South Asians into the two countries of Bangladesh and Pakistan.

The result was a blood bath, starving and stricken by an unwanted pilgrimage. Broken apart. Cut in half and patched together (Dalyrmple).

In this instance, the body becomes the state. Dina's body becomes the state. Her body becomes a morose metaphor—her hair a political analogy, because her hair represents Indian Partition. Nusswan's backlash is the violence that ensues. When Dina comes home from school, and her hair is cut, Nusswan beats her. Not only that—he also strips her of her clothes. He strips her of her dignity and forces her into the bathroom. She must wash the recently cut hair from her body, the little hairs washed away in small clumps. At this time, "he was eyeing her strangely, and she grew afraid… it was vaguely linked to the way he was staring at the newfledged bloom of hair where her legs met" (24). To avoid his gaze, hungry and angered, she feigns muffled sobs. At his sister's tears, Nusswan retreats. Then, "when Dina finishes her bath, Nusswan fetches a roll of black electrical tape and fastens the plaits to her hair. "You will wear them like this," he said. "Every day, even to school, till your hair has grown back'" (25).

Partition is a great trauma, broken in halves. The countries of Bangladesh and Pakistan suffered greatly where Hindu nationals pushed them on the outskirts of a newly formed India (Dalyrmple). Likewise, Dina's hair—torn every time she takes a bath, when she unfastens the tape of deadened hair—is a point of trauma during Partition. Her budding womanhood also signifies her relationship to India, a newly formed nation growing into itself. Only, this growth relies upon violence and trauma. As the nation of India defines itself, "there are day-and-night curfews in every neighborhood. Offices, businesses, colleges, schools, all stayed closed, and there was no respite from the detested plaits [for Dina]" (26). Only when the curfews lift, and the many refugees had already been cornered and taken to broken halves, does Dina's hair begin to grow further.

In fact, Nusswan says, "The curfew is over, and your punishment is over. We can throw away your plaits now," he said, adding generously, "You know, short hair does suit you"' (26). The short hair, now damaged and frayed from the electrical tape, cut once and for all, mirrors the country of India—recently cut in three. Now India, split apart by religious demarcations, and forcefully segregated, grows—but not in light, in anger.

Bodily metaphor, inscribed upon the hair of a young girl, tells a larger story about Indian displacement—about lineages cut and roughly patched together in another land. "Use of bodily description reveals a fundamental concern with the representational capacity of the body [where] bodies figure not only as the material evidence of suffering and privation, but also as symbols" (Johnson 1). Dina's hair symbolizes a cut, a breaking of ties grown from a naïve decision, not unlike India's decision to split off into different countries at its inception. Of course, this cut summons violence. The violence that comes of India's breakage or Partition experiences various resurgences in the years that follow.

Reading for Caste in *A Fine Balance*

Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be changed into nectar.

B. R. Ambedkar

Though this thesis prioritizes the feminine, work to be done on social inequality requires attention and care also. Dina Dalal houses workers that help her in her sewing business: Ishvar and Omprakash. Both Ishvar, and the lovingly abbreviated Om, belong to an untouchable caste.

Caste forces Ishvar—Om's uncle—from their home village to Mumbai. He takes Om with him, and they head for the city—a place they hope they might escape the stigma of being born into poverty. Not only are they born to poverty, but they are also kept there by a religious class system that deems them as lesser than. In Hinduism, of course, caste dictates a person's

work and duty; it is also associated with one's lineage. Because Ishvar and Om's caste position is based on bloodline, there is no true refuge from discrimination or hardship, even as their geography changes.

In this way, uncle and nephew must struggle to survive during the Emergency, a political period in which those of lower castes became most vulnerable to forced sterilization and encampment. Their journey is a difficult one, especially due to socioeconomic factors beyond their control. But, to understand their place in Mumbai, it is helpful to go back in time, when they belonged to a village far from the shore.

