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Exploring a South African Indian Woman Poet and her Poetry from an Indigenous Perspective: Interviews with Francine Simon and Readings of Selected Poems from *Thungachi*.

By Arushani Govender
Student Number: 395318

A dissertation submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research in the School of Literature, Language and Media



UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

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Supervised by:
Prof. Denise Newfield and Associate Prof. Barbara Boswell

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation "Exploring a South African Indian Woman Poet and her Poetry from an Indigenous Perspective: Interviews with Francine Simon and Readings of Selected Poems from *Thungachi*" is my own unaided work and that all sources used are indicated and acknowledged as references. This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Masters of Arts by Research at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Full Name: Arushani Govender Date: 30 July 2019

Signed: _____

Abstract

This dissertation executes a critical reading of Francine Simon's poetry in relation to contemporary perspectives of indigenous knowledge (IK), and against the political background and socio-cultural context of the poet's lived experiences. Simon is an emerging South African Indian (SAI) woman poet in the contemporary poetry scene, and has recently published a debut poetry collection titled *Thungachi.* I unpack instances of IK from selected poems in *Thungachi,* through use of an *indigenous language of critique.* Linda Tuhiwai Smith conceptualises *indigenous language of critique* as a form of theory that indigenous research scholars should engage with, by combining questions of indigeneity with attributes of decolonisation (24). Framed by decolonial theory, this study serves the interests of decolonising research praxis, and thereby the nature of the knowledge produced. I have executed in-depth interviews with the poet to determine how she came to acquire IK and how such knowledge is conveyed and dealt with in her poetry. The interviews are presented as an experiential montage, countering the "objective" nature of academic research that distances the knower from the known. The dissertation is thus composed of theoretical analysis and creative reflections, which together offer a textured exploration of the selected poems and an *experience* of the poetry. Using the interview data as a supplementary device, I conduct the poetry analysis with the following questions, which pertain to examining the data from an indigenous perspective: What indigenous worldviews are prevalent in Simon's poetry? To what culture/s may those worldviews be attributed? How is IK affected by diaspora, gender and cultural hybridity? This study finds that it is necessary to critique Simon's poetry from an indigenous perspective in order to uncover its cultural complexities, ontological insights and social commentary. Additionally, Simon's poetry demonstrates artistry, experimentation with language and form, and innovates a genre of decolonised feminist poetics that creates room for the heterogeneity of South African Indian women.

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I thank Dr Dane Perumal for being my lifeboat at countless times, and most of all, for giving me more time with my father.

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To my father, Vella Govender, you were only alive for less than half this journey but you have not left my side for a second. Every day I live is for both of us.

A Note on the Text

This dissertation makes use of a variety of research methods across theoretical and creative disciplines in the Humanities. The length of this dissertation is attributed to unconventional research writing techniques and formatting in chapter four. The dissertation refers to my interviews with Francine Simon as well as her doctoral thesis titled "Experimental Explorations of Selected Women's Innovative Poetry Written in English, with a focus on 'the Gurlesque'." To distinguish between the two bodies of work, I use the abbreviated in-text reference "EWP" and relevant page numbers when referring to Simon's thesis. References to the interviews are stated in each sentence and do not contain parenthetical in-text citations. References to Simon's poems include the title of the poem and line numbers where necessary.

The following additional abbreviations have been employed for in-text references to author's with more than one work, who are referenced recurrently:

DSAIE	*A Dictionary of South African Indian English* by Rajend Mesthrie.
ELS	*English in Language Shift: The History, Structure and Sociolinguistics of South African Indian English* by Rajend Mesthrie.
III	*Inside Indian Indenture* by Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed.
MoF	*Melancholia of Freedom: Social Life in an Indian Township in South Africa* by Thomas Blom Hansen.
"WNFS"	"Where Names Fall Short: Names as Performance in Contemporary Urban South Africa" by Thomas Blom Hansen.

Other titles have been shortened for in-text references but are stated in full at least once. Abbreviations to the following terms have also been employed:

SAI	South African Indian
SAIE	South African Indian English
IK	Indigenous knowledge
IKS	Indigenous knowledge systems

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Chapter One
Introduction

1.1. Research Topic, Background and Context

This dissertation executes a critical reading of Francine Simon's poetry in relation to contemporary perspectives of indigenous knowledge (IK), and within the political background and socio-cultural context of the poet's lived experiences. Simon is an emerging South African Indian (SAI) woman poet in the contemporary poetry scene and has recently published a debut poetry collection titled *Thungachi.* I unpack instances of IK from selected poems in *Thungachi* through use of an *indigenous language of critique.* Linda Tuhiwai Smith conceptualises *indigenous language of critique* as a form of theory that indigenous research scholars should engage with, by combining questions of indigeneity with attributes of decolonisation (24). Framed by decolonial theory, this study serves the interests of decolonising research praxis, and thereby the nature of the knowledge produced. I have conducted in-depth interviews with Simon to determine how she came to acquire IK and how such knowledge is conveyed and dealt with in her poetry. The interviews are presented as an experiential montage, countering the 'objective' nature of academic research that distances the knower from the known. The dissertation is thus composed of theoretical analysis and creative reflections, which together offer a textured exploration of the selected poems and an *experience* of the poetry. Using the interview data as a supplementary device, I conduct the poetry analysis with the following questions, which pertain to examining the data from an indigenous perspective: What indigenous worldviews are prevalent in Simon's poetry? To what culture/s may those worldviews be attributed? How is IK affected by diaspora and cultural hybridity?

The beginning of this chapter provides summative background information about the poet, working definitions of key concepts, and the rationale and research objectives of this study. Thereafter I include a brief overview of SAI history to assist with locating both the poet and myself within the timeline of South African political history. I also explain my ethical dilemma as an insider/outsider in relation to researching poetry that represents my own identity as a SAI woman. The latter part of this chapter

considers theoretical arguments regarding the political power of poetry. It focuses on theorists who write from indigenous, feminist, post-structuralist, and post-colonial perspectives, in order to provide a conceptual map for reading Simon's poetry. This brief review serves to support the rationale that poetry, as IK, is a political genre and a promising source of decolonising praxis. I link these views to examples of contemporary South African poetry criticism that demonstrate applications of indigenous perspectives in reading poetry. These texts illustrate how decolonised research practices, combined with contemporary examples of South African poetry, provide insight into alternative and local ways of knowing that deflect from the Western episteme. A chapter summary that outlines the contents of this dissertation concludes this introduction.

I will elaborate on my choice of theoretical framework in the next chapter but must emphasise here, that my study is undertaken from the perspective of IK in poetry. Although this research deals with a woman poet who writes about women's issues from the vantage point of her particular cultural identity, I have chosen a theoretical approach that is cultural rather than feminist. I acknowledge that feminist theory is the expected analytical lens for research on a woman writer. However, my study centralises IK and associated theories in order to offer a novel approach to literary analysis and to enquire within an emerging and decolonising field of knowledge.

The Poet: Francine Simon

Simon is a twenty-nine-year-old contemporary poet. During our interviews, Simon provided information regarding her family's background and upbringing. She was born and raised in Durban by Catholic-converted parents of Tamil linguistic heritage. She grew up in the affluent, mostly white neighbourhood of Durban North and was educated at Model C schools, which distanced her from close relatives who had been living in the "Indian" area of Chatsworth since the promulgation of the Group Areas Act. Simon's father managed to remain in Isipingo, the town of his upbringing. In 1990 when Simon was born, the Group Areas Act was repealed, allowing her parents to move to Greyville, closer to their family-run clothing business. Years later her family relocated to Durban North, accompanied by Simon's younger sister and her maternal grandmother. During her childhood Simon was a staunch Catholic devotee

like the rest of her family, attending Church regularly and adhering to religious conventions. She studied English at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and on discovering an aptitude for poetry writing, took on a master's degree in creative writing. She produced a portfolio of poems, which marked the beginnings of *Thungachi.* In 2018, Simon graduated with a PhD from Stellenbosch University. Her thesis titled "Experimental Explorations of Selected Women's Innovative Poetry Written in English, with a focus on 'the Gurlesque' ", led to the publication of her debut poetry collection — *Thungachi* — by uHlanga Press in 2017. *Thungachi* means "little sister" in the Tamil language. Simon, having a Christian name, asked her parents for an Indian nickname according to SAI household traditions. As a result, her father gave her the name *Thungachi*, ironically because Simon is the older of his two daughters. Simon's thesis tracks her struggle to find women poets whose work consolidated the hybridity and fragmentation of South African Indians, in a way that resonated with her own identity. When she failed to find such poets, she sought guidance from experimental women poets who transgress genre and gender boundaries through innovative explorations of marginalised 'femaleness' ("EWP" 3). In addition to *Thungachi*, Simon's poems have been published in journals and literary magazines, such as *The Sol Plaatjie European Union Poetry Anthology, New Contrast, New Coin, Illuminations, The Atlantic Review, Ons Klyntji, Prufrock, ConVerse, AVBOB Poetry Project Anthology, Stanzas* and numerous online journals such as *Aerodrome* and *Type/Cast*. She was a featured poet at the Franschhoek Literary Festival and the Poetry in McGregor Festival in 2018. During her PhD candidature, Simon married Christoph Pan, a German-speaking Italian student of engineering. Simon is currently spending a year in Italy with her husband and his family, as she ventures into new writing projects.

Important Working Definitions

Before I explicate the research objectives and rationale for this study, I must provide working definitions to strengthen the suggested associations between IK, decolonisation and South African Indians. Dei, Hall and Rosenberg identify the issue of defining IK and establishing appropriate parameters when researching IK (5). The term 'indigenous', historically associated with colonial classifications, was used to describe all non-Caucasian communities as a single homogenous group (Purcell 259).

Contemporary, anti-colonial scholarship — accounting for forced migration, diaspora and hybridised identities — focuses on indigeneity in relation to knowledge, rather than to the geographical residency of the knowledge holder. IK constitutes a range of enduring epistemologies, ontologies, cultural practices, beliefs and traditions belonging to heterogeneous groups of people (Shahjahan 214). IK determines and texturises a people's worldview, refers to the long-term accumulation of empirical and spiritual knowledge used to regulate life, is predominantly disseminated through orality or practice, encompasses non-dual thinking, and recognises living and non-living beings as important components in the natural order of the world (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6; Dei 5; Gone 3-4).

This study is founded on anti-colonial understandings of indigeneity, which will be detailed in the following chapter. Although this research is broadly located in anti-colonial discourse, it is conceptually framed by theories of decolonisation. Anti-colonialism is used as an umbrella term to describe various schools of thought that seek to oppose colonial power and "restore local control" (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 15). Focused on subverting notions of immutable relations between coloniser and colonised, anti-colonial discourse may include or refer to scholars of post-colonial theory, post-structuralism and decolonial theory. Thus, decolonial theory is one instance of anti-colonial discourse with a distinct approach to deconstructing the relationship between coloniser and colonised. For Smith, decolonisation is not restricted to national, geographical independence but is "a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power" (98). As such, theories of decolonisation frequently entail a rigorous analysis of colonialism, modernity and Western epistemology. I will provide further account of decolonial theory in chapter two.

The terms 'Western epistemology' or 'Western *knowledge*' are often used by decolonial and indigenous research scholars to describe the authoritative, scientific methodologies used to validate, verify and engender all institutionalised knowledge (Purcell 259). Under the traditional, positivist tenets of Western knowledge construction, any knowledge that cannot be tested, measured or rendered 'objectively true' is considered inferior, irrational and consequently marginalised. Western epistemology is both predicated on and is the predicator of modernity. Its increasingly

scientific, methodical approach to life is commonly attributed to key European intellectuals, such as René Descartes and Isaac Newton. Descartes's concept of mind/body dualism renders a mechanical world that severs the internal, sensational and psychological from the objective, external world (Semali and Kincheloe 26). Newton's advances on physics rationalised cause and effect, promoting the ideology that predictions could be made on any phenomenon if its conditions were measured, tested and scrutinised (26). Subsequently, Western scientific modes of thinking reinforced colonial conquest, patriarchy and capitalism by seeing the Earth, its people, its resources and landscapes as objects, subjects and commodities to own. Dei, Hall and Rosenberg elaborate:

> Positivist thinking and the traditions of 'rationality', 'objectification', 'reason', 'progress', and the certainty of knowledge are the hallmarks of Western scientific knowledge. Social phenomena are often presented in structural forms that downplay the human element and the dimension of emotion and intuition. (8)

It is clear that Western modes of inquiry and perception do not account for indigenous epistemologies. Thus, anti-colonial discourse seeks the resurgence of IK as counter-colonial, counter-culture discourse, seeing IK as relevant in contemporary political thinking and not confined to the pre-colonial past (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6).

It is also necessary for me to clarify my use of the descriptors: 'female' and 'woman'. First, I must note that, in many instances, Simon describes herself and her influences as 'female poets.' She asks the following question in her thesis:

> Searching for examples of local innovative female poetry, and unable to find an obvious local figure of female inspiration and guidance, where does a young South African 'Indian' female poet turn when she is writing between the uneasy claims of a gendered identity and linguistic-conceptual experimentalism? (3)

Although I respect Simon' views and will approach an analysis of her poetry that adheres to her own ways of theorising her identity and poetic process, I am cognisant of feminist scholars who derogate the term 'female.' Lockett suggests that in feminist scholarship, the term 'female' is used to connote biological identity, while 'the feminine' refers to "values that are marginal and often oppositional" and is used to indicate the redefinition of women's roles in society (7). Similarly, Nfah-Abbenyi emphasises that in most examples of feminist scholarship, sex is differentiated from

gender, where gender is understood as "the nonphysiological aspects of sex, a group of attributes and/or behaviours, shaped by society and culture" (259). Thus, this dissertation will use the terms 'feminine' and 'woman/women' when dealing with issues of gender and the social expectations of a person's behaviour in their community. However, I use the term 'female' in instances where gendered identities are not subsumed, for example when referring to mythological or non-human figures, to certain indigenous practices and to the physical female body. I also use the term 'femaleness' in line with Simon's use of the concept as a poetic device. In her thesis, Simon expresses her concern with 'femaleness' being the singular, predominant and defining element of a women's identity, especially within the context of SAI culture. Consequently, she redefines and explores 'femaleness' as "multiple inflections rather than struggling with the inability to fit into a coherent, single position" (22). Thus, Simon's understanding of 'femaleness' offers a deconstructive interpretation of gender, whereby femaleness is the locus from which to approach gender issues.

Rationale and Research Objectives

This study responds to a range of gaps in literature on IK. Its overarching rationale is based on notions that IK can have liberating and decolonising values if it is intellectualised and integrated into the mainstream system (Ntsoane 100). The re-acquisition, promotion and protection of IK has a place in South African governmental policies (Botha 8). Indigenising education is the predominant concern for African IK activists and theorists who advocate modified pedagogical approaches and curriculum content, which will be relevant to the lived experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of black students. The task is to "create new ways of knowing" and "different strategies for sharing knowledge" (Ntsoane 97). When researching IK in South Africa, the available outputs hold strongly to essentialist views – focusing predominantly on indigenous African ethnic groups and pre-colonial beliefs and practices. A 2009 survey, conducted by Moos, Struwig and Roberts for the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), reveals that coloured and Indian respondents were less supportive of IKS initiatives in the country than black respondents. The report on the survey states, "People in tribal and informal urban areas are more inclined to support IKS" ("Local is Lekker"). There is no present evidence of inquiry into SAI culture from the perspective of IK. South African Indians have lived in the

country for over 150 years, experiencing a long, troublesome history of systematic oppression and cultural repression and should be represented in national decolonising outputs. Thus, this study aims to produce IK research in relation to SAI culture. My purpose here is not to categorise SAI culture as an expression of IK, but simply to recognise the dynamics of IK that are embedded in SAI lived experiences, and ways of seeing the world that deviate from — and co-exist with — Western epistemologies.

Secondly, I am cognisant of the lack of IK research into humanities' disciplines. Botha deduces that from the perspective of national discourse, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) initiatives have strong economic orientations, neglecting to realise opportunities for liberation (10-11). My research began as a response to the National Research Foundation's (NRF) call for research on IKS, particularly its request for "novel and creative thinking that will shift the boundaries of IKS knowledge production and that address national priorities in South Africa" (3). The South African Poetry Project (ZAPP) has responded to this call by producing research on contemporary IK poetry. Newfield emphasises that ZAPP interrogates essentialist views of IK by regarding indigeneity as heterogeneous, mutable and fluid. ZAPP aims to "reconceptualise poetry in terms of indigenous oral traditions, currently reconstituted and hybridised through global intersections of culture" (1). Later I will provide a brief survey of poetry criticism in South Africa that endorses indigenous critique in relation to literary analysis. I will indicate that poetry is a highly political genre that can afford deep cultural insight if coupled with IK studies.