When Ishvar was a baby, his mother Roopa sacrificed her body for food. She steals in the orchards at night to feed her child and her husband where hunger had once ravaged them before. One night she is caught by a guard and is raped for the price of some oranges. She sacrifices her body for the food, and the "coconut oil in the man's hair left streaks on her face and neck" (Mistry 110).

Hair, in this case, is an unwanted reminder of place and precarity. Roopa was abused because she is viewed as an abject body, who steals to feed her family. The coconut oil left on her body is a human stain on her honor, both literal and metaphorical. The injustice of Roopa's assault speaks to the injustice of a social system that isolates and punishes people for their lineage. The hair oils are "strong in her nostrils," when she goes home to feed her child and husband (110). She does what she must to survive in spite of the man who marked her body with violence.

Roopa's courage, however, does not shield Ishvar from discrimination and strife. As an untouchable, Ishvar must learn the trade of curing leather from his father, Dukhi. Dukhi teaches him to scrape a dead cow's, "hair and bits of rotten flesh with a dull knife" (Mistry 113). Leather

work is deemed undesirable in Indian cultures, as cows are considered sacred. The pulling back of hair in leatherwork, one of the first tasks Ishvar undertakes in helping his father, separates him from other castes in a substantial way—revealing his lower position in society.

As a child, Ishvar is marked as Other when he peels back flesh and hair. Before then, his mother experiences violence due to her status as Other, coconut oil overwhelming her senses. "Others are undesirable" in social classification systems, and they are often excluded or exterminated for their position as Other (Said 22:05). Roopa and Ishvar, with Omprakash joining in the following generation, experience subjugation due to their caste. The ways hair appears in Mistry's novel, with oils and leatherwork, marks them as undesirable bodies.

The Hair Collector in *A Fine Balance*

The hair is chopped off, but there is a whole life connected to it

Hair Collector
A Fine Balance

A hair collector collects snippets, trimmings, and locks to sell to third parties. The trimmings and snippets are compounded into chemicals and medicines; the locks go to Western and African women for wigs and weaves. The business of hair is, as mentioned earlier, profitable and harmful—harmful as it perpetuates Western beauty standards and modes of re-colonization. For some, however, hair collecting is a livelihood.

Rajaram, the hair collector of *A Fine Balance*, serves as a small, albeit fascinating role within Ishvar and Om's lives. In the slums, Rajaram guides them through safe zones while also providing them food and comfort as they settle into a space called "the colony." However, he soon becomes a nuisance to the two with his "pointless chatter" and his immoral character (298). Even still, his presence is tolerated, and even welcome, at various points in the novel.

His role changes as time passes. He is not merely a hair collector, but an agent of the state during The Emergency. He works for the Family Planning Center. His job is to convince impoverished people to be sterilized. He explains:

> "For each man or woman I can persuade to get the operation, I am paid a commission." He said he was happy with the arrangement. Gathering just two vasectomies or one tubectomy each day would equal his takings as a hair-collector (366).

At this time, well into the Emergency, it was common for "government servants to be given quotas to motivate sterilization" (Williams 457). The intensification of the Family Planning Program was one of the many ways the Government exerted greater control over its subjects.

During this period, from 1975-1977, Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, created a state of Emergency wherein problems such as the economic crisis and overpopulation problem were used to abuse people of lower socioeconomic status. The Emergency began with very different origins, however. At first, the Emergency was declared to quell any dissent to her rule among the elite after an uprising calling for her resignation (Williams 472). Instead, she shut the country down and monopolized on the many conflicts of her country to assert her political power.

Eventually the Emergency not only detained people and suspended democratic processes, but also meandered itself into the lives of impoverished people. Forced sterilizations and labor camps were one of the many ways people were subdued under her rule. Rajaram, though impoverished himself, contributes to the discrimination of lower caste, lower income people. When he is beaten for his occupation after a sterilization gone awry, he returns to hair collecting, but with a sinister purpose.

Rajaram becomes a murderer who kills beggars at night for their hair. He sells the long locks that he steals from dead bodies for much more money than he did during his former, legal

hair collecting. During the Emergency beggars were typically, "killed for their beggings. But [Rajaram's] case is very peculiar—money was not touched… Only their hair was taken" (508). When he resorts to murder, Rajaram becomes further entrenched as a mechanism of the State, an apparatus that preys on the impoverished to benefit from their death. Some call this process, on the part of the State, necro-politics.

In necro-politics, some bodies are marked for death. Achille Mbembe coins the term necro-politics to show the destructive process by which people touched by poverty and war become more vulnerable to death and violence. He cites Frantz Fanon as inspiration for the term due to his psychiatric approach to colonialism and his denunciation of European powers. Mbembe states that, "colonial machinery sought not merely to block [people's] desire to live. It aimed to affect and diminish their capacities to consider themselves moral agents" (5). In this way, Rajaram is affected by the vestige of colonialism when he serves as an agent of the Indian State apparatus during the Emergency.

Rajaram is a sick person informed by a colonial mindset; he participates in a sort of eugenics as he targets the beggars, and there is no denying the revolting nature of his actions. Yet Fanon advocates for therapy to combat the violence imposed upon formerly colonized peoples. The violence Rajaram participates in—contributing to Western beauty standards while murdering those most impoverished to do so—exemplifies the horrors of necro-politics. I am surprised by my second, compassionate reading of Rajaram and his thread within *A Fine Balance*—as someone who is sick and needs help. When I was younger, I was filled with hatred for his crimes. But having read about the process of radicalization and his induction into violence, I began to understand the reasons Rohinton Mistry must have written him into being.

Rajaram carries in him so much anger, resentment, and violence towards the past and towards his poverty—not unlike many people who are subjugated and wounded by the effects of colonialism.

Film Phenomenology in the Music Video "Nada"

Phenomenology is the philosophy of experience

Daniel Frampton
Filmosophy

To a certain extent, I have been practicing phenomenology this entire time, with an intense focus on embodied knowledge, on the way I perceive, and on the ways in which my way of being impacts the scholarship I do. As we shift from novel to music video, however, I am compelled to explain the origins of phenomenology and its role in my analysis of Lido Pimienta's music video, executed by director Paz Ramirez.

Phenomenology stems from the likes of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Such thinkers prioritize sensation and hearing—what is perceived rather than set reality. Yet sensations encompass a myriad of emotions, thoughts, and desires, along with other reactions and conscious processes as well (Smith). To think phenomenologically, then, is to listen to the body.

In film in particular, the viewer's body knows and feels things based on appearances, not fact or reality. And because ideas and sensations are ephemeral and indefinite, acknowledging the importance of the phenomenological is necessary. I will use my initial reading of the music video "Nada" as an example.

Because of where I come from, and who I am, I am affected by the music video "Nada" differently from others. The first thing I notice, before the water, and before the textiles—which do come first—is the Rain Forest.

I think about the time I was eleven, tasting lemon ants and chewing botanical gum that looked to me like tree sap. "The gum you chew in the U.S. is made of petroleum; this is the real stuff—it's natural," the guide said. The guide was taking my mother, sister, Tia, cousin, and me to a village where we would taste chicha, made of fermented corn.

I was in my country, and I was not. I do not belong to the forest, but the mountains: the volcano, Pichincha, is where I was born. So in this new place everything was cloaked in strangeness and wonder. At eleven, so much can change in a 45-minute car ride. Then bus ride, then river boat, then forest.

As I watch the music video, the taste of lemon ant—still crawling, and lunging at my throat lingers. I am taken aback by familiarity. Then, I smile as the women—connected by hair, which is braided together—dance in their colonial dresses. I do not know what to make of the hair and the dress, but I do smile as they dance to a makeshift reggaeton beat. They do not follow the music playing on the audio, but a playful spirit in their hearts. I dance like that, in a room where nobody watches.