Thirdly, the introspection of Simon's poetry for this research is partially a personal choice. I identify deeply with her poetry and have never been exposed to such personally relatable poetry in either my school or tertiary education. This study therefore addresses gaps in my own life and educational experience. Additionally, there is lack of profound academic investigation on SAI women poets. Devarakshanam Govinden produced a doctoral thesis titled " 'Sister Outsiders' – The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women" (2000) which gives some focus to SAI women's poetry. In 2008, the thesis was published as a book. Aside from Govinden's work, there is no extensive academic research that centralises SAI women's poetry.

Finally, my study contends that mainstream versions of SAI history do not suffice. Kumar and Tiwari postulate that personal narratives, literature, songs and testimonies should be considered as viable sources in the historiography of indenture (22). Largely predicated on limited archival material and colonialist renditions of indenture, the rich oral histories that exist in the community are frequently overlooked. This research aims to give credence to SAI oral traditions for its vital role in cultural continuity and its encapsulation of indigenous ways of knowing.

South African Indians: Brief Historical Background

"Slavery had been abolished. But labourers were still required to sweat in the fields" (Sam 129). These words by Agnes Sam in *Jesus is Indian and Other Stories* powerfully depict the beginnings of the SAI subject. Growing up, I was told that our people were brought to South Africa as slaves to plant sugar cane for the Queen. According to my family, I am a fifth generation SAI. My great-great-grandparents arrived on board the *Truro* and *Belvedere*. My maternal predecessors came from Pondicherry: a French colony in India during the emergence of indenture. The story was always told as if those ships came together. Only during formal education did I learn the term 'indenture'. Sam offers a narrative rendition of indenture, similar to my family's stories, telling of how poverty-stricken Indians were coerced into parting with their families, seduced by offers of minimal wages, greener pastures and a passage back to India after gaining sufficient finances, all with the belief that slave trade principles were entirely relinquished (Sam 129-131). While a considerable percentage of indentured labourers were descendants of low-caste, poor communities who sought a better quality of life, they do not account for all the migrants who travelled to South Africa (Ebrahim-Vally 122). Some were recruited by British sub-agents who "would lurk in temples, at weddings, community meetings" feeding Indians with promises of brighter futures (127). The *Truro* arrived at Port Natal on 16 November 1860, followed by the *Belvedere* on 26 November. Together the ships contained nearly seven hundred indentured migrants from various parts of the Indian sub-continent. Desai and Vahed describe this moment: "Hierarchies 'imagined' into being over a long period; divisions based on age-old customs; castes, religions, dialects, centuries in the making, unravelling. Space, time and place compressed" (*III* 1).

Despite the myth of the *kala pani* (dark waters) which forbade Indians to cross the ocean, likening it to debasing the soul; to the loss of a pristine Hinduism; and to banishment with no return, Indians migrated to South Africa (56). The condensation of differing identities aboard the ship led to a significant collapse of the caste system, a social hierarchy based on archetypal Indian occupations (Hiralal 161). Subsequently, caste stratifications were internalised and appropriated in new ways (Ebrahim-Vally 120). Once disembarked, the passengers (most of whom were lower caste and illiterate) had their names recorded in the Indian Immigrant's Register, a dubious process that marked the interpellation of the labourers as subjects of modernity (Desai and Vahed *III* 63). Then, the myth of the *kala pani* became a truth. Indians were increasingly ill treated under the indenture system; they were forced to work fourteen hours a day, starved, physically abused and deprived of healthcare after being placed in squalid, hostile living conditions (127). Women were constantly assaulted and raped (209) and countless labourers were killed, worked to death or committed suicide (127).

The transplantation to South Africa, and working under Christian authorities who saw Hindus as pagans, caused the labourers to modify their cultural rituals (Naidoo vi). Desai and Vahed write, "These were not simply inherited and transplanted from India, but often refashioned in a fluid and complex situation" (*III* 240). Although Christianity spread throughout South India, with 1.4 percent of indentured labourers already converted before leaving Calcutta (262), conversions persisted and increased in South Africa (279). The majority of the converts were lower caste and saw conversion as a tool for politico-cultural resistance (262). Complaints of cruel treatment were systematically silenced for years until some indentured labourers managed to return to India by paying for a passage back (77). This led to new contractual agreements in 1874 between the Indian and British governments, stipulating better treatment and the allowing Indian traders to migrate to South Africa for self-entrepreneurship. These migrants were known as 'passenger Indians' or 'free Indians', most being Gujarati or Muslim, and of higher caste than the indentured labourers (Ebrahim-Vally 83). The passenger Indians arrived at port cities, including East London and Cape Town, and began the Indian diaspora throughout South Africa (126). Despite vast linguistic, caste, religious and regional differences, the designator

'Indian' was used to describe all who migrated from the subcontinent (84). It was only in 1961, over one hundred years after the arrival of the first generation Indians in South Africa, that their descendants received South African citizenship (Ebrahim-Vally 84).

Citizenship meant the transition from indenture to oppression under apartheid. The continual homogenisation accorded by both systems elided the complexities of the Indian population (Moodley 125). Indians began to distinguish themselves in cultural terms defined by regional cuisine, linguistic heritage and traditional garments (126). The introduction of apartheid's Group Areas Act in 1950 complicated matters further. The act sought to separate South African residential areas into clusters based on racial hierarchy. One of the areas was Chatsworth, an Indian township about 15km south of Durban. Hansen deduces that Chatsworth was devised as a buffer between white and black residential areas in Durban. Poorer Indians were strategically positioned on the outskirts, bordering Umlazi, while middle-class Indians were located on the boundaries of working-class white neighbourhoods ("WNFS" 209). Desai and Vahed note, "Chatsworth was born at the height of apartheid's madness when the government sought to ghettoize persons of 'Indian' origin into what it intended to be a frozen racial landscape" ("Writing Chatsworth" 1). Chatsworth was constituted by ten units (although the units were numbered from one to eleven for unknown reasons) and three private townships: Umhlatuzana, Kharwastan and Silverglen, where Indians could purchase land on auction. The layout of Chatsworth and the strategic distribution of Indians was determined by class divisions marked by a variety of sub-economic houses: flat-like homes made from cheap material; free-standing economic houses for purchase; and free-standing houses built by Indians themselves (Vahed 26-29). Housing approximately 350 000 residents, Chatsworth became the largest Indian suburb in the country (Desai and Vahed "Writing Chatsworth" 2). Hansen postulates that the shift from apartheid to democracy instituted multi-layered feelings of loss amongst Chatsworth residents who had grown accustomed to communal intimacy, enforced by cultural enclosure and newfound economic stability (*MoF* 15-16). Referring to Freudian psychoanalysis, Hansen identifies the people of post-apartheid Chatsworth as self-reproaching and self-reviling, symptomatic of the perpetual state of 'melancholia' where "the loss of this deeply problematic past, its pleasures, and its

forms of life cannot be acknowledged. The past is tense, and the experience of freedom becomes melancholic" (16).

Given the post-apartheid imperative of geopolitically locating the country's residents as 'South African', today Indians are officially known as 'South African Indians', yet widely referred to as 'Indians', influenced by indenture and apartheid racial classifiers. The term is still reductive and fails to account for the differences amongst a heterogeneous population of 1.3 million people ("WNFS" 202). Hansen aptly describes the incessant flux of SAI identity attributed to numerous systems of oppression and shifts in contemporary politics:

> Indians in South Africa remain, in other words, "in suspension" – in a provisional and indeterminate space: with a history of forced removals, non-recognition, of economic success against many odds; of being at the mercy of powerful forces beyond their own control. . . . ("WNFS" 203)

These complexities, fragmentations and displacements are part of the reason Simon struggled to find an *affidamento* poet figure to follow ("EWP" 14). She questions her place in South Africa as an emerging poet, "What (*how?*) was I (to be) called?" (18). The indefinite answers to these questions are the reasons why Simon emphasises varying dimensions of femaleness, one of which is attributed to her 'Indianness' (13-14). Simon sees her identity as a rhizomatic structure — each root a confluence of cultural identifiers and femaleness (38). As a South African, Indian, woman, Catholic, Tamil, Simon acknowledges herself as provisional and frames her poetry within themes of 'non-place': a technique used to "provisionally situate and yet repeatedly also re-locate" (32). Simon's poetry, while feminist and experimental, deeply captures the experiences of dispossession and loss that define the large majority of South African Indians. Given the divisions and compression of contrasting Indian cultures in South Africa, Simon's poetry will particularly resonate with those of Tamil linguistic heritage, residents of Chatsworth and Christian converts who hold on tightly to Hindu traditions despite their religious affiliations. Yet the subdued indigenous knowledge/s infiltrating her poetry speak to a wider SAI consciousness: to those who long to know their origins, to the educated elite who are more and more distanced from their cultural 'roots', to those who cannot articulate their differences, and to those who are burdened by repressed and untold histories.

The Researcher as an Insider/Outsider

There is much I share in common with Simon if viewed through the lens of identity designators: race, gender, age and nationality. We were born and raised in the city of Durban; our elders were victims of the Group Areas Act; we have relatives in Chatsworth and an ancestry tracing back to South Indian, Tamil-speaking indigenous peoples who entered South Africa through the indenture system. We share the fact that neither of us knows much about those ancestors. Even so, we had variegated upbringings: my family's religious affiliation is with Hinduism; I was raised in Umhlatuzana (one of the private, middle-class districts that forms part of the greater Chatsworth); I attended Indian-majority public schools where classmates and teachers had distinctively SAI accents and used the dialect known as South African Indian English (SAIE). I have had great exposure to Chatsworth and Hindu culture as a community member: that is, as an insider. Yet my subsequent tertiary education at an elitist institution outside Durban, and increased exposure to national, political currents, had significant impact on my view of religion, my use of language, and on my familial social circles. Smith points out that research methodologies are often devised on the assumption that the researcher is an outsider who knows nothing about the community he or she is observing (137). Drawing from reconceptualised and flexible methodologies of feminist theory (137), Smith posits and problematises the use of insider methodology for indigenous research. She suggests that the insider/outsider dynamic of researchers dealing with their own communities is two-fold. At one level the researcher is a partial insider in the particular group and shares important, eternal relationships with the community members; and, at another level, is a partial outsider by acting in the interests, or for purposes of, Western institutional research (5). Smith affirms:

> Simultaneously, they work within their research projects or institutions as insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and as outsiders because they are often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a minority or a rival interest group. (5)

I have established my working definition of 'indigenous' in order to clarify that the community I am 'insider' to, is not removed from Western institutional practices, education or the fabric of modernity. I must also clarify that this is not an anthropological study, although it utilises certain ethnographic methods, which will

be explained in chapter three. The study focuses on Simon's poetry and contains interviews with her. I have not committed any ethnographic observations of people in Chatsworth for purposes of this research. However, through sparing use of autoethnographical inserts, I reflect on memories that mildly implicate family figures and members of my social circle. Emphasis is put on the fact that these reflections are filtered through my subjective perspective. Additionally, due to the fact that Simon's poetry bears striking resemblance to my own past and present lived and 'living' experiences, I cannot claim to deliver a purely objective conceptual analysis of her poetry and interview responses, nor do I intend to. Thus, throughout developing a research methodology, executing interviews with Simon, and in reflecting on and presenting those interviews, I was cognisant of my insider/outsider status and aimed to think through all research processes reflexively while maintaining ethical accountability to the research participant and to the wider community implicated in the research (Smith 147).

1.2. Literature Review

The Political Implications of Poetry

Audrey Lorde's essay "Poetry is not a Luxury" engages the political value of poetry from a black, feminist perspective, whilst highlighting its capacity as an agent of change. Lorde confronts white, patriarchal, capitalistic dominance as a conduit for oppressive and subalternising gestures. For Lorde, "institutional dehumanization" is justified by modernity's predilection for logical thought over feeling and experience (39). Feeling becomes the repressed skeletal structure of self-determination (36-39) and can only be exhumed through poetic activity, which gives "name to the nameless so it can be thought" (37). Lorde clarifies her definition of poetry:

> I speak here of poetry as a revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that too often, the white fathers distorted the word *poetry* to mean – in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight. (37)

Lorde's definition of poetry differs from the poetry of education institutions, mainstream profitable literature, or entities functioning as incumbents of imperialism.

She implies that poetry's capacity to transform distilled experience into language allows it to transcend the scientific and objective use of language as a transparent medium. As such, she indicates that liberation for victims of colonialism — particularly women — cannot occur through the use of pure logic or new ideas but through "old and forgotten ones" (38). Lorde's standpoint signals toward what Dei, Hall and Rosenberg call the 'crisis of knowledge': the commodification of knowledge induced by colonial and globalising forces (3). The flux of knowledge across geo-political borders problematically configures the displacement and suppression of Third World (or what is now known as the 'Global South') philosophies and traditions, confounding all world knowledges with that of the ruling episteme's (4). Lorde's conjecture that forgotten, pre-existing ideas are the solution to reshaping black women's futures, resembles theories of indigenising, where "through the process of learning the old, new knowledge is discovered" (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 6). Thus, Lorde postulates poetry as a site of resistance, accorded by its propensity to resurface silenced and marginalised ways of being. Kristevan semiology offers a comparable view in "Revolution in Poetic Language", albeit from a psychoanalytical and semiotic perspective:

> In 'artistic' practices the semiotic – the precondition of the symbolic – is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic, and this revelation allows us to presume something about its functioning. (103)

It is necessary to unpack Kristeva's two varieties of signification. The *semiotic* refers to the pre-linguistic process of signification. This process is marked by repetition and rhythmic baby talk during an infant's acquisition of language. Borrowing from Freud's theorisation of the pre-Oedipal complex, Kristeva associates baby talk with the phase of maternal dependency (95-98). Conversely, the *symbolic* refers to the acquisition of developed language, associated with subject differentiation and subservience to social codes constituted by signs and syntax (Lewis 31). For Kristeva, both processes are interdependent and constitute the intelligible speaking subject (Kristeva 93). The dynamic of language as both *semiotic* and s*ymbolic* is not apparent until a breach is affected between the two processes of signification (109-10). The breach may be incited through uses of poetic language that resemble the musicality of *pre-language*, which appropriates the primal states of fragile narcissism and maternal dependency (115). This theory posits that poetic language is self-referential; that it raises the signifier (language) above the signified (meaning) and in doing so, breaks

the continuity of an ideologically determined subject. As a result, poetic language turns language against itself, exposing it as abstract by initiating a resurgence of primal operations, and thus, the feminine. While this model accounts for poetry's ability to dismantle patriarchal ideology provisionally, its paradoxical reliance on white, male psychoanalysis and semiotic deconstruction produces what Spivak self-reflexively calls "the inbuilt colonialism of First World feminism" ("French Feminism in an International Frame" 153). Furthermore, Kristeva's theory of a *revolutionary* poetic language restricts poetry's significance to linguistic mastery. Borrowing Eagleton's words, from the post-structural perspective "poetry is writing that flaunts its material being, rather than modestly effacing it before the Holy-of-Holies of meaning" (41). It is a view that presumes all poetry functions this way, moreover, what is considered *good* poetry (41). While Kristeva's theory could be extended to forms of indigenous oral poetry, its emphasis on poetry as discourse is useful and applicable to a wider range of contexts.

Similar to post-structural theorists, Ngugi wa Thiong'o sees poetry as a metalanguage: an inventive and creative interplay of speech that makes everyday language flourish (87). His concern in *Decolonising the Mind* is peculiar to the revival of indigenous languages and cultures, which, according to him, are indivisible categories (13-16). Ngugi perceives language's ontological resonance as a power it holds to help people form organic relations to one another and to nature. Thus, he objects to the use of English over African vernaculars in African literary forms. In his view, literature's potential to repair and liberate can be maximised if presented in the relevant indigenous language (87). Intertwining semiotics with cultural analysis, Ngugi's rendition of poetic language emboldens the signifier without eclipsing the signified. Instead it revitalises the signified to the point of cultural restoration. It is useful to apply Eagleton's words here, when he remarks on the feeling of loss arising from new knowledge in *How to Read a Poem*:

> Yet that something had also been lost is surely beyond question; and part of the point of poetry was to seek to restore it. In a world of instant legibility, we had lost the experience of language itself. And to lose our sense of language is to lose touch with a great deal more than language. (21)

While Eagleton rebukes the widely denotative and monotonous use of language in everyday speech, his words reverberate with themes of orality and the concern for the

non-institutional use of African vernaculars. Indeed his comments hold true for South African Indians, most of whom have lost the intimate cultural knowledge that goes along with Indian vernaculars. Although Eagleton's criticism appears limited to Western poetry, he elucidates the importance of considering poetry as discourse and as a language whose meaning "*is the whole process of signification itself*" (21). He describes discourse as "language grasped as a concrete social occurrence inseparable from its context. It is language seen as a transaction between human subjects, rather than viewed formally or abstractly" (90). Evidently, each of the theorists mentioned above share the common perspective of poetry as discourse. This perspective is subsequently used as a foundation for theories regarding the political competency of poetry. Kincheloe takes issue with the unquestionable use of language as representation in formalist research. He suggests the necessity of breaking out of the narrative structures that govern our perceptions of the world, bearing in mind that "students of inquiry are rarely exposed to meta-analytical orientations that facilitate the exposure of the effects of such narrative constructions" ("Redefining Rigour and Complexity in Research" 43). By acknowledging the discursive frameworks from which poetry emerges, and which are made transparent through the form and content of the poem, one is able to identify and reflect on the white, patriarchal and capitalistic narratives that rule the world. For being able to achieve this, poetry's aptitude for political empowerment is indisputable.

Ramazani explores the characteristics of poetry that set it apart from prose-dominated literary genres. Moreover, he acknowledges frequent associations between poetry and localised cultural experience and how this translates in a global context. In describing the transnational value of poetry, Ramazani states:

> Because poetic compression demands that discrepant idioms and soundscapes, tropes and subgenres, be forced together with intensity, poetry—pressured and fractured by this convergence—allows us to examine at close hand how global modernity's cross-cultural vectors sometimes fuse, sometimes jangle, sometimes vertiginously counterpoint one another. (4)

For Ramazani, poetry's political value lies in its capacity to reflect adequately on the creolisation of local worldviews, raising the genre to the level of the transnational. His standpoint engages an analysis of modernity's confluence with Third World nations. This perspective can be likened to that of Latin American decolonial theorists, such as

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Maria Lugones and Walter Mignolo. These theorists examine colonialism as the premise for modernity and its consequent ontological dichotomisation. Colonialism infiltrates socio-historical spheres such as the economy, militant and political authority, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and subjectivity, resulting in the coloniality/modernity of the world (Mignolo 15-21; Lugones "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" 742). In "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality", Maldonado-Torres examines how modernity is mobilised by colonial powers to incite metaphysical tribulations for colonised subjects, naturalising their subjugation and dehumanisation (11-15). These theorists recommend that in order to pursue decolonisation, one must first dismantle and scrutinise the past operations of colonialism, and the perpetual occurrence of the *coloniality of being* (10).

Ramazani's rendition of transnational poetry as a microcosm of global tensions and fusions suggests poetry's profound exposure of modernity/coloniality. The seemingly "one-way homogenization and westernization of the world" is challenged by poetry's astute outlining of the cultural imbalances within the globalised world (6). Poetry then becomes a measure for decolonial resistance, articulating the inner workings of modernity/coloniality — concurrently disobeying and deviating from its paradigm. Poetry, compressed and pliable, stretches over various themes, cultures and landscapes, "its figural and allusive traversals of space, its rhythmic and sonic coordinations of distances" (14) evoking the spatial dominion of the empire, while summoning the "global ungathering of decolonization" (145). Since Ramazani's articulation of transnational poetry encompasses both postcolonial and indigenous poetry, we must distinguish the indigenous prerogative "where the tendency has been to re-appraise metropolitan 'touchstones' through the telescope of alternative modernities" (Chapman 11) from post-colonial criticism, which seeks to examine liminal and hybrid spaces where coloniser and colonised interact (Chapman 10). Both positions are present in transnational poetry and refute the binary opposition between coloniser and colonised. However, where indigenous analysis perceives this binary cosmologically (Smith 25-28), post-colonial criticism sees it through the lens of the linguistic and psychoanalytical turns (Chapman 9-10). Thus, Ramazani's meditations are crucial in evaluating contemporary South African poetry from an indigenous perspective.

Indigenous Perspectives on Contemporary South African Poetry

Before exploring examples of literary analysis that focus on the indigenising features of contemporary South African poetry, I must first clarify what I mean by an *indigenous perspective*. I borrow my definition of the term from Michael Minor, who published a thesis titled *Decolonizing Through Poetry in the Indigenous Prairie Context* (2016). Minor rigorously argues for indigenised poetry as a specific form of decolonial activism (142). For Minor, indigenising is about repositioning society from the perspective of indigenous peoples and how indigenous principles ground and frame their lived experiences (154). Consequently, indigenous poetry can be defined as expressions of indigenous worldviews *by* indigenous peoples. The next chapter will address the issue of indigeneity, suggesting an anti-essentialist and heterogeneous definition of the term that accommodates the phenomenon of diaspora. For now, I use Minor's understanding of indigenous poetry, as I believe it is suitable and applicable to the contemporary South African context. In addition to centring indigenous worldviews, Minor posits that indigenous poetry subverts Eurocentric visions of genre by reconfiguring poetry as a multimodal genre that caters for a range of cultural expressions, art forms and every-day practices (184). Minor elaborates:

> Indigenous poetry works as a decolonial force because it challenges generic boundaries, constructs writing in new ways that reject the politics of recognition, and uses this writing as both documentation of and script for performance. (184)

This view of poetic genre as artistic and historical expressions of intermingling forms, proposes that a rethinking of genre itself is part of what constitutes an indigenous worldview. The subversion of Western genre is a concern also taken up by Taban Lo Liyong. In his article "Indigenous African Literary Forms May Determine the Future Course of World Literature" (2018), Liyong posits that decolonising can be effected by the production of literary works which illuminate the spirit of a people and their unique cultural architecture. He denounces Western literature and its imperialist implications for placing African literary forms under erasure. Moreover, he claims that instruments of modernity have strategically prevented our spontaneous will to create. Liyong states:

> That stopped the development of our literary genres and forms. And, by doing so, blocked our springs of thought, of inventiveness, our capacity to bring to the world stage well-developed works of art which display how

> our minds and spirits work, and which we consider important for humanity's existence. (18)

For Liyong, the solution is to equip future African artists with IK by exposing them to African IK holders — "the 'unmortared' experts" — in order to obtain valuable traditional insight, and thereafter innovate contemporary versions of indigenous poetry and literature (27). Liyong's argument signals towards the potential for cross-pollination of genre, while emphasising the importance of anchoring literary creation within African indigenous worldviews. Now that I have clarified the type of poetry this study invests in, I will explore how these views have been applied to poetry criticism in South African contexts.

Newfield and D'Abdon, in their article "Reconceptualising Poetry as a Multimodal Genre" (2015), acknowledge the crisis in poetry in South African formal education — where the scope of poetry is restricted to elitist, Western, written word poetry (514). Positing that poetry must be reconceptualised to account for local traditions and practices, the article makes reference to Newfield and Maungedzo's report, "Mobilising and Modalising Poetry in a Soweto Classroom" (2006). The report details a pedagogic intervention that took place in a Soweto classroom where learners displayed little interest in English poetry (72). Acknowledging that meaning-making involved both the collection and transformation of various cultural resources (74), the researchers urged students to engage with poetry through diverse modes of expression — such as stories, letters, visual artwork and oral performance (76). Students produced their own poems resulting in the published anthology *Thebuwa, Poems from Ndofaya.* Newfield and Bozalek describe the collection as follows in "A Thebuwa Hauntology, from Silence to Speech" (2018):

> The poems enliven possibilities of indigeneity through the rupturing of canonical conceptions of poetry . . . They produce insights into the complexity of South African worlds, opening up a myriad of connections to place, time, everyday life and culture that reconfigure both literacy and themselves . . . Students drew — consciously or subconsciously — on indigenous traditions of oral poetry, ignored in official syllabi. . . . (45)

Here we see an example of Liyong's meditations put into action. By crossing Western genre boundaries, and fusing their lived experiences with intellectual activity, the students were encouraged to think and act instinctively. Newfield and D'Abdon attribute this result to a convergence of Western literary forms and organic cultural

poetic practices (514). This version of poetry challenges divisions between written and oral modes, allowing holistic understandings of contemporary indigenous South African poetry (519). The above study demonstrates that opening poetry up to indigenous influence propels self-actualisation, agency and marks a political moment. *Thebuwa, Poems from Ndofaya* is an instance of decolonial aesthetic creation brought into existence by marginalised subjectivities, who have reclaimed their power to "shape, and reshape subjectivity, space, and time" (Maldonado-Torres "Ten Theses" 27) and thus emerge as agents of social change (28).

Gunner has published extensive research on African indigenous oral poetry. In "Africa and Orality" (2000) Gunner debunks the colonial myth of a primitive, homogenous Africa by examining a range of African poetry genres where "poetry was, in a way, the heartbeat of royalty" (2). Gunner wants us to see that orality is not a monolithic genre devoid of organising principles — nor is it a nostalgic pastime, employed by African politicians to appropriate positions of royalty by evoking ideas and feelings of the past (3). The latter point is already indicative of oral poetry's unwavering political disposition and adaptability to contemporary politics. In South Africa, praise poems are cultural memory banks "that act as a mirrors and as a form of working archive" (4). For most indigenous sub-Saharan societies, praise poetry has multifaceted functions beyond the scope of artistic mastery. As a mirror and as an archive, praise poetry in its myriad of subgenres allows societies to reflect on their social ideologies while maintaining cultural continuity, in which the past is attainable. Liyong advocates that African literary genres should be shared with the world for their unique ability to capture both the visceral and cognitive dynamics of life, and a community's truth and ways of being (26).

Furniss and Gunner's anthology *Power, Marginality and African Oral Literature* (1995), examines African oral literary forms both as representations of social life and agents of change in contemporary African politics (1). The collection provides a number of reports on anthropological studies in selected oral communities throughout Africa, finding that oral art was mobilised as a tool for self-regulation and to structure power hierarchies within societies. It draws attention to oral societies' resistance to documentation, suggesting the refusal of oral forms to being marginalised within communication networks in African societies (7). The scope of my study does not

permit me to venture further into oral genres and forms but I would like to emphasise the manner in which oral poetry functions both as an expression of culture and as commentary on societal conditions: a defining characteristic of revolutionary poetry. I will later demonstrate how Simon's poetry, albeit written, attempts to contain orality's ephemeral and animated resonance and is prompted reflexively to contemplate the discourse of orality itself. Africa's oral histories and histories of orality demonstrate indigeneity's reluctance to be confined to divisive genres that do not account for interconnection of cultural and social codes (Minor 185-86).

I will now explore the interest in ecocritical evaluations of poetry in South Africa. Boswell's article "Re-memory and an African Ecofeminist Poetic of Healing in Malika Ndlovu's Poetry" (2011) executes poetry analysis from the theoretical framework of ecofeminism. Boswell explains:

> Inherent in these African ecofeminist approaches is also a critique of Western epistemologies – what counts as formal knowledge – and a restoration of indigenous modes of knowing and understanding the earth and nature. (34)

Acknowledging that indigenous women hold deep connections to nature, Boswell propounds that modernity's structures worked to sever women from the natural world (34). African ecofeminist poetry thus endeavours to rebuild women's alliance with the environment through the regeneration of indigenous epistemologies (34). Healing the Earth becomes analogous with human psychological and emotional healing, and consequent liberation (34). Indigenous ontologies underlie this approach, giving "a sense that the people, animals and entities are not separate from the places that they occupy" (Kavanagh 32). Boswell focuses on the restorative ethic of nature, viewing environmental elements as historical sites from which human memory can be reconstructed (37-39). In relinquishing the binaries that divide humans from the natural world, re-memory and recuperation of the "fractured sense of self" becomes possible (35). This critique exemplifies that landscape is, to some extent, exempt from the "collective amnesia" (37) suffered by colonised subjects through colonial processes of cultural erasure, and is therefore an important source of knowledge and liberation. Where memory fails us, the Earth bears evidence of pre-colonial ways of being and the subsequent shattering of these ontologies initiated by colonialism. If nature contains traces of IK to accelerate self-determination and re-humanisation, then

re-linking the self with nature is equivalent to summoning the repressed, the instinctual, the indigenous ways of being.

Similar viewpoints are found in Mthatiwa's doctoral thesis, "Human-Animal Relationships and Ecocriticism: A Study of the Representation of Animals in Poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and South Africa" (2011). Mthatiwa postulates that ecocritical examples of African poetry reshape the relations between human and animals, often refuting the Western ontological views of animals as mechanistic, beast-like creatures whose purpose is only valued in relation to human capitalistic enterprises. He justifies the need for a transpersonal ecology that erases boundaries between human and non-human beings: boundaries that have thus far engendered the continual exploitation of animals as resources for human consumption (296). Literal use of animals in mainstream literature is infrequent in comparison to allegorical representations (60). Mthatiwa deduces that African and Hindu ontologies recognise the interconnectedness between all living organisms and as such, poems derived from these traditions are inclined to representing animals as spiritual yet literal beings (229). Again, we can give credence to contemporary African poetry for encapsulating indigenous ontologies that counter and destabilise Eurocentric visions of the world, in efforts to reconstruct harmonious and decolonised ways of being.

The above arguments have demonstrated a need for reading poetry in the socio-political and cultural contexts from which it emerges. Gqola emphasises this point in " 'Pushing Out from the Centre': (Black) Feminist Imagination, Redefined Politics and Emergent Trends in South African Poetry" (2009). Gqola explains her diverse selection and comparative examination of black South African women's poetry:

> . . . their work illustrates something about the place of the cultural in contemporary South Africa, and the specific ways in which a Black feminist imagination is responsible for a widening of the literary landscape. (215)

These words are of particular importance to the study at hand. Gqola's suggestion of an expanded literary landscape serves figuratively to map marginalised imaginaries that are at once racialised, cultural and feminine. Relating to Lorde's and Kristeva's conjectures, Gqola renders women's bodies and cognition as prime sites of resistance. Reading the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon, Myesha Jenkins, Lebogang Mashile and

Makhosazana Xaba, Gqola highlights the necessity of recognising the conscious centralisation of women in relation to local experiences and cultural influences. She identifies the decolonial stance taken in black feminist poetry and the subsequent need for a new forms of criticism (233). In "Whirling Worlds? Women's Poetry, Feminist Imagination and Contemporary South African Publics" (2011), Gqola explicates:

> Attention to such multimodality is a questioning, exploratory stance, rather than obsessive framing, as we attempt to make sense of the kinds of creative explosions that women's poetic energy continues to give rise to. (6)

This new form of poetry criticism should account for the geopolitics of knowledge and historical consciousness embedded in the literary landscapes of black feminist poetry; should identify multimodal processes of meaning-making that exceed the confinements of Western literary conventions and criticism; should integrate semiosis with the multiple modes of meaning-making and with lived experience; and should forage for indigenous ways of knowing and assess how these are inflected in contemporary South African poetry. More importantly, a new form of poetry criticism should elucidate how the found ontologies differ from, subvert and destabilise Western epistemology, all with the intention of transforming it. The above examples of contemporary South African poetry criticism exhort the application of indigenous perspectives in order to deflect from and transcend conventional Western approaches. Additionally, they illustrate poetry's restorative and decolonising capabilities through viewing poetry as a multi-generic discursive expression of local cultural tapestries.

The present chapter sets the foundation for this dissertation by providing the background and context of SAI history, of the poet and of the researcher. The rationale for this study is attributed to gaps in research with regards to IK, SAI history and SAI women poets. Additionally, there is a lack of IK research within the creative arts. In reviewing the political power of poetry and indigenised critiques of contemporary South African poetry, I argue that poetry should be researched more carefully in relation to IK and decolonising praxis. As such, my dissertation wishes to execute an analysis of selected poems from Francine Simon's debut collection, *Thungachi*, from an indigenous perspective. In doing so, I have conducted in-depth interviews with Simon to investigate her poetry writing process, how she came to acquire IK and how she interprets such knowledge in her poetry. The dissertation uses

decolonial theory as conceptual scaffolding to provide an *indigenous language of critique* of Simon's poetry. Extending the theoretical framework to research design, I experiment with interdisciplinary and creative articulations of literary analysis, as described in the chapter summary below.