My initial thoughts and feelings are light and airy. But something surely pulls me down. Because when I see the children on the women's laps, next to their solemn faces, I am reminded of lineage. I am reminded of conquest, subjugation—I am reminded of history. Then the woman dies by suicide, floating on the Amazon river. I think, *how awful*. How touching, how beautiful and how awful.

Phenomenology weaves together half formed ideas and visceral feelings. Phenomenology gives credit to what is usually deemed unimportant, personal, and unscholarly. Yet this first reading of "Nada" informs all subsequent readings, and this reading is the reading I come back to.

The Outsider Within "Nada"

Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside and from the inside out… we understood both.

Bell Hooks

I will put Lido Pimienta's music video, "Nada," in conversation with the Black feminist scholarship of Patricia Hill Collins and the phenomenological scholarship of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to show the correlation between hair, lineage, and race. I chose to use Collins' article, "Learning from the Outsider Within," due to her impactful feminist theorizations—similar to those of Lido Pimienta and Li Saumet. In the music video "Nada," both Piminta and Saumet identify Indigenous empowerment, which often goes unacknowledged in Latin America. Their choice to elevate the voices of marginalized bodies speaks to their work as outsiders within; Saumet and Pimienta are Afro-Indigenous, so their emphasis on Indigeneity offers care to an identity they could easily reject. Contrastingly, my second choice for theoretical approach—in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—differs from this reading of "Nada." He prefers an apolitical approach to interpretation, but we find common ground in his work, *Phenomenology of Perception*. He states, "I alone bring into being for myself" (Ponty ix). Though his statement refutes the historical and the political, the way I perceive and bring myself into being—the way I sense the lyrics of the song and the feel the water in the video—contributes to the way I feel about my ancestral past as a mestiza. The pain that I feel is a deep sensation that uplifts the scholarship of Patricia Hill Collins. Both theorists reveal meanings in "Nada" that may otherwise go unread and ill-perceived.

The opening scene of Lido Pimienta and Li Saumet's music video for "Nada" shows women hand washing colorful textiles in the Amazon river. The cloth being purified and washed comments on the social 'fabric' of South America and on female labor and birthing alluded to in

the song. Though I expand upon fabric, clothing, and weaving in this section more than I do hair, I feel they are deeply intertwined—just as the *quipu* and hair share an affinity. To me, hair and fabric make up the DNA of a society, and the way fabric is worn and labored over correlates to the way hair is treated, tressed, and cared for as well. Both fabric and hair can be used as allegories for societal processes, just as Dina represents India in *A Fine Balance.*

Soon after the opening camera shot of fabric, the women have their bodies submerged in the same river they cleansed their clothing in. The two women seem to be drowning in their former labor, which contributes to Patricia Hill Collin's discussion of, "Black women as racially-oppressed workers," in her article, "Learning from the Outsider Within" (s28). Both women are mixed, and the politics of Latin America deem mixed groups as 'less than'—as 'marginal' despite their deep integration and necessity within Latin American economies.

In fact, their social devaluation allows for the exploitation of their labor, which goes unpaid and taken for granted. The unpaid, unacknowledged labor of countless women can be felt in the opening scenes of "Nada" with Pimienta's washing of the clothes, and I feel the frustration and anger of many women as Lido Pimienta and Li Saumet lay suspended in the water. I feel the heaviness in my body as they sing and float above the shallow riverbank.

Collins uses the idea of labor exploitation to further explain the outsider-within status Black women occupy, but an 'outsider-within' applies to many scholars who are marginalized by gender, ethnicity, or race (s26-s29). An outsider-within produces scholarship through knowledge that comes from subjugation, which allows for beautiful insights that otherwise under looked. Lido Pimienta and Li Saumet occupy this status by making art that resonates with women who are exploited and taken for granted. The paradoxical structures that enable women to see and

understand their own interlocking oppressions is intentionally represented in the music video, as it seeks to break silence and render visible the pain and insights many Women of Color share.