1.3. Summary of Chapters

Chapter two, "Theoretical Framing", describes Smith's conceptualisation of *indigenous language of critique* by exploring its two major components: IK and decolonisation. I review theories of indigeneity, IK and decolonisation, indicating how the dissertation is framed, overall, by decolonial theory. Feminist perspectives of decolonisation are used in amalgamating IK and decolonial theory to produce an *indigenous language of critique* for this research. Chapter three, "Methodology", details the 'decolonising methodology' devised as an extension of the theoretical framework. Kincheloe's notion of research *bricolage* is used to describe the interdisciplinary research methods patched together for the compilation of the dissertation. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews with the poet, observation, and searching the archive. The differing methodological approaches in chapters four and five are defined individually. Chapter four, "Interviews with Francine Simon: A Reflexive Montage", delivers a creative and experimental presentation of the interview transcripts. A variety of texts are used: Simon's poetry, interview excerpts, archival material, media extracts, and autoethnographic reflections. This chapter promotes a diffractive reading of data, influenced by Jackson and Mazzei's article "Plugging One Text Into Another: Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research" (2013). As a result, texts juxtapose and complement each other in a non-linear montage that unsettles the supposed seamless chronology of history. Chapter five, "Reading Selected Poems from *Thungachi*: Analysis and Findings", executes a close reading of five selected poems from *Thungachi*, namely: "Naming Places", "Tamil Familiars", "Rati", "Nanni-Ma" and "Betel-Nut". I explore instances of IK and ontologies that underlie the poems. Chapter six briefly concludes this dissertation by discussing how the research topic was addressed. It illustrates how a range of perspectives, writing styles and methods, culminate in a research *bricolage*.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

Theories of decolonisation are used to formulate the main conceptual framework for this dissertation. Using decolonial and indigenous theory, I construct an *indigenous language of critique* (Smith 24) as a strategic, decolonising approach to my study. This chapter begins by unpacking the two major tenets of *indigenous language of critique*: IK and decolonisation. In doing so, I examine contemporary definitions of indigeneity and IK that accommodate the Indian diaspora in South Africa. Thereafter I review scholarship on decolonisation and focus on feminist perspectives of decolonial theory, which will later be used to situate Simon's poetry.

2.1. *Indigenous Language of Critique*

According to Smith, an *indigenous language of critique* stems from two strands of thinking, of which both are present in the politics and theories of decolonisation. She states:

> One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into a universe which was entirely of our making. . . . The second strand of the language of critique demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. (24)

For Smith, the two strands are mutually dependent and allow the reformulation of problems and solutions for both time periods: colonised time and pre-colonised time (24). Thus, I refer to conceptions of decolonial theory in so far as they emphasise "the power held by local/social practice to survive the colonial and colonized encounters" (Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 7). Although Smith conveys the importance of associating indigenous peoples with pre-colonised time, she is not suggesting an essentialist definition of IK. Rather, she suggests that both strands intersect in indigenous cultural politics (24) and contends that an *indigenous language of critique* is a significant

foundation for indigenous scholars to form their own theories (28-37). Her argument will be explored further later when I discuss contemporary theories of IK.

2.2. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Indigeneity

Essentialist views of indigenous peoples are widely contested as a product of positivist anthropological research, where IK is codified as primitive, static, historically bound and irrelevant to the present. These reductionist views preclude the integration of IK into the academic episteme, compounding the marginalisation of indigenous populations (Semali and Kincheloe 22). In effect, indigenous scholars are caught in between prejudiced assumptions: on one hand IK is prehistoric and therefore could not be relevant to contemporary society and progressive thought; on the other hand, if the knowledge is in fact evolving, current and industrialised — then it is impure, post-colonial and thus, not indigenous. With regards to the first scenario, Semali and Kincheloe argue, "indigeneity in this context becomes romanticised to the point of helpless innocence" (22). For the latter, Dei contends that the prospect of hybridity is used as an opportunistic scheme to enable Western intellectuals to execute research "without acknowledging the collectivity and ongoing collaborative nature of knowledge creation in dialectic exchange" (10), hence claiming ownership of IK whilst effacing its very existence. Scholars of IK are left with the responsibility of demonstrating that IK can be hybrid, yet genealogical; and locally specific, yet globally advantageous. Smith cautions scholars against the danger of losing interest in IK, with the false impression that it will not be understood by a global audience. In her view, one must confront the challenge of demystifying as this is an important step in the decolonial agenda (16).

But how does Simon's poetry — influenced by SAI Tamil heritage, mixed with Catholic interventions and Model C school teachings — fit into the IK paradigm? According to essentialist views on IK, SAI people are indigenous to India and while I will attempt to offer definitions that accommodate them, I am cognisant of the fact that such 'classifying' must not fall into the categorical mentality of the Western episteme (Shahjahan 214; Almeida and Kumalo 2). A differentiation is required here, between *indigenous peoples* and *indigenous knowledge.* In essentialist terms,

indigenous peoples are those who originated from and occupied a country or geographical region in the advent of colonisation (Loubser 76). This classification has strong connotations of ancestral territory, inevitably binding indigenous people to their landscape of provenance and designating them as culturally homogenous (Purcell 259). However, in favour of a definition that acknowledges continuous cultural hybridisation and processes of decolonisation, I draw on Purcell's definition of indigenous peoples:

> *Indigenous people* are existing descendants of non-Western peoples who, in general, continue to occupy their ancestral lands even after conquest by Westerners, or who have been relocated forcibly in the process of colonization. Indigenous people maintain a cultural complex that sets them apart from the Western socio-cultural tradition . . . . (260)

While this definition does not specifically account for the historical complexities of Indian indenture, where recruitment was not free of coercion, Purcell acknowledges that forced and unforced migration "have made identification of the indigenous a contested terrain" (259). Smith argues that 'indigenous' refers to a global network of peoples of varied cultures, with the capacity to band together in the quest for self-determination (7). Combined, these ideas allow for a more inclusive definition that encompasses colonised people from all over the world, giving them grounds to organise, mobilise and decolonise as a collective of subjugated communities whose lives have been determined and infiltrated by colonial domination.

Indigenous knowledge conveys a similar ethos in that the *knowledge* is deemed to have originated from a particular place, has developed over time, is cumulative and vital to indigenous peoples in apprehending their relationship to the world (Dei 5). Distinct from indigenous people, IK may be identified as "the body of historically constituted (emic) knowledge instrumental in the long-term adaptation of human groups to the biophysical environment" (Purcell 260). This conception untethers IK from ancestral ties to landscape and acknowledges its importance in the context of diaspora, such that it becomes indicative of the methodological, philosophical and ideological perspectives of its users (Purcell 258). Moreover, it values knowledge as the constituting factor of indigeneity as opposed to restricting its definition to geographical boundaries (Botha 13). In the face of diaspora the question of hybridity further complicates the notion of 'indigenous'. To Semali and Kincheloe, the wide

diversity of indigenous peoples clarifies that IK is heterogeneous and cannot be confined to monolithic epistemology; different knowledge systems can dialogically co-exist (52). To Shajahan, "these knowledges are both dynamic and adaptive, have evolved over centuries, successfully adapting to continuous environmental and social changes" (215). To Dei, dichotomous thinking that construes 'indigenous' knowledge and 'Western' knowledge as discrete categories must be challenged (9). Dei, Hall and Rosenberg argue that, "indigenous knowledges recognise the multiple and collective origins of knowledge as well as collaborative dimensions" (7). The effort to transcend essentialism need not mean that hybridity must be read in a way that renders the resourcefulness of indigenous peoples invisible (Semali and Kincheloe 52). Rather, it suggests that the Western knowledge system is a *local* knowledge system, which displaces its locality for universalism as it converses with IKS (Semali and Kincheloe 28). The hybrid nature of IK culminates in its myriad of forms. This dissertation employs the following definition of IK provided by Dei, Hall and Rosenberg:

> For millennia, many indigenous cultures were guided by a world view based on the following: seeing the individual as part of nature; respecting and reviving the wisdom of elders; giving consideration to the living, the dead, the future generations; sharing responsibility, wealth, and resources within the community; and embracing spiritual values, traditions, and practices reflecting connections to a higher order, to the culture, and to the earth. (6)

The above contentions illustrate that IK is holistic knowledge, both tacit and explicit, immersed in local realities, and can be expressed through practices, rituals, technologies and artistry that demonstrate the ingenuity of a given group (Mbatha 173). IK can be presented in multimodal artistic forms; from language to oral poetry, stories and songs (Ngugi 1-63); to petroglyphs, weavings and objects (Smith 33); and textual narratives or scriptures (Bar-On 782). Summarising Gone, the following overarching characteristics can be derived: *IK is genealogical*, inherited and conveyed through generational lines; *IK is empirical*, based on observations and deductions regarding all elements of nature; *IK is spiritual,* promoting and maintaining relationships with non-humans; *IK is oral* or largely disseminated through oral narratives; and *IK is experiential* in that is derived from lived experiences (4).

Decolonial theory appears to be the preferred approach to by many leading scholars in the field, including the likes of Smith, Dei, Semali and Kincheloe. Combining IK with

decolonial praxis urges the recognition of oppressive and totalising structures within the Western episteme. Understanding that knowledge creation and dissemination are tools for attaining power, IK scholars are accountable to the communities they represent and must produce knowledge that has true emancipatory value. Akena notes:

> To stress the importance of indigenous knowledge as a tool for decolonization, researchers need to appreciate the complexity of the structures of colonialism and its neocolonial forms. Moreover, attempts to engage indigenous knowledge for community development should not blind researchers to myriad modes of ideological domination and the theoretical lure of Western knowledge to negatively affect thoughts and actions. (603)

Akena emphasises that the *process of knowing* and its associated content must disclose the levels of subjugation that are naturalised in Western academia; must reroute towards non-exploitative, non-capitalistic and non-individualist research practice; and must circulate the knowledge with honourable intentions of liberating. If researchers are seduced by Eurocentric attitudes, they risk falling into the trap of re-colonising and further 'othering' indigenous groups (Semali and Kincheloe 20). To this end, I outline three major concerns reflected in contemporary IK scholarship. These concerns illustrate the need for decolonial thinking in recovering and reclaiming IK.

1) Indigenous research theorists suggest reconfiguring scholarship by re-centring indigenous knowledge

Paralleling Ngugi's supposition, educational theorists advocate for a revolutionising of pedagogical practice and curriculum content that centralises IK. A constructivist learning theory is encouraged whereby learning builds upon the existing knowledge that learners have (Mvenene 102). As a result, the policy of using mainly English in educational institutions is highly contested and criticised for depriving speakers of indigenous languages the ability to be creative and innovative (Ntsoane 93). Such re-centring is crucial not only to scholarship but to historicity in general. History must be reconfigured so that it tells the story of colonisation from the indigenous perspective and helps indigenous people to (re)claim nuances of the past, which were not only eradicated through processes of colonisation, but which are continually excluded in

the narratives of the academy (Dei 3). This dissertation does not explicitly deal with pedagogical practice, nor does it claim to reinvent curriculum. However, it makes a small contribution towards these goals by working towards an indigenised literary analysis. It addresses only one strand of resistance, imparting Shahjahan's view that, "agency does not necessarily have to take place in terms of accommodating voices, but it is also about employing one's indigenous ways of knowing and centering these in the process of knowledge production" (229).

2) Indigenous scholarship is concerned with intellectualising IK without compromising its nature

Although many of the IK enthusiasts mentioned in this chapter urge the institutional reclamation of IK, theorists such as Gone postulate that indigenous and Western epistemologies cannot be reconciled in the academic setting (2). In Gone's view, incorporating IK into research or university-based knowledge further hybridises the IK, endangering it to the point of erasure. Gone's arguments conflict with Smith's contention that researchers should take on the challenge of demystification. Moreover, Dei speaks of all knowledge systems, including IKS, as 'hybrid knowledges', but also contends that the collaborative and dynamic taxonomies of knowledge systems do not entail the loss of indigeneity (4). Rather, the integration and centralisation of IK will explicate the academy's recognition of the inherent diversity of all knowledges, even that of the West. Additionally, IK theorists caution against acts of translation. This is not limited to the problem of English as the primary mode of institutional communication, but also applies to the translation of oral knowledge into written representation. The written word distances the knower from the known and the past from the present, thus neutralising knowledge, being, and time, as though these were objective data (Gone 10). Furthermore, forms of explicated IK such as spoken word poetry, folklore or mythology, cannot simply be captured as cultural artefacts to be archived, codified and analysed, because this would imply "a material manifestation of the colonial encounter" (Dei 4). I have formulated a methodology with careful consideration of these conjectures regarding my interviews with Simon. Although her poetry is used as 'data', it is not equivalent to the extraction of oral IK, as it is already presented in written form. In terms of ancient Hindu wisdom, the written word existed long before the advent of colonialism (Ashcroft,

Griffiths and Tiffin 183). Indian indigenous literary forms convey strong interactions between written and oral traditions (183). Thus, my analysis of Simon's poetry is exempt from certain precautions. Additionally, having been exposed to influences of African IK from the time of indenture, and having been distanced from Hindu cultural practices, orality became significant within SAI culture. These matters will be discussed in chapter five upon investigating the hybrid IK that is articulated in Simon's poetry.

3) IK discourse emphasises the need for synergistic dialogue between knowledge systems in scholarship

Botha emphasises the necessity of distinguishing between 'Western' and 'indigenous' knowledge systems, in order to bring them together again in equal relations (15). The task is undeniably difficult. Faced with hybridity resulting from colonisation and economic globalisation, the probability of finding pure pre-colonial knowledge is low (Semali and Kincheloe 19). However, Latin American decolonial theorists have highlighted the overt structures of colonialism/coloniality, suggesting possibilities for rupture through the vigilant pursuit of 'pluriversal' knowledge production. The end goal of this pursuit renounces universal knowledge for a comprehensive plurality of varying epistemes (Mbembe 36). This approach certainly moves far beyond the anti-essentialist view of IK, acknowledging that all cultures and identities are historical processes, are mutable and susceptible to moments of convergence with other cultures (Semali and Kincheloe 23). Semali and Kincheloe propose the creation of a synergistic dialogue between knowledge systems as the way forward. They suggest, "the questions of the nature of indigenous knowledge and its academic uses are obviously complex but central to the future of education" (53). The future of education becomes synonymous here with the future of liberation and self-determination for subjugated individuals who endlessly straddle two worlds and are persistently forced to revoke their cultural ideologies and ways of seeing for the sustenance of the academy (Windchief et al. 536). Le Grange posits the following with regard to indigenising scholarship in South Africa:

> A focus on the performative side of knowledge decentres (not destroys) dominant knowledge systems and produces third spaces (spaces in between) where seemingly disparate knowledges can be equitably compared and function to work together. (10)

Similarly Dei argues that the inclusion of IK is integral, especially in the context of globalisation and rapid information exchange (5). He too, advocates for an academy of synthesised knowledge and as a reconstituted space that caters for diverse manifestations of human thinking (9). Drawing on the concerns mentioned above, this dissertation advocates the culmination of synergistic dialogue. In this context, I acknowledge the formal requirements of academic research while understanding their limitations. Nevertheless, I use them as tools to enforce an *indigenous language of critique* in the intellectual sphere, while working within the conceptual frameworks of a decolonial theory.

2.3. Decolonial Theory

Before commencing a review of decolonial theorists who inform my conceptual framework, I must briefly consider some of the post-colonial theoretical implications at hand, seeing as decolonial theory relies on the foundations of post-colonial scholarship. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe post-colonial discourse as a body of post-structuralist work that "deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies" (204). Although growing out of post-colonial theory, decolonisation can be distinguished as "the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms" (73). Post-colonial theory is criticised by decolonial theorists for its generic presumptions which render all subjugated or 'post-colonial' subjects as homogenous, thereby perpetuating the interests of coloniality. Mignolo discerns that modernity and coloniality are co-dependent, and that alternatives *to* modernity are much more necessary than *alternative modernities* in so far as modernity represents humanity's narrative, located only from within the Western geography of reason (20). He claims the following:

> Therefore it is not necessary to invent alternative modernities, or peripherals, or posts, or subalterns, because that is what modernity/coloniality is: the triumphal rhetoric of salvation (by conversation, civilization, development, and market democracy) that needs inevitably to unfold (and to hide) the logic of coloniality. (20)

Post-colonial theory provides valuable insight from the likes of Gayatri Spivak who theorises subaltern representation and from Homi Bhabha who postulates that hybridity and ambivalence are forms of resistance in postcolonial cultures. However, Shahjahan notes that "through their emphasis on discourse analysis, these thinkers take away the effective agency of the 'Other'. . ." (222). In an effort to foreground the state of the oppressed, post-colonial theory confounds Western ideas with indigenous interests, paradoxically reproducing the Western intellect's authority to determine the world (Smith 14). Moreover, Tuck and Yang assert that post-colonial theory ignores the unique condition of countries where settlers still live amongst indigenous populations, as in South Africa. They contend that it does not address the intricacies of settler colonies, and therefore cannot be solely relied upon to define the appropriate path to decolonisation (5). Decolonial theory emphasises the need for locally specific research that traces the historical and cultural trajectories of a given community (Dei 6). The focus on ideology and theoretical orientation restricts post-colonial discourse to the realm of concept formation. Later I will illustrate how decolonisation involves acts of resistance and posits solutions that require collective mobilisation. Importantly, decolonial inquiry promotes reading culture from the locus of IK, while post-colonial theory reads culture from the vantage point of colonialism. Although I do not view the two discourses as binary oppositions, I concur with the above-mentioned theorists that decolonial theory is more accommodating to projects on IK. For these reasons, I refer to decolonial theory as my primary theoretical foundation while acknowledging its reliance on post-colonial discourse in conceptualising and understanding the impact of colonialism/modernity on indigenous populations. For instance, indigenous scholars who postulate the hybridity of IK indicate the relevance of Bhabha's notion of hybridity. Although contested for repudiating the inequities of power relations between cultures (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 136), Bhabha indicates the need to rethink essentialism through his rendition of the *Third Space,* a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" where all cultural identities are formulated (Bhabha 55). Thus, culture is inveterately hybrid and the search for a pure culture becomes futile. My discussion of decolonisation follows and further instantiates how post-colonial ideas permeate decolonial discourse.

I will begin with a key thinker who is widely referenced across post-colonial and decolonial theory: Frantz Fanon. Fanon produced two foundational works that

influenced the trajectory of anti-colonial discourse. Some of his postulations that have been adapted and reinvigorated by a number of decolonial theorists, will be mentioned briefly. In *Black Skin White Masks,* Fanon provides a psychoanalytic view of black subjectivity, hypothesising that blackness and whiteness are caught in reciprocity. In this situation, the black subject is relegated to a 'zone of non-being', and in consequence, the white subject occupies the authoritative and superior tier in the hierarchy of being. Attention is drawn to race as a social construct that challenges phenotypic assumptions that the black individual is inherently inferior to his or her white counterpart. Additionally, Fanon identifies the use of the colonisers' language as a form of colonialism in its own right. He writes:

> Every colonized people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilising nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. (9)

Thus, the white subject is privileged with continuity of culture and a sense of belonging, but "when it comes to the case of the Negro, nothing of the kind. He has no culture, no civilization, no 'long historical past' " (21). By psychoanalysing blackness, Fanon is able to tease out the strands of colonialism that subjugate the colonised nation post-independence. The final point I wish to emphasise from Fanon's work is found in *The Wretched of the Earth*, an almost prophetic text that provides a Marxist critique of post-colonial resistance through examining the class relations devised by the country's national bourgeoisie. He identifies that in nationalising trade sectors, the ruling group confer the same disadvantages that were predominant in the colonial period under the guise of nationalism. The lack of a transition period between a nation's colonisation and independence results in mere substitution that constitutes "the minimum demands of the colonized", and which requires instead the "whole social structure being changed from the bottom up" (35). Fanon asserts that independence is not synonymous with decolonisation. According to him, decolonisation is an historical process that can only be accomplished through violence (37). It excludes friendly understanding or order (36), modifies the colonised individual in fundamental ways by encompassing "a new language and a new humanity" (36), and can only be achieved through a rigorous questioning of the colonial situation and ultimately violence (37).

Moving onto theorists who extend the application of Fanon's theories, Ngugi makes an integral case for the politics of language. He refutes the use of English as primary communication in academic institutions around Africa. Ngugi highlights the two roles of language: as communication (13) and as a carrier of culture (15). The work of the coloniser has succeeded in destroying the function of language on both levels, in order to alienate the colonised from their immediate environment. By viewing the world through a Eurocentric lens, feelings of dispossession are re-inscribed; this is attributed to loss of language which "as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history" (15). Consequently, Ngugi prescribes that African languages be reclaimed in the teaching, learning and writing project, to establish Afrocentric attitudes, whereby African culture is the centre and other cultures are viewed only in relation to it (89). Ngugi's vision of Africanisation differs from Fanon's critique of nationalisation, despite the similar projections about the loss of indigenous language. Shahjahan notes that Ngugi "exemplifies the use of indigenous knowledge, here specifically language as a counter discourse to rupture the hegemony of colonial language and colonial forms of knowledge production" (219).

On the other hand, Latin American theorists emphasise the struggle against epistemic coloniality by analysing modernity and coloniality as interdependent phenomena. Mignolo observes four domains that are controlled by colonial power, namely: *the economy*, *authoritative forces*, *gender and sexuality*, and *knowledge and subjectivity*. Hence "domination is not just economic, but it operates at all levels of interrelation between different domains of the colonial matrix or power" (14). He suggests that the entry point to decolonisation is in the last domain, for decolonisation of knowledge and being will affect the control of authority and economy by re-imagining the concept of the state (18).

Maldonado-Torres further deconstructs Mignolo's criteria for coloniality in his "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality" by distinguishing the various layers of coloniality and proposing oppositional ideas for subversion. Thesis five is especially relevant to this study: "*Coloniality involves radical transformation of power, knowledge and being leading to the coloniality of power, the coloniality of knowledge, and the coloniality of being*" (18). Thesis five summarises the main decolonial preoccupations of IK theorists and the decolonial turn taken by this

research. Deriving from Fanon's projection that the subject is constituted by coloniality as much as the subject is a key element that connects the aspects that generate coloniality, Maldonado-Torres posits that the colonial conception of knowledge comprises three major facets: subject (subjectivity), object (objectivity) and method (methodology) (18-19). Positing the *coloniality of being* (circumscribed by time, space and subjectivity) and the *coloniality of power* (circumscribed by structure, culture and subject), Maldonado-Torres elucidates how Western epistemic violence detaches the knower from the known through Cartesian divisions of mind/body and reason/nature. The outcome is a knowing *subject* that is confronted by a world of *objects* and thus produces *objective knowledge*: a hegemonic framework mobilised to repress any differing worldview that exists outside of it (Mbembe 33). Maldonado-Torres illustrates how the illusion of universal knowledge is reflected through Western ontology, re-initiating self-erasure within the colonised. The structures of coloniality reveal that "Western modernity not only became entangled with the production of coloniality, but was itself constituted by coloniality" (11). The post-colonial lens that saw colonised nations as hybrid is in effect turned the other way, scrutinising the hybridity of the coloniser. Shahjahan states, "what we call Western knowledge is actually a hybrid and mixture of knowledges from other cultures and societies" (230). Maldonado-Torres finds that post-colonial theory contemplates colonialism and decolonisation as historical moments, which are "locked in the past, located elsewhere, or confined to specific dimensions" ("Ten Theses" 10). Conversely, *coloniality* deciphers the ontological, metaphysical and logical layers of Western modernity, leaving a more discernible and comprehensive notion of *decoloniality*. Maldonado-Torres defines decoloniality:

> . . . decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world. ("Ten Theses" 10)

The theoretical approaches of this research are closely aligned with Maldonado-Torres's conceptualisation of *decoloniality,* in that it sees decolonisation as a collective, holistic struggle against the *coloniality* of knowledge, power and being. The next chapter will establish how this dissertation's research design works towards the decolonising of research praxis in search of a new ontological paradigm (7). The

methods employed are an extension of decoloniality as they are not, and cannot be, as Maldonado-Torres states, "fully contained in single units of study, or captured within the standard division of labour between disciplines or areas in the traditional arts and sciences" ("Thinking through the Decolonial Turn" 1).

Having established theories of decolonisation from a male-authored corpus, I will illustrate the feminist approach to decoloniality, beginning with Lugones's "The Coloniality of Gender." Lugones stresses the necessity to understand pre-colonial gender relations within indigenous societies – in order to understand how colonialism affected them (17). She posits that the intersections of race, gender and sexuality must be read alongside the *coloniality of power* to explore how men of colour, "exhibit to the systemic violences inflicted upon women of colour" (1). Lugones investigates gynecratic indigenous societies, deducing that the exchange of pluralistic spiritual beliefs for a singular, divine male being turned egalitarian tribes into hierarchical, male-dominated societies. Indigenous ontologies were destroyed, female authority was relegated, male dominance became the prerequisite for survival, and clan structures were replaced by the nuclear family (10). Lugones problematises the matter further:

> Those changes were introduced through slow, discontinuous, and heterogeneous processes that violently inferiorized colonized women. The gender system introduced was one thoroughly informed through the coloniality of power. Understanding the place of gender in pre-colonial societies is also pivotal in understanding the extent and importance of the gender system in disintegrating communal relations, egalitarian relations, ritual thinking, collective decision making, collective authority, and economies. And thus in understanding the extent to which the imposition of this gender system was as constitutive of the coloniality of power as the coloniality of power was constitutive of it. (12)

Lugones's meditations caution us against presuming the victimisation of women in indigenous societies prior to colonisation: this prejudice is itself an integral component of the *coloniality of power*. While her assertions significantly address the marginalisation of colonised women — which is a matter of consequence in this study — her solution poses great difficulty for cases where pre-colonial social relations are not determined or are historically determined as inequitable and oppressive. Later I will illustrate that, in the instance of ancient Hinduism, scriptures signify the non-duality of male-female beings, favouring multiple reflections of The Supreme as a

genderless, unified force (Dasgupta 1-23). I will discuss how Simon's poetry depicts frustration with the highly gendered duties and responsibilities prevalent in SAI households, whilst acknowledging the multiple variations and agency of female figures in Hindu mythology.

This dilemma is articulated by Spivak in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak posits that the subaltern subject is one who cannot be heard within the epistemes of the elite. Thus, a representative of the epistemes of the elite, who has access to revisionist history, *speaks for* the subaltern subject. She uses the example of *sati* to problematise the representation at hand. *Sati* is an ancient Hindu ritual performed by a widow (regardless of caste) during her husband's cremation, entailing self-sacrifice, whereby the widow throws herself upon her husband's pyre (93). British authorities took it upon themselves to represent the women by abolishing *sati,* which Spivak describes as a case of "white men saving brown women from brown men" (93). In effect, colonists effaced the act of representation and simultaneously silenced the voices of the Hindu women — who were deprived of the opportunity to make their own decisions (93-95). Spivak acknowledges the possibility of women's desire associated with *sati* as that which can never be known (96). Within this context, "ritual is not being redefined as superstition but as *crime"* (97). Both theorists recognise how colonialism's reification of inequitable gender relations was used to catapult the destruction of indigenous laws. However, Spivak's analysis of *sati* problematises Lugones's argument of understanding pre-colonial gender relations in cases where the relations are only understood through colonial historicisation. From an African feminist perspective, Nfah-Abbenyi claims:

> If Spivak's subaltern woman is historically muted, I contend the reverse, which is that she has always spoken, she has spoken in alternative ways that have challenged and continue to challenge not only imperialism and colonial discourse but us, the critics as well. . . . (273)

Nfah-Abbenyi postulates that an undifferentiated concept of post-coloniality problematically neglects to identify the power relations vested in totalising classifications. In the context of post-colonial women's writing, she argues that a 'singular' post-colonial discourse does not aptly cater for the multiple fragmentations of post-colonial women (262). A pluralistic post-colonial discourse can be initiated through discovering manifold indigenous theories that inexplicitly exist in language,

oral literature and fiction (262). She draws attention to the multiple, mutable and contradictory subjectivities represented in African women's fiction and propounds this as a reconstitution of women's identity that undermines gender dichotomies (275). As a result, Nfah-Abbenyi makes the following conjecture:

> The theory is embedded in the polysemous and polymorphous nature of the narratives themselves. These texts reinscribe and foreground teleological, ontological, and epistemological insights and praxes relevant to the specific histories and politics that preceded the fictional texts. (262-63)

Nfah-Abbenyi calls for a reframing of the notion of theory itself. Her contentions, coupled with concepts of decoloniality, culminate in the *indigenous language of critique*. This serves as the primary theoretical approach to Simon's poetry in chapter five. Although my analysis seeks to uncover IK in Simon's poetry, it incorporates the concerns of black, feminist scholars, in so far as it serves an *indigenous language of critique.* Gqola observes that African feminist scholars "warn against reading creative sites as locations of raw material to be mined for meaning" by stressing the need "to recognize that creative sites are places where theory is produced, not simply applied" ("Whirling Worlds?" 7). I adhere to Gqola's speculations in that my literary analysis does not merely 'apply' theory but attempts an unravelling of indigenous knowledge, ontologies and theories already present in Simon's poetry.

Additionally, I aim to identify the forms of IK embedded in the selected poems and to examine whether colonialism and apartheid, as systems of oppression have repressed and transformed the knowledge. I wish to address the endurance of inequities stemming from Indian caste systems, while recognising that coloniality historically permeates and distorts all social relations. An *indigenous language of critique* not only advocates the re-centring of subjugated cultures and histories, but creates spaces for discerning immanent problematic behaviours that may have existed before colonialism, but which colonialism exacerbated. This opens the door to a complex methodology and an entanglement of methods, which will be detailed in the next chapter.

In this chapter I have tried to establish the significant role of IK in decolonial praxis and define the *indigenous language of critique* as the overarching approach to my

study. Before moving onto the methodology chapter, I must outline the characteristics of my study that adhere to decolonising research principles. These principles suggest that decolonisation is not simply used as a theoretical framework with which to analyse Simon's poetry, but also significant in the research design. Smith states that academic research is instilled with colonial attitudes and "regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state)" (7-8). To address this issue, Botha suggests the interrelation of theory and method where "methods become a practical extension of the theories and assumptions of the research" (Botha 35). Following Smith and Botha's lead, I provide three points that describe this dissertation's decolonising attributes, and how they are germane to methodological processes.

1) This dissertation is interdisciplinary

Maldonado-Torres explicates that decolonial research should establish new spaces that exceed the boundaries of humanities and social sciences, in order to accommodate the mandatory experimentation required in fields such as Women's and Gender studies ("Decolonial Turn" 2). While this dissertation is departmentalised in English Studies, it refers to methods from other disciplines (such creative arts, anthropology and cultural studies) and is symptomatically interdisciplinary. The research methodology is propounded through the metaphor of *bricolage*, which is currently used by scholars who are disinclined to objectivist research praxis. In "Describing the Bricolage: Conceptualizing a New Rigor in Qualitative Research", Kincheloe postulates that a research *bricoleur* tactfully employs a number of methods from divergent schools of thought to weave together a syncretic contribution to knowledge (679-92). Contextualised in anti-colonial discourse, research *bricolage* has the capacity to enunciate a diverse set of meanings and discover academic paths to marginalised epistemologies. The next chapter will elaborate on the use of *bricolage* as a research design for this dissertation.

2) Parts of this dissertation subvert the objective language prevalent in traditional, abstract academic writing

The next chapter will elaborate how elements of this dissertation utilise creative and spiritual forms of writing. I bear in mind Shahjahan's criticism of decolonial theorists whose refusal to 'walk the talk' comes down to a disjuncture between theory and practice:

> It is ironic that many of these scholars are talking about equity and social justice issues especially in the context of knowledge production, yet the texts they produce can be quite exclusive to a certain readership. (230)

Having said that, I am still obligated to institutional demands that restrict total experimentation. However, I have attempted to argue the necessity of my alternative methodological choices in chapter four. Inserting a reflexive chapter in which I have implicated myself, allows me implicitly to critique critical analysis itself. I concur with Shahjahan that the separation of the personal/spiritual from the social/secular presumes that "these are two different domains of transformation" (233). I do not profess that both domains have seamlessly converged in this dissertation, seeing as the genre of academic writing mandates critical analysis. Instead, I have tried to undertake critical analysis from a decolonial standpoint, with moments of disavowal in which I privilege reflexive etiquette. Acts of digression will unsettle the colonial conception of knowledge in which subjectivity, objectivity and methodology are systematically congruent. Nfah-Abbenyi advocates for the reclamation of the personal in academic research practice. She suggests that writing in the first person distances the writer from the subject/object dichotomy which is given prominence in scholarly writing (263). Although this dissertation is not entirely written in the subjective voice, there are numerous instances of subversion of the objective academic voice.