Further, the melodic sounds serving as the song's introduction percolate as the women drift head to head, floating in the water. The lyrics give way to a somber message:

Por todo lo que yo sufrí,	Of everything I felt
por todo lo que yo aprendí	Of everything I have given
De todo lo que yo te di,	Of everything I presented
ya no me queda nada	Now nothing is left

Lyrically, the song demonstrates an emptiness, hollow vocals that resound with pain, yet their tenderness permeates in the slow pronunciation of each word. In her lyrics, "Pimienta has been vocal about the erasure and violence that Indigenous and Afro-Latina women like her face in Colombia" (Perez).

Her song was written after giving birth to her baby daughter, echoing the wish for a mother's pain and suffering to give way to a new vision for the world (Perez). Her child, Afro-Latina, must encounter the same pain and strife as her foremothers. In this reading, the water that submerges the women takes on the quality of lineage and ancestry—perhaps alluding to the water that breaks at birth. Yet, suspended, the water becomes an embryonic fluid where the two women float. The water now serves as a metaphor for the passage of life.

The river is where the women labored over clothes; the river is where Lido Pimienta speaks about giving labor to a baby daughter. Her daughter will most likely inherit her pain and struggle. When the video begins, Pimienta is drifting with her twin—Li Saumet—as she floats in the water. She is tethered to her through her hair, but when she returns to the river in her death, the ties are severed, and she is alone. The circle from birth to death is mediated through water. Lido Pimienta's cut hair shows utter detachment between her and her twin as she dies.

In this reading of "Nada," I choose to focus on the role of the Outsider Within, and specifically, on fabric as labor. The river, as mentioned before, serves as a metaphor for life's passage. The water submerges both the fabric and the women as they drown in labor—the labor of life's struggle and the labor of grief. The river, then, acts as a conduit that explores birth, death, and nothingness ("Nada").

Las Dos Fridas in "Nada"

Nothing is absolute.
Everything changes, everything moves, everything revolves, everything flies and goes away
-Frida Kahlo

With themes of death and suffering explored in the music video, a haunting homage to past women, born and buried in pain continues into contemporary times. The European clothing Lido Pimienta and Li Saumet wear—from colonial periods—indicate painful assimilation as both women mirror each other with their hair tied together. The video's focus on the colonial, with references to the famous artwork, "Las dos Fridas," indicates a clear preoccupation with Indigenous pain as well as female identity.

In the painting, the two Fridas are tethered by their hearts, a scissor puncturing their connection to one another. Yet the video shows the death of one of the interconnected women, their hair cut and their ties severed.

The use of Frida Kahlo's image in the music video appeals to the sensations of the viewer, who recognize the painting as an object. Sara Ahmed defines use—objects that are useful, used, in use, etc.—as a multifaceted process that transforms things into somethings (Ahmed 23). She defines use as, "a verb employed for some purpose, to expend or consume, to treat or behave toward, to take unfair advantage of or exploit, and to habituate or accustom"

(Ahmed 23). In this case, Kahlo's art is used as something to treat or behave toward. The painting "Las dos Fridas" elicits reactions that bring sensations into use—they elicit reactions and behaviors in me that are embodied and tied to ancestral knowledge.

The woman played by Lido Pimienta dies by suicide; similarly, in the painting, the European Frida, is profusely bleeding and risks death.

"In the 'Two Fridas,' Kahlo portrays herself in two versions: one in a traditional Mexican dress, and the other in European dress" (Huen). Though both women in the music video "Nada" wear European clothing, unlike Frida's painting, the woman who dies by suicide is given a funeral on the riverbanks, celebrating her Indigenous roots. Her flower crown and tribal face paint shows a proud reclamation of Indigenous identity in the Amazon region of Colombia. Her death signifies the dichotomy of Indigenous resistance versus European assimilation that many undergo. Both are, in a way, a kind of death.