3) This dissertation aspires to contribute to decolonial resistance

Focusing on the problematic character of institutional knowledge, this study recognises the need for ontologies of the indigenous, colonised and marginalised masses in South Africa (Almeida and Kumalo 11). Le Grange contends that the exclusion of IK in educational practice "leaves unchallenged space for the (re)colonisation of knowledges and cultures in local environments and contexts" (6). Nevertheless, IK inquiry within academic (colonial) contexts runs the risk of reducing indigenous bodies and culture to consumable data that is controlled and distorted by whiteness, thus, re-inscribing indigeneity as 'otherness' (Almeida and Kumalo 3- 7).

This dissertation steers towards decoloniality's epistemic, spiritual and revolutionary turn, in which the colonised becomes the thinker, creator, and activist (Maldonado-Torres "Ten Theses" 25-28). Decolonial theory mitigates exploitative research practice, historically associated with anthropological accounts of indigenous cultures, and is therefore the preferred theoretical departure for indigenous research.

2.4. Concluding remarks

This research uses an *indigenous language of critique* as an overarching approach that entails the application of decolonial thinking to questions of indigenous people, knowledge and epistemology. In providing contemporary understandings of IK and indigeneity that account for the Indian diaspora of South Africa, I have explored leading concerns of IK scholarship that promote and imply the need for decolonisation. Reviewing arguments against the use of post-colonial theory as a conceptual framework for IK research, I deduce that decolonial theory is the preferred theoretical foundation by IK scholars. After assessing the trajectory of decolonial thought, I suggest that feminist decolonial theory, as articulated by Lugones and Nfah-Abbenyi, is necessary for the reading of Simon's poetry, and for discovering indigenous theories thereof. In this chapter I have outlined characteristics of decoloniality, which have shaped my thinking in preparation for a research design that extends its decolonising theoretical concerns.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The previous chapter established how a decolonial theoretical framework sets the grounds for a decolonising research methodology. I employ the term 'decolonising' in order to suggest an ongoing attempt to enact decolonial praxis while conducting academic research. Smith clarifies that decolonising methodology does not entail the complete rejection of academic writing; rather it is applied to ensure a reflexive research practice that recognises the "diverse ways of disseminating knowledge" (15). Thus, qualitative inquiry must be executed critically. In the case of an *indigenous language of critique,* critical analysis is used as a means of supporting indigenous research by unsettling dominant research practices and its colonial associations (Kincheloe and McLaren 306). Historically, qualitative research espoused objectivist approaches that influenced researchers to interpret the behaviour of their 'subjects' according to predetermined theory, reinforcing "the positivist tradition of complicity with colonialism, and the global politics of White, patriarchal, capitalism" (Denzin 9). Conversely, critical qualitative inquiry involves the use of diverse methods to deeply introspect "routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin and Lincoln 3). By focusing on methods as integral mobilisations of theoretical frameworks, rather than for their data validation capabilities, I aim to open up a creative space for knowledge-making (Botha 35).

The present chapter attends to the specific methods of data collection and analysis in this thesis. It begins by describing the overall research design as a *bricolage*, of which I am the *bricoleur,* patching together various methods from various schools of thought. I will show how the concept of a research *bricolage* allows me to engage with data in two ways: reflexively and analytically. A creative, reflexive engagement with research data is presented in chapter four: "Interviews with Francine Simon: A Reflexive Montage", while a critical and analytical engagement with the data is delivered in chapter five: "Reading selected Poems from *Thungachi*: Analysis and Findings." Accordingly, I have conceptualised two varying methodologies for chapters four and five, which will be discussed in separate sections. Prior to this, I

will outline the use of mixed qualitative methods as tools for data collection. The collected research data includes interviews, observation, autoethnography, archival materials and Simon's poetry, all of which will be explained in detail. I will then outline the writing and presentation methods employed in chapter four, encompassing post-qualitative data representation. This section extrapolates that while the research design is not post-qualitative in its entirety, it draws on characteristics of post-qualitative *writing strategies* in chapter four. Lastly I explain the use of critical analysis, defined by *indigenous language of critique,* in providing an examination of selected poems from *Thungachi* in chapter five. The interdisciplinary nature of this research will become clear, along with the necessity of research *bricolage* in combining different methods and writing styles in a single academic dissertation. Following decolonising and indigenising principles, this dissertation "works at the centers and margins of intersecting disciplines" and allows the me to inquire into a "hybrid reality" (Denzin 10).

3.1. *Bricolage*

Bricolage, a French term, was first applied in theory by Levi-Strauss to describe the ways in which "mythological thought creates meaning and "fixes" myths by replacing missing or forgotten elements with residual components" (Altglas 2). Altglas uses this methodology of *bricolage* to investigate the sociology of religion and posits that modern religious societies have created contemporary, culturally hybrid belief systems through the process of *bricolage*. While my thesis does not explicitly examine SAI culture as *bricolage*, it acknowledges its hybrid nature and the fusion of various cultures that inform it. Smith argues that indigenous research methodologies should be a convergence of existing (Western) methodologies and decolonised research practices (143). Therefore, regarding myself as a research *bricoleur* does not mean I have freedom beyond the constraints of academia. Similarly, Altglas explains that cultural *bricoleurs* face limitations when it comes to addressing discontinuities or gaps of their particular culture, by including aspects of other cultures to fulfil the desired function:

> Finally, bricolage is not free in the traditional societies to which it was originally applied. In African and South American syncretisms, the introduction of new resources in religious life was linked to colonial

> contexts. Power relations and cultural domination generated hierarchies in values and meanings which, in turn, affected the making of bricolage. (6)

Altglas identifies the asymmetrical nature of *bricolage* by suggesting that a researcher can only make do with the resources afforded to them: thus ideologies from differing cultures are not included in equal weight. Kincheloe sees advantage in these attributes and applies the notion of *bricolage* to research methodology to add rigor to qualitative research. He proposes that research *bricolage* is inherently interdisciplinary. The academy rests on the categorisation of disciplines, distinguishing one school of thought from the next, each containing prescribed sets of restricted discursive and methodological approaches to research. Such categorisation resonates with Cartesian dualism; separating the knower from the known; seeking only practices of validation and ignoring the heterogeneity of human experience (Kincheloe "Bricolage" 681). Conversely, research *bricolage* subverts reductionist versions of academic research that removes discourse from power relations, and as a methodology, serves the interest of decolonisation (Kumar 135). Kincheloe asserts:

> To be well prepared, bricoleurs must realize that knowledge is always in process, developing, culturally specific, and power-inscribed. They are attuned to dynamic relationships connecting individuals, their contexts, and their activities instead of focusing on these separate entities in isolation from one another. ("Bricolage" 689)

To meet the complex requirements of *bricolage*, I have chosen a methodological design that operates as an implementation and extension of the decolonising, indigenising theoretical framework. Secondly I refer to an assortment of qualitative methods used for data collection, and post-qualitative writing methods used for data presentation in chapter four. As explanations of specific methods are offered in the rest of this chapter, I will draw comparisons between my selection and the conceptualisation of research *bricolage.*

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Selecting Poetry from *Thungachi*

This dissertation makes reference to selected poems from *Thungachi.* There were two selection processes involved: the first pertained to which poems to discuss in the

interviews and the second pertained to the five poems analysed in chapter five. *Thungachi* consists of thirty poems, each of which explores various strands of SAI experience from a woman's perspective. While all the poems contain evidence of local, cultural knowledge and experience, I highlighted those that portrayed one or more of the IK characteristics mentioned in chapter two. Specifically, these are poems that showed evidence of genealogical, empirical, spiritual, oral and experiential knowledge (Gone 4). I was able to make associations between IK themes and the poems, given my own lived experiences, and through guidance from IK scholarly texts. I commenced the interviews with notes on hand but did not cover all the poems prepared for, and allowed the flow of the conversation to determine which poems to focus on. Further details are explained in the following section, outlining the texture of the semi-structured interviews. During the interviews, Simon and I discussed twelve poems from the collection, which are included in chapter four. In order of appearance in chapter four, the poems discussed in the interviews were: "Betel-Nut", "Rombu Unbu", "Pp", "Dholl", "Tamil Familiars", "Tea", "Rati", "Kreuzigen", "Vetala-pachisi", "Nanni-Ma", "Late" and "Naming Places". The poems are deliberately scanned as images in chapter four, instead of retyped, to maintain the integrity of their visual appearance as a distinct attribute of Simon's authorship. Moreover, the organisation of poems in *Thungachi* brings to mind the notion of the 'palimpsest'. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe the palimpsest, which denotes the overwriting of inscriptions upon paper where old writing has been erased, as a metaphor for culture:

> . . . the term has become particularly valuable for suggesting the ways in which the traces of earlier 'inscriptions' remain as a continual feature of the 'text' of culture, giving it its particular density and character. (190)

The strategic placement of poems on antique-cream, lightweight paper in the book gives the impression of a palimpsest. For instance, "Tamil Familiars" reveals the faint print of "Tea" which is located on the next page, thus the poems are visually and metaphorically connected. The palimpsest effect will be discussed in chapter five, in relation to the opening and closing poems of the collection — "Naming Places" and "Betel-Nut".

Combined with the interviews, the poems discussed in chapter four display Simon's preoccupation with tracing her ancestry, orality, animism, Hindu mythology, Catholic

religion, diaspora, sexuality and above all, femaleness and the pressures of gendered identities in the SAI community. Using IK characteristics and existing research as guidelines, as well the interview responses as supporting evidence, I chose a total of five poems to analyse in chapter five, namely: "Naming Places", "Tamil Familiars", "Rati", "Nanni-Ma" and "Betel-Nut". These poems exemplify the predominant themes of the entire collection, while inviting further introspection into IK and associated ontologies.

Interviews with Francine Simon

In addition to the selection of poems, I conducted two in-depth, *semi-structured* interviews with Simon and one brief, introductory Skype interview. All three interviews were audio-recorded as per Simon's consent. Audio-taping interviews is deemed to be a universally accepted practice in ethnographic research as it prevents persistent disruptions and tends to be "infinitely more reliable than memory" (Davies 114). The Skype call took place on 25 April 2018, after I received an ethical clearance certificate permitting me to commence my interviews with Simon. This call occurred between our informal introductory meeting and our personal interviews in Durban. The Skype interview was used as preparation for the personal interviews: to explain my methodological choices to Simon, work out the logistics of our in-depth, semi-structured interviews in Durban, and notify her of my ethical commitments as a researcher by emphasising the details on the consent form (a copy is found in the appendices). The call is transcribed but is not quoted in the dissertation, given its largely pragmatic and preliminary nature. The dissertation refers to excerpts from the personal interviews, which took place on 25 June and 27 June 2018.

The consent form stipulates Simon's liberty to withdraw from the research at any point, her right to confidentiality for any parts of the interview that she does not want publicised, and her right to request transcripts, audio files, observational notes, and photographs to approve what is used in the final dissertation. The form covers requests for her permission to be photographed, audio-recorded, and observed during the interview and in any public poetry performances or events. It stipulates the restriction of access to edited transcriptions and audio files: to Simon herself, the researcher, the research supervisors, and the relevant examination committee. During

our interviews, Simon verified which parts of the interview she would like to be kept confidential. These sections are excluded from the transcripts and audio files and are not used in the dissertation. The transcripts of the three interviews and their respective audio files are to be preserved by the Wits Institution Repository and Data Store, upon completion of the final dissertation. During the research process, all data was stored on a password protected hard drive that was kept in a locked cupboard at the researcher's residence. For added measures, the data was also stored in a password protected Google Drive folder.

The interview is the most widely used method of inquiry in social research (Davies 94). As a qualitative research method, the interview presumes that conversation is the primary means of human communication and dialogue (Brinkmann 6). The job of the *bricoleur* then, is to look beyond the interview as a venue for meaning and produce multidimensional knowledge that "make a variety of previously repressed features of the social world visible" (Kincheloe "Rigour in Research" 20). Coupling interviews with the poet with an indigenous analysis of her poetry takes this research into the interdisciplinary spectrum by bringing together literary analysis and social science. In light of indigenous traditions it is important to note that by probing a research participant to tell their own stories, and deliver the past through spoken word, the interview pays homage to oral history (Rapport 14). Structured interviews are associated with survey research, in which the interviewee has limited agency. Conversely, the semi-structured interview makes use of open-ended questions or thematic cues that evoke further conversation and curiosity, paralleling the dialogical and fluid quality of conversation (Rapport 8). Thus, I chose to execute a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Simon. Kvale defines the semi-structured interview as "an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (5-6).

In preparation for the in-depth interviews, I devised a set of general questions for Simon, focusing on her upbringing, education and personal and academic interests, to cue a variety of narratives, descriptions and experiences (Brinkmann 22). As mentioned earlier, I had prepared questions on poems as guidelines but allowed the conversational nature of the interview to determine which poems to focus on. In

effect, Simon and I linked themes in our conversation about a particular poem to other poems in the collection. The illusion of the researcher's ability to construct coherent themes is challenged by the multiple perspectives, contradictions and incoherence within interview dialogue (Brinkmann 24). Consequently, Simon's responses incited textured conversations, spontaneous follow-up questions and the continuous shifting of dynamics between us. This research treats the interview structure as a spectrum ranging from the highly structured to unstructured (Rapport 56). In order for un/semi-structured interviews to be conducted, a conscientious and reflexive ethnographer will aim to form relationships with the research participants, in order to share insight, experience and to develop the prospect of future relations, before entering the interview setting (Davies 94). Simon and I are SAI women, raised with comparable cultural ideologies, giving me the insider/outsider dynamic as mentioned in the introduction. There are non-exploitative power relations between us (Davies 108). More importantly, Simon is regarded as an expert whose academic qualifications are higher than my own.

Kvale claims that the interview is not an equal partnership due to the researcher exerting all the control (6). While I cannot claim equal partnership due to the intention of analysing and critiquing Simon and her poetry, I have tried to make the interview participatory on all levels. Along with the semi-structured approach, I asked Simon to choose the location of our interviews according to her preference. On both interview days, I fetched her from her parents' house in Durban North, and followed her directions to nearby cafes or restaurants. I had never been to any of the venues prior to the interview and as a researcher, could not predict possible disruptions from the chosen locations. I prioritised Simon's comfort over certain practicalities; for instance, transcribing the audio recordings was made a more difficult task due to background noise. However, the settings compensated in other positive ways by allowing conversation to flow more easily in social spaces that provoked the senses by offering a range of visual, audible and olfactory stimuli.

In addition to the interview recordings, I made observational notes during my time with Simon. Unlike ethnographic participant observations, which to anthropologists have become "virtually a rite of passage" in gaining 'insider' status in a community (Davies 68), I have relied on observation for descriptive and emotive purposes, with

no need of gaining such status. Any original data collected for this research is not used to implement a behavioural analysis of Simon; rather, it is used as creative material for developing a decolonising research practice and "to stimulate reflections about the situation in which they were produced" (Botha 54). For the same reason, photography was used frugally. I photographed the interview locations and parts of the neighbourhood Simon grew up in. I took photographs of Simon at each interview venue, always asking her permission beforehand. The photographs were intended to stimulate memory when writing the reflections on the interviews and are not included in the dissertation.

At this point I must discuss the process of transcribing the interviews. I initially intended to transcribe all the interviews verbatim to make conjectures about Simon's spoken language, nuances in the tone of her voice, sentence structure, pauses and intonation (Charmaz 35). I therefore began by transcribing the first in-depth interview in great detail, paying close attention to repetitions, exclamations, hums, accent and shifts in dialect. The immensely time-consuming nature of this approach led me to question whether or not it revealed anything about Simon that was not already spoken about or expressed through in her own writing. I came to the conclusion that transcribing a sample in detail allowed me to derive enough connotations about the nature of Simon's speech. I then proceeded to transcribe the audio recordings by leaving out phonological detail such as repetitions, pauses, excessive use of "like", all of which translate to a text filled with grammatical errors. Therefore, I switched to editing the spoken word into more coherent prose (Montgomery 147). In doing so, I applied this method to both Simon's and my own responses. I did not transcribe parts of the interviews that were purely social conversations and not of utmost relevance to the topic of my dissertation. As will be exemplified in the next chapter, Simon and I often slipped in and out of friendly conversation. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, I did not transcribe any parts of the interviews deemed confidential by Simon. By focusing on Simon's general background and upbringing, academic status, political stances, her poetic processes, and her hardships and accomplishments as a SAI woman poet, I have compiled approximately one hundred pages of transcriptions. Given that my research does not focus solely on the interviews as a source of knowledge, I have referenced only selected excerpts of the interviews in chapters four and five. The transcription process urged me to decide which parts of the interviews

to focus on as valuable and necessary to the research topic at hand; thus the selection of excerpts was informed and deliberate (Davies 115).