"Las dos Fridas" makes me behave and treat its image with care and respect; it brings forth ideas of loss and acculturation. The fact that the Fridas, or twins, in "Nada" are connected by hair brings to mind the connection people find through shared culture and origins. Both images elicit thoughts of generational pain and assimilation into European ways of being as the hair is severed and the vein punctured. Struggling with my own acculturation, loss of language, and assimilation into the United States, the painting and the video become objects of passion, sensation, vulnerability, and anguish. Kahlo understood more than most the anguish of being caught between two cultures and the sacrifice of staying true to her roots. She was German and Mestiza, clinging to her distant Indigeneity, and she did not succumb to acculturation.

Motherhood, Ancestry, and Hair in "Nada"

You didn't learn anything from the moon today?
You haven't gleeeaned anything from a flower's constant gifts to the lands we'll soon become?

edxi betts
Whose Imagination Are We Using to Free Ourselves?

The woman played by Lido Pimienta in the music video "Nada" commits suicide by eating the seeds of an unknown flower; she floats on the Amazon river into the distance by the music video's end. Similarly, edxi betts asks us if we have "gleeeaned anything from a flower's constant gifts to the lands we'll soon become" in her poem "Whose Imagination Are We Using to Free Ourselves?" edxi betts is an Afro-Indigenous trans woman who asks us to understand our relationship to the world around us through spiritual practice rooted in nature (AwQward). Lido Pimienta asks the same question, only visually. She asks whether nature has taught us to be resilient, with its everyday atrocities and beauties, or if it has led us astray and numb. But she makes a clear distinction, of course, because human nature is surely different from Mother nature.

In human nature, blanqueamiento policies are a silent genocide against Black women in particular. Lido Pimienta is Afro-Indigenous, so she and her family face double erasure if the process of blanqueamiento policies are to succeed. Blanqueamiento is the gradual lightening of a race over generations to reach ideal "whiteness." In colonial times, this process of was by no means consensual. Women were taken from their homelands, raped by European men, and made conform to colonial dictates (Fischer 965).

The woman who kills herself in the forest, played by Lido Pimienta, dies after the camera captures her with her children by her side. Her children, who are lighter than herself, seem

sorrowful. This mother and her children stare straight at the camera, disapprovingly, as if confronting an ugly truth. Mestizaje, or the mixing of Indigenous and European people, is to many

> a deceptive identity, which is permanently blurred and ends up creating a discourse that moves in ambiguity; [it] "gives life to a modus vivendi that we all know is precarious and that poses serious problems as far as culture is concerned. A kind of emptiness is produced, of dangerous uprooting; and more than a living and lived reality, culture is at this level a disturbing interrogation" (Quevedo 45).

Not only is this form of miscegenation harmful, but because it is forced, becomes a form of hegemony wherein European men dominate conquered peoples.

Hegemony is "the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group" (Webster). The dominant group—the group that exerts influence on the tethered Fridas—are the unpictured European men who imposed their way of being onto the Indigenous population. Hegemony often operates through subtle forms of control, often including social or cultural norms. In colonial times, direct and appalling systems of control and domination gave way to the quiet and pervasive norms that dictate Latin American beauty standards. Today the "deceptive" and most common racial group remains the mestizo. Mestizaje is only possible through the rape and cultural domination of Europeans who cloak the identity in whiteness.

So the woman who stares back at the camera—she had motherhood imposed on her, along with the demands of European colonizers. Imposed motherhood scars both generations of mother and child. They *all* look up at the camera with a glazed-over look, saddened and resigned. The complicated structures that hold them together, hold them through years of domination by conquistadores.

Instead of continuing on an obligatory path to whiteness, some prefer that their lineage end with the seeds of an unknown flower, which is to say: some prefer death over the nothingness felt that results when giving birth to a child that was not born of love. In this way, we are led to believe that the woman who commits suicide dies due to colonial violence. Though this reading of “Nada” does not reflect the reality of Pimienta’s own personal experience, it encompasses the truth of a past everyone in Latin America knows.