There is no dispute that different methods of transcription confer varied sets of meanings. Reinvigorating my status as *bricoleur,* I turned to other methods of representation and inquiry, to open the interview text to a wider range of interpretation, resisting positivist research assumptions that texts can be evaluated in isolation of the discourse from which they are produced. However, in order to exemplify how the original interview conversations flowed, I have provided two samples of interview transcriptions in the appendices. Sample one adheres to the inclusion of phonological detail whilst sample two adopts the edited style, whereby grammar is slightly altered. The samples are provided merely as reference material seeing that this research focuses on presenting the interview data in innovative, post-qualitative ways.

The Material Archive

Spivak describes the task of her research in India as "to investigate, identify, and measure the *specific* nature and degree of deviation of [the] elements [constituting dominant indigenous groups at the regional and local levels] from the ideal and situate it historically" ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 80). This research intends to read Simon's poetry in its local context along with the virtues of its ancestral lineage in order to trace and uncover the extent of IK it contains. Consulting the archives leads to a genealogical approach to poetry reading — an approach that reads history from the context of ancestry. In KwaZulu-Natal the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre and its web facilities offer an extensive archive of SAI history, including ship lists, indenture registers and certificates, newspaper clippings, advertisements, posters, reports and notices from the British controlled Immigration Department, photographs and transcriptions of community speeches and interviews that range from the period of indenture to post-apartheid. I have therefore made use of selected available materials in chapter four. While these materials assist in a genealogical reading of Simon's poetry, they also make visible a number of gaps in history. It is necessary to consider the available material associated with the colonial act of indenture, in order to critique the Westernisation of history itself (Akena 600). The introduction indicated

my interest in oral narratives as a form of history that should both supplement the material archive and expose its discrepancies with civilian narratives. Kumar and Tiwari postulate the importance of combining historic documents with multimodal forms of history, such as songs, proverbs, stories and rituals (22). They write:

> Conventional historiography considers written and archival documents as the most reliable and authentic historical evidences. . . . Oral traditions, transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth, and retained and relayed through individual and collective memory, embody truth of a different kind. Encompassing lived experiences of common people and "common voices", oral traditions can be an equally valuable source of reconstructing and reinterpreting the past. (21)

Desai and Vahed concur that the narratives of indentured labourers went largely undocumented, inciting a one-dimensional historical depiction of their lives (*III* 2). I borrow from their approach of "trawling the 'official' archives" while paying attention to neglected sources, which in this case is Simon's poetry and her oral accounts in the interviews. I also draw on David's theory of the 'living archives' as individuals who store and process oral memories (78-80). In chapter five, I argue that Simon's poetry is an example of when "a 'living archive' is co-opted into a material archive" thus inciting its transformation from individual to collective memory (80). The interview transcriptions demonstrate a similar dynamic — a written capturing of 'living archives' — that portrays and negotiates orality. The following section will explain how selected archival sources will be both juxtaposed and put into dialogue with interview excerpts and scanned images of Simon's poetry. The purpose of the juxtaposition is to unsettle the hegemonic role of the material archive and supplement it with narrations of lived experience, so that history can be rethought. As research *bricoleur* this data collection approach allows me to "work to account for historical and social contingencies that always operate to undermine the universal pronouncement of the meaning of a particular phenomenon" (Kincheloe "Rigour in Research" 5).

3.3. 'Writing as Inquiry' in Chapter Four

This section describes the specific writing and data presentation methods used in chapter four, "Interviews with Francine Simon: A Reflexive Montage." Aspects of post-qualitative inquiry influence the methodological writing strategies used in

chapter four. In "Post Qualitative Inquiry in an Ontology of Immanence", St. Pierre situates post-qualitative inquiry in 'an ontology of immanence' which rests upon the grounds of philosophy, history and social science. According to her, post-qualitative inquiry is a methodology-free form of research inquiry that theorises through writing, in order to produce highly informed research that transcends empiricism (1-14). Conventional qualitative research methods are condemned for following safe trajectories whereby "possible experience is always limited by what *is* so that, in effect, everything is already given, even the possible" (3). Invented by St. Pierre, post-qualitative inquiry is strongly influenced by the works of post-structural theorists such as Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari and Foucault (1-14). Inspired by their philosophies, St. Pierre finds it necessary to abandon data that depends on a speaking subject, restating Derrida's contention that "meaning cannot be closed off and contained in language, that meaning always escapes" ("Writing Post Qualitative Inquiry" 1). Consequently, writing is perceived as inquiry in its own right, acclaimed for its potential to "invent and reinvent the world" (6). St. Pierre further posits that there is no prescriptive research design or methodology with which to conduct post-qualitative inquiry; this prevents repetitive knowledge creation by innovating new methods of inquiry for each new research undertaking (2). My research study does not identify as post-qualitative inquiry given its use of qualitative research methods. However, it draws upon the notion of 'writing as inquiry' to present the interview data in chapter four.

Gerrard, Rudolph an Sriprakash argue that the glorification of the 'new' in post-qualitative inquiry decentres the human to the point of risking "closure and erasure: closed-off from the worlds and people being researched, whose histories and voices are obfuscated, displaced, and, at worst, erased", subsequently reviving the colonial logic of desiring and discovering new territories (393). Moreover, projects of decolonisation and indigenisation require strong attention to the past and to untold narratives that afford a sense of continuity to the lives of previously colonised populations (Greene 754). Chapter four resists notions of 'decentring the human', for such acts rest on the assumption that all humans were central in creating the global, ideological structures that determine life — a view that does not account for the marginalised. Instead, chapter four wishes to centralise SAI consciousness with its indigenous propensities; and in doing so to demystify cultural ideologies that have

been severely abstracted or muted during the periods of colonisation, indenture and apartheid. Accounting for arguments that problematise post-qualitative inquiry, I refer to the specific strategies of non-representational methodology, which combine elements of qualitative data collection with post-qualitative writing techniques. Vannini asserts that non-representational research encompasses a range of methods directed at making research performative through the novel expression of data. It aims to "enliven rather than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate, to rupture and reimagine rather than to faithfully describe" (15). These characteristics appear to work in the interests of both IK and poetic practice. Manning further discusses the intricacies of non-representational methodology:

> It not only touches on the question of how art itself activates and constitutes new forms of knowledge *in its own right* but also, perhaps most importantly, incites us to inquire into the very question of how practices produce knowledge, and whether those forms of knowledge can engagingly be captured within the strictures of methodological ordering. (52)

Similarly, research *bricoleurs* question the nature facts, their function in the world and the processes that define them. Dealing with alternative and marginalised histories, where oral renditions of the past are incongruous with its documented versions, echoes the concerns of decolonial theorists concerning how knowledge is validated and how differing ontological perspectives inform knowledge creation. Kincheloe makes vital conjectures regarding the task of a research *bricoleur*:

> Bricoleurs understand the multiple ways that a fact may be defined. They understand that it can be viewed from many perspectives that grant it not only diverse meanings but also different ontological statuses. . . . In this context a bricoleur can project what alternative facts could have been produced given the reality of different contexts, discourses, and power relationships in the knowledge-production process. ("Rigour in Research" 7-8)

Assembling this dissertation required a shifting of voices between the theoretically driven academic voice and the emotionally driven personal voice, to reveal the tensions between Western and indigenous ways of knowing. While chapter four encapsulates the creative voice, the rest of the dissertation adopts a formal and critical tone. The reader is therefore able to distinguish how different voices and methodological approaches produce varied perspectives on the same subject. To that

end, I outline a number of writing techniques used in chapter four that help to blend artistry with found data, whilst bearing in mind elements of IK.

Storytelling Techniques: From Creative Non-Fiction to Screenplay

Smith suggests that storytelling is an essential practice of indigenous culture and that continuation of storytelling allows the persistent connecting of the past with the future (145). When I began writing chapter four I had a wealth of interview transcripts, Simon's poetry, fragments of archival material, personal memories, and the desire to make them talk to each other. I leaned on creative journalism in the venture to write the interview as a profile piece. It was Wolfe who wrote:

> . . . it was possible in non-fiction, in journalism, to use any literary device, from the traditional dialogisms of the essay to stream-of-consciousness, and to use many different kinds simultaneously, or within a relatively short space . . . to excite the reader both intellectually and emotionally. (28)

In addressing the discrepancies between oral narratives and mainstream representations of SAI culture, I made use of performative writing techniques to illustrate that storytelling and truth are not independent categories; their forms appear to make one seem more factual than the next. Writing in creative prose, although infiltrated with descriptive style, was not enough to bring a coherent order to the multiple narratives articulated in the interviews. Simon's responses and the themes within the poems refused chronology. Referring to the aesthetics of research *bricolage*, I made use of Denzin and Lincoln's conceptualisation of the use of montage in research. 'Montage' is a term generally used in filmmaking to describe the editing process, which involves the juxtaposition of single images or frames, overlapping or blending into each other, resulting in an entirely new composition (4). *Bricoleurs* use montage to create dialogical texts that constantly shift from the personal to the political (5). Using the montage explicitly as a writing device, I have employed screenplay-writing methods in the construction of chapter four. Although there is no intention of turning chapter four into a film, the unapologetic use of montage in screenplay to depict multiple scenarios, locations and time periods in a singular text makes it a resourceful tool for this research. Price describes the screenplay as a modular text that is "neither a blueprint, at one end of the scale, nor

'literature in flux' at the other" (236). In arranging the research data, I draw on only a few elements of the screenplay in chapter four, namely: the slug line, action/description, character dialogue and of course, montage (Moura "Screenplay Formatting"). Below is an excerpt from chapter four, which demonstrates the screenplay elements used.

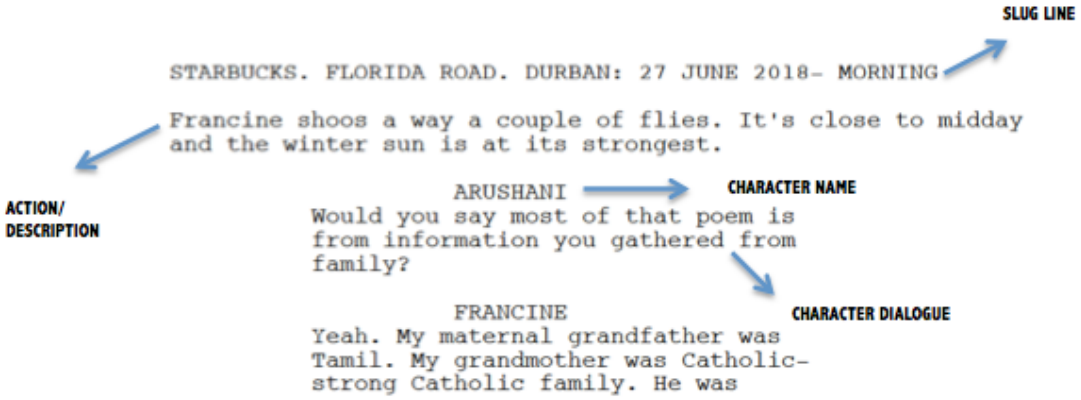


Fig. 1. Screenplay excerpt from chapter four

The 'slug line' is used to state the location and time of a given scene. Generally this is accompanied by specifying whether the location is 'interior' or 'exterior', but since this is a practicality for shooting purposes, I have omitted specifying this. Following the slug line is the 'action' and 'description' paragraph, which describes the setting of the scene and the activity of the character/s in present tense (Moura). Afterwards the dialogue between characters is inserted. A new slug line indicates the beginning of a new scene, or the return to a previous scene, creating the montage effect of moving back and forth between settings and time frames.

I depart from the rules of screenplay in several ways by combining it with novel literary devices and autoethnographic inserts. I do not include any technical information usually present in a screenplay: scene numbers, camera angles and transitions (Moura). Although I describe the interview vignettes in present tense, I do not maintain a singular tense throughout. I shift to past tense when reflecting on memories, which are contextualised within the present tense of the scene setting: the interview, which has already come to pass. Moreover, the

scenes jump between various moments in the interview achronologically, as well as to historical moments. Each 'scene' reflects a date and/or location, even if the 'scene' is a poem and the location is *Thungachi*. The same applies to Internet sources, archival documents and newspaper clippings.

In effect, this transformed screenplay text initiates a diffractive reading of interview data. Conceptualised by Karen Barad, the term 'diffractive' has inspired post-qualitative researchers to read data through theory and vice versa, such that space and time are not construed as fixed phenomenon that exist outside of matter (Kuby and Christ 3). I do not explicitly mobilise Barad's conception of *spacetimemattering* when presenting the interview data: rather, I draw on inspiration from Jackson and Mazzei's proposition. They postulate that research can be executed diffractively, as opposed to being ordered and coded thematically, if one peruses data whilst thinking about theory. Texts can be thought of as machines, that when 'plugged in' to each other, disrupt and transform the meanings of other texts. Consequently, texts constitute one another and form a new text or assemblage (261-71). I have plugged the interviews with Simon into the screenplay format, proceeding to plug in; the poems as text-images, historical anecdotes, visual media, and autoethnographical reflections. The interaction and shifts between extracts from the material archive and co-opted 'living archives' depicts a recognition that history itself is constructed and pliable, as opposed to being naturalised and objective. In the words of Spivak, "at work here is the idea that history is always sedimented in the present — that it is always contemporary" ("IKS and Globalisation" 39). Each text confers meaning on the texts that surround it so that the interview data and the poetry are not explicitly viewed through one theoretically and thematically bound lens, but are interpreted via other texts. These approaches follow the trajectory of research *bricolage* as Kincheloe states:

> Bricoleurs move from convergent to divergent forms of meaning-making, abandoning the short-sightedness of pre-specified, correct patterns of analysis in favour of more holistic, inclusive, and eclectic models. ("Rigour in Research" 21)

I have so far discussed the various writing styles and forms implemented in chapter four, with the exception of autoethnography. Denzin and Lincoln believe that autoethnographical texts independently make use of montage by shifting not only between the personal and theoretical, but also from "the local to the historical and the cultural" (5). In chapter four, I use autoethnography to deepen the layers of reflexivity (Botha 65) by explicitly situating myself within the text and acknowledging my status an insider/outsider. Kumar extrapolates that decolonising methodology, with specific reference to autoethnographic strategies of marginalised groups, allows one to "move beyond a static opposition to colonization that often reinscribes the colonizer and the colonized" and to "start with a dynamically tense position as a betweener, being between and both colonizer and colonized" (135). Implicating myself in the text makes further revelations about the discourse surrounding the text. The use of screenplay format and creative non-fiction techniques suggests the extent to which the interview is performative (Svašek and Domecka 107). My reflections on the interview process serve as recognition of the extent to which the interview process is subjective, filtered and portrayed through perspectives (Rapport 57). Inserting and removing myself from the text visually depicts my insider/outsider dynamic (Smith 137).

The writing styles mentioned above culminate in chapter four, in which writing is used both as a method of presentation and reflexive analysis (Botha 54). Data is not treated as objective material existing outside of the discursive contexts that inform it, but as material that can be experimented with. Maclure problematises deeply prescriptive coding practices in qualitative research. She advises that, if treated differently, data is subject to metamorphosis, eliciting new connections and generating knowledge (229). I have thus far demonstrated my attempt to write my research data as a form of inquiry influenced by non-representational methods and post-qualitative approaches. Chapter four takes an alternative and experimental perspective on explorations in poetry. Expanding the interdisciplinary horizons of this research *bricolage*, I include a formal analysis chapter as a complementary critique of Simon's poetry.

3.4. Towards an *Indigenous Language of Critique* in Chapter Five

Keeping in line with the overall *indigenous language of critique*, performed in this study, chapter five analyses Simon's poetry from an indigenous perspective. Each poem is evaluated in association with its dominant indigenous theme or IK characteristic. "Naming Places" is explored against the politics of names and the significance of naming to indigenous communities. "Tamil Familiars" is read in conjunction with themes of oral narratives, women as custodians of IK, and animism. Mythology and femaleness are explored as the dominant themes in "Rati". The analysis of "Nanni-Ma" refers to Lorde's conception of 'the erotic' in relation to non-duality as an indigenous ontology ("Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power"). The use of SAI dialect and association with IK is considered as the central theme in "Betel-Nut".