Once her body falls to the ground, her twin—played by Li Saumet—cuts the braid that at one point tied them together. Right before this scene, however, when both women are alive, they sing the lyrics:

Yo te soy sincero, *no le tengo miedo a la muerte,* *si es que me quiere aqui la espero de frente sonriente te recuerdo* *el dolor lo llevo dentro* *el dolor lo tengo presente* *soy mujer de sangre en luna de tierra, sal y duna* *con amor, sin duda alguna* *el dolor lo llevo dentro, lo llevo dentro, yo...*	I’ll be honest with you, I am not afraid of death... if she wants me I’ll wait for her, smiling let me remind you of the pain I carry, this pain is always with me, I'm a woman, of moon blood of earth, salt and dune and love, no doubt about it I carry the pain, I carry the pain, I do

To be a woman, then, is a pain intrinsic to the way of things—to the way of nature and of flowers both poisonous and beautiful. I interpret motherhood as life’s ultimate gift and burden, one that fills the body with nothingness as it brings life into the world. “Nada” the name of the song, meaning “nothing,’ and is ripe with meaning in this sense. Pimienta shows that motherhood is tied to sacrifice, and because of the nature of colonialism, it is tied to violence inflicted upon the female body, which is a kind of nothingness.

When hair is cut, in this circumstance, it is a way of letting go the obligation of the dutiful mother who holds no doubts or pain. Because of the nature of motherhood for Latin American women, the images of sacrifice, pain, and healing represent love for foremothers and care for self. The healing occurs on the riverbank, with a crown of funerary flowers placed upon Lido Pimienta's head. In lieu of connection to her sister via hair, her hair becomes a part of nature with flowers brimming atop her head.

The cutting of hair represents the forgiveness of Lido Pimienta's twin. Though the moment the scissors sever their connection is sorrowful, Li Saumet's actions on the riverbanks demonstrate the ever-present care attached to her fallen sister. Lido Pimienta's funeral ritual and flowerlike hair also signify a rebirth where forgiveness blooms into understanding.

Mental Health and Empire

You cannot prevent the birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair.

Chinese Proverb

In the course of writing this thesis, obstacles amounted—making it difficult to put into words the disturbances I feel when I think of hair, conquest, power, and the personal. Confronting the pain of India, Colombia, Ecuador—of the many countries who are defined by former colonization—was something trying for my mental health. The more I became emersed in this project, though, the more I took Sathnam Sanghera's words to heart. They read: "That education can be a tool of colonialism is reflected in the fact that imperialists routinely used it as a weapon" (171). I take from this that education can be a tool, but that it has been used as a weapon in the past. I contrast these words to Audre Lorde's. In "Poetry is Not a Luxury," she writes, "as we learn to use the power of scrutiny for power within our living, those fears which rule our lives and form our silences begin to lose their control over us" (1). Scrutiny is only analysis by another name, and

analysis is simply another word for critique. In critiquing the past, then, I break long-held silences which is something powerful and essential to my life as a scholar. Further, I think that in this project, I do not wield my embodied knowledge as a weapon but as a tool to heal myself. Poetry—and I consider this work as verse hidden in the expository—is a tool to be used. It is a useful tool, not of colonialism, but of care. While writing this thesis, I learned to educate myself and trust my subjugated knowledges.

Finally, I must mention that in both *A Fine Balance* and "Nada" central characters die due to suicide. I do not find this coincidental. There is so much pain in the past, and for Maneck and Lido Pimienta's character, there was no respite from their pain. I believe that they could not cope with the legacy of colonialism, at least, this is what I perceive and how I feel.

Maneck, one of the protagonists of the novel, throws himself off a train when he visits Mumbai and finds that Ishvar and Om have become beggars and that Dina Dalal lost her independence (705). He learns the callous after-effects of the Emergency, a political crisis ignored by the West (Nossiter 1). In this time, Maneck was told to be careful of his beard during the 1980 Sikh riots—riots that took the form of genocide. He could not believe the violence. He was made vulnerable, for the very first time, by his hair. He was mistaken for a Sikh for facial hair, long and well-groomed (665). From then on, his trip to Mumbai became horrifying and strange in relation to his memories—as he was finally made to confront the injustice of his country. Lido Pimienta, as an artist, suffered the same disillusionment, and she likely created a character that dies by suicide to symbolize the tragedy and overwhelming pain of generational violence. Lido Pimienta's character dies as Maneck does, but she dies from the fruit of a flower due to the burden of motherhood. She dies due to her frustrations with Spanish colonial legacy.

Both Maneck and Pimienta's character undergo parallel processes of disillusionment and hopelessness.

Understanding these truths is a difficult process, and as a reader, I must be delicate with my perception of Maneck and Lido Pimienta. I read them with my tools of care in the hope to end painful silence—silence that makes trauma unspoken, misunderstood, and ignored. As the Chinese proverb above states, you can prevent a nest in your hair despite the birds that fly above you. In other words, you can prevent yourself from falling into disarray at the atrocities of the past, and there is hope in building knowledge about tragedy—because building knowledge about ancestry allows the body to heal from its pain. I am beyond thankful to Rohinton Mistry and Lido Pimienta for creating characters that falter, who are imperfect, pained and beautiful. Dina, Maneck, Roopa, Ishvar, Om, Rajaram, and the twins of "Nada" speak, in their own way, about subjugated knowledges—which is to say embodied knowledges, which is to also say, the knowledge stored in ourselves and what the body remembers. The bodies, the hair, and the pasts that belong to Mistry and Pimienta's characters urge us to listen to our own sensations and personal understandings of the World. When confronted with themes of loss, violence, and death, the body speaks. To listen, then, to our bodies, to our pasts, and to our suffering is to understand the world more fully.

Conclusions: "Nada" and *A Fine Balance*

Queer uses, when things are used for purposes other than the ones for which they were intended, still reference the qualities of things; queer uses may linger in those qualities, rendering them all the more lively.

Sara Ahmed
What's the Use?

Hair is used queerly in "Nada" and *A Fine Balance* to exemplify the pain associated with colonial pasts. I also use queer readings of hair as allegorical, culturally resonant, and

economically motivated through my perceptions of the world, especially in relation to my memories and sensations. Both *A Fine Balance* and "Nada" use hair as an object that produces the cultural processes of assimilation, hopelessness, and subjugation. Sara Ahmed also shows how objects are transformed by their use and how unconventional usage of objects, like hair, reveal more about the culture in which they are formed, for "use is how we mingle with things" (22). Mistry and Pimienta mingle with the importance of hair. They queer its use by emphasizing its biological, ancestral, and cultural meanings.

I know that others share the same fascination with hair and its many uses, which is why I included epigraphs in each section of this thesis. When I was workshopping the structure of this thesis, I wondered how to weave and braid the concept of hair as more than just deadened cells. I soon discovered that when talking to peers and advisors alike, the topic of hair resonated with them and sparked their curiosity.

Hair, then became a useful, multifaceted extension of self and culture. Due to this, my thesis meanders with the goal of inspiring surprise. Moreover, I find that "Nada" and *A Fine Balance* encourage fascinating and beautiful readings of hair that confront the past in an impactful way. Thus, they are linked together by use and care. They have also inspired me to embark on a similar sort of storytelling that is embedded in queer uses. I am confident that I have woven a story about hair that resonates with its readers through Pimienta and Mistry's works. I have woven a story about hair and its importance in literature and culture with examples from my personal experiences.

Notes

1. This quote was especially illuminating for me. It is found in the New Yorker article entitled “Evidence of Evil” and can be found here: www.newyorker.com/magazine/1993/11/15/evidence-of-evil

2. Visit www.kajalmag.com/poem-collage-mudra/ for the full poem and graphic design.

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