The analysis will also pay attention to formal elements of the poems in so far as it contributes to or reinforces the *indigenous language of critique*. I execute a critical analysis of Simon's poetry, bearing in mind these particular questions: How does Simon (re)write SAI history? What do the ontological implications of her poetry suggest about SAI consciousness? How do themes of orality, genealogy, landscape, language and naming infiltrate her poetry? To what degree is Simon's poetry locally specific? How does IK intersect with themes of femaleness? I also examine whether it is necessary for Simon to be an IK holder and/or IK practitioner in order to produce poetry that embodies indigenous ontologies. In addition to addressing the above questions, chapter five refers to interview excerpts to reinforce thematic discussions on each poem. By doing so, the chapter explores how Simon has come to acquire IK and how she applies it to her poetry. In the interviews, Simon described her writing process as one that combines structure, research, and organisation as well as instinct and sensory perception. Her thesis makes a case for her experimental writing techniques as working within, and exceeding the barriers of, the 'language poetry' genre. 'Language poetry' involves linguistic experimentalism, often expressed through unconventional use of space on the page, engagement with taboo subjects, and subverting the presumption of an individual speaker behind the text ("EWP" 59). Simon describes the craft of 'language poets':

> Language poets often advocated an aleatory conceptual writing which recycled the linguistic detritus of many cultural forms, and disrupted poetic conventions of coherent, original 'selfhood' . . . often there were poems that accentuate jarring, dislocated registers that refused to be reconciled into 'meaning'; or poems which resembled chunks of prose. . . . (59)

Simon's preoccupation with poetry as a discourse that questions the viability of language itself (59) echoes the concerns of theorists such as Lorde, Kristeva, Ramazani and Eagleton, who were mentioned earlier. Simon demonstrates a conscious effort to use language in her poetry in a way that revitalises and challenges language by transcending the signifier (Eagleton 68). The "multiple, shifting, and sometimes contradictory identities and subjectivities" (Nfah-Abbenyi 275) in Simon's poetry illustrate her use of form to connote the multiple aspects of her identity. Her intentional use of culture as a central topic is "a way of mediating lost family traditions and histories, and to place this in tension with the less evidently 'Indian' impulses of experimental form . . . along with the transgressive exploration of female embodiment" ("EWP" 29). It is evident that form and content are co-dependent expressions of meaning (Eagleton 72) implying the inclusion of formal analysis of Simon's poetry. Furthermore, evaluating 'poetry as discourse' pays homage to the *bricoleur's* task of acknowledging discourses that surround and produce a given text (Kincheloe "Rigour in Research" 19). In this case the discourse refers not merely to language but to the socio-political and cultural discourse from which Simon's poetry emerges.

3.5. Concluding Remarks

The above chapter emphasises that the methodology I have used in writing this dissertation parallels and extends the theoretical concerns of this research. Drawing on a number of domains that employ qualitative research methods, I make use of the ethnographer's tools: interview and observation. I refer to cultural studies methods to execute a genealogical reading of SAI culture. In anthropological terms, I consider myself an 'insider' as well as an 'outsider' and thus produce autoethnographic inserts that reveal these tensions. Taking an historical approach, I make use of archival documentation to trace discrepancies between written and oral history. The collected

data — poetry from *Thungachi*, interviews with Simon and archival material – are used to formulate two methods of presentation: creative (chapter four) and critical (chapter five). I have outlined the differing methodology used for each of these two chapters. Chapter four promises to mobilise inspirations from post-qualitative and non-representational inquiry, focusing on the process of writing itself as a form of knowledge-creation. Chapter five utilises literary analysis strategies, framed by an *indigenous language of critique.* Thus, the dissertation not only accounts for new knowledge (content) but also new ways of knowing and inquiring (Gone 1). The research is patched together in the form of *bricolage,* which as Botha states, "is the one that ties to activity in the service of human flourishing" (68).

Chapter Four

Interviews with Francine Simon: A Reflexive Montage

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SOUTH BEACH, DURBAN: 16 NOVEMBER 1860

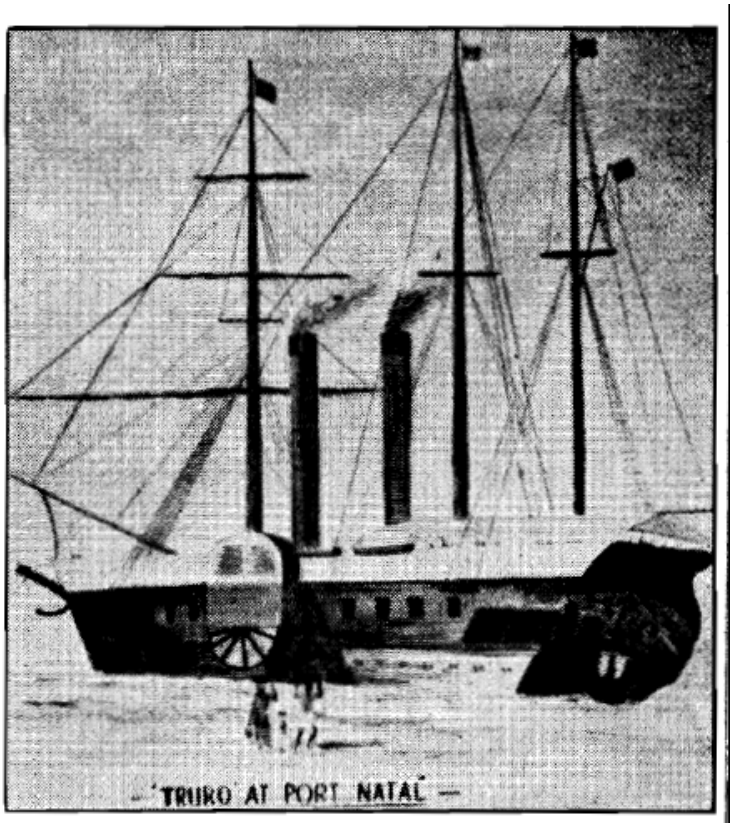


Fig. 2. Truro Arriving at Port Natal on 16 November 1860 from: Pather, S R. *Centenary of Indians, 1860-1960*. Durban: Cavalier Publishers, 1960. p.45.

The *Truro* ship arrives at Port Natal, carrying 341 Indian indentured labourers. On 22 November 1860, *Natal Mercury* publishes an article written by John Robinson, marking the event. The concluding paragraphs of the article titled, "The Coolies Here" read:

> A very remarkable scene was the landing of the first batch of Indian indentured labourers and one well worth remembrance and record. Most of the spectators who were present had been led to expect a lot of dried up, vapid and sleepy-looking anatomies. They were agreeably disappointed. As the swarthy hordes came pouring out of the boat's hold, laughing, jabbering, and staring about them with a very well satisfied expression of self-complacency on their faces, they hardly realised the idea one had formed regarding them or their faculties. They were a queer, comical, foreign looking, very Oriental-like crowd. The men with their huge muslin turbans, bare scraggy shin bones, and coloured

garments; the women with their flashing eyes, long disheveled pitchy hair, with their half covered, well-formed figures, and their keen inquisitive glances; the children with their meagre, intelligent, cute and humorous countenances mounted on bodies of unconscionable fragility, were all evidently beings of a different race and kind to any we have yet seen either in Africa or England. Master Coolie seemed to make himself perfectly at home, and was not in the least disconcerted by the novelty of his situation. He looked about him with considerable animation and very generally remarked that Natal was colder than Madras. . . . The boats seemed to disgorge an endless stream of living cargo. . . . It seems to be rather a heterogeneous assortment comprising a few of all calling, than a supply of labourers for the plantations.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

Two blue crutches lean against the wooden wall of a newly opened Starbucks. Coffee grinds on top of '90s Rhythm & Blues and the chatter of customers.

Francine Simon is perched on the window bench with her feet up. A leather jacket lies on the ledge. Beside it, a cup of ‘Pure Matcha’ cools down. Through the window, across the road, is St. Joseph's Catholic Church — the Church Francine went to as a child.

ARUSHANI
You were very hesitant when you started writing *Thungachi* — in that you needed a model, someone to aspire to or someone to show you an example of how to present your identity. In the end you sort of had to assemble different styles from other writers —

FRANCINE
Yeah.

ARUSHANI
Who had similarities to you but didn’t come from your background.

FRANCINE
No.

ARUSHANI
But why were you so resistant to be the first and accept that ‘there’s no one like me and I just have to be it.’ What was the fear?

FRANCINE
I think it's quite scary. You look out to such a vast world of writing and such a vast country and see absolutely no representation of yourself. That is really sad. I really hesitate to say I'm the first one. I'm really not sure if there was anyone else who came before me. If there is, I'd like to know. From my research, it's a no. I don't know about your research? Have you found anyone, an older writer that represents what we're discussing?

My pen pauses. I think about Agnes Sam’s collection *Jesus is Indian*. I think of Sam’s use of South African Indian dialect. But then I think about how Simon’s poetry resonates with my lived experiences in a way that no other literature or poetry has.

ARUSHANI
No. The closest thing I found was you.

FRANCINE
Isn't that sad. Not sad, isn't that scary?

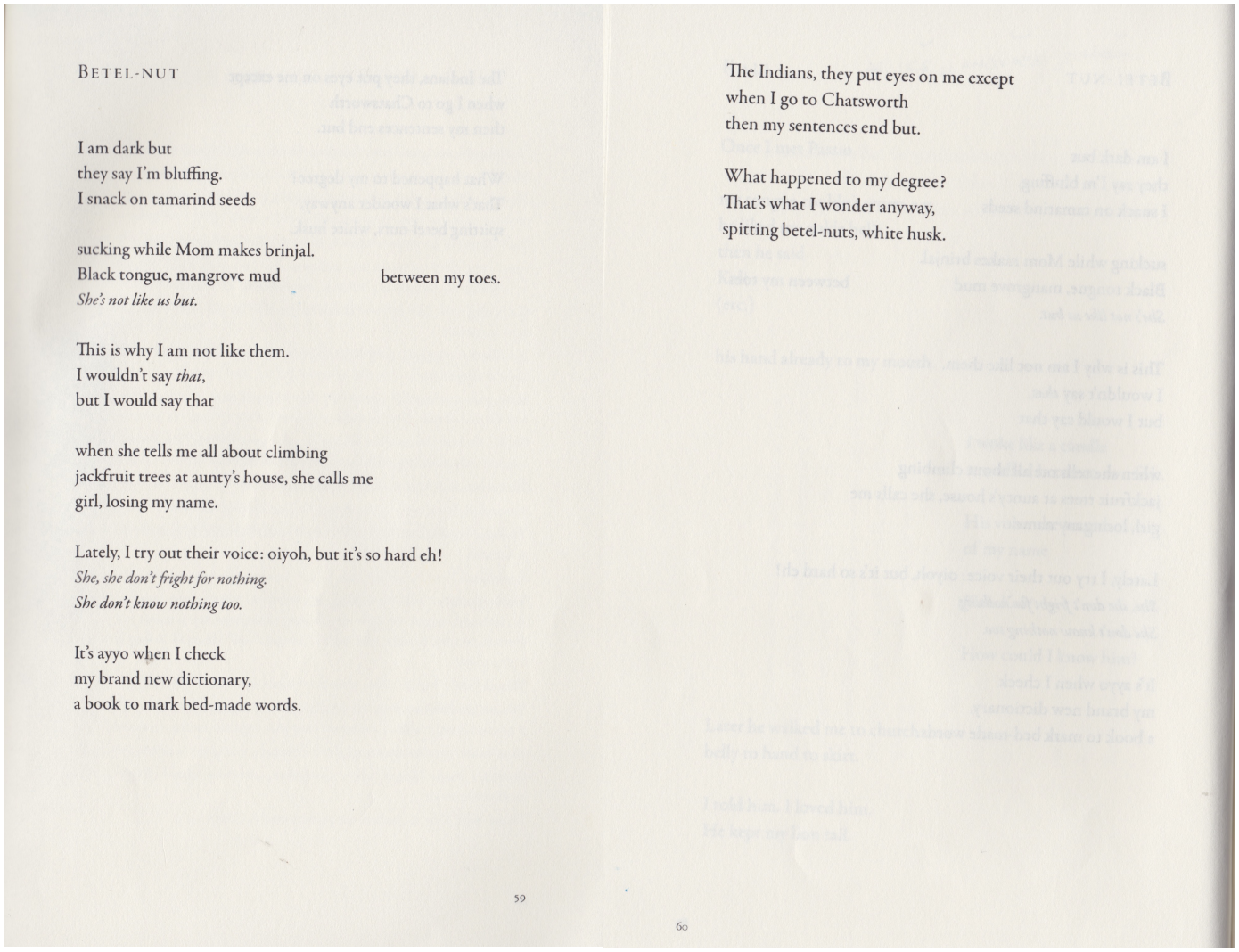
I hesitate. I am not sure if she is expecting a detailed answer, the kind she has always given me.

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG: SOME TIME IN OCTOBER 2016 — MORNING

I am sitting in the office of Phillippa Yaa De Villiers for a consultation regarding my poetry portfolio. I tell her about my dissatisfaction with the poems I wrote for her course and seek her advice on how to improve them. I do not tell her that I feel pretentious and disconnected when I write poetry — always trying to be an insider in someone else's reality. She seems to hear what I do not tell her and asks me if I heard about an upcoming Indian, woman poet who writes poems about Chatsworth. A fresh page darts out the printer. Phillippa hands it to me. I read the title. "Betel-Nut" by Francine Simon.

It takes me half a minute to read but longer to believe that poems about Chatsworth have made it to bookstore shelves.

"BETEL-NUT." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



BETEL-NUT

I am dark but
they say I'm bluffing.
I snack on tamarind seeds

sucking while Mom makes brinjal.
Black tongue, mangrove mud between my toes.
She's not like us but.

This is why I am not like them.
I wouldn't say *that*,
but I would say that

when she tells me all about climbing
jackfruit trees at aunty's house, she calls me
girl, losing my name.

Lately, I try out their voice: oiyoh, but it's so hard eh!
She, she don't fright for nothing.
She don't know nothing too.

It's ayyo when I check
my brand new dictionary,
a book to mark bed-made words.

59

The Indians, they put eyes on me except
when I go to Chatsworth
then my sentences end but.

What happened to my degree?
That's what I wonder anyway,
spitting betel-nuts, white husk.

60

Fig. 3. Scanned images of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Betel-Nut". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 59-60.

S43 PUB. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

Francine and I are at a restaurant-brewery and the aroma of coffee is replaced with the heavy smell of beer. It's a few hours before dusk and Francine intermittently sips a margarita. Rows of skylight windows gleam beside us. We are on the first floor of The Foundry building with a view of Durban's trending art precinct. In plain sight,

there is no ocean, no malls or palm trees, no Chatsworth. It is a setting that I am not accustomed to in Durban, yet there is something so comforting about the creative guise of the once industrial plot.

ARUSHANI
You talk about when you go to Chatsworth, your sentences end 'but', right. So that was a real thing? When you went to Chatsworth you would start talking, purposefully, incorrectly?

FRANCINE
When you say it like that...

ARUSHANI
I know —

FRANCINE
No I know.

ARUSHANI
I know it's the dialect but when —

FRANCINE
Code switch.

ARUSHANI
You recognised it?

FRANCINE
Yeah I would pretty much code switch back into —

ARUSHANI
But then you reflect and you're like 'what happened to my English degree?' Is that a — what was your perception of using that dialect when you were with your cousins? Did you feel like you were being ‘other’ to yourself when you were speaking like them? Or more like them?

FRANCINE
Sometimes. Sometimes I would feel like I wasn't a real Indian person because I was pretending. Now I know, I wasn't putting it on — I wasn't putting on the accent — I was just trying to fit in but I wasn't forcing it. I could just end my sentences

[but] because my parents spoke, and speak like that, all the time.

GOVENDER RESIDENCE. UMHLATUZANA, CHATSWORTH: 24 AUGUST 2018

In the English Calendar, it's ten months and twenty-three days since my father passed on. In the Tamil Calendar, it is one year. Our family performs the first part of the *Sraddha* ceremony. A Brahman is called to guide us through rituals that will aid the journey of my father's soul into the next dimension. My mother, siblings and some extended family are gathered around a cast iron fire burner. The smoke is thick inside our lounge. A picture of my father stands on the table and in front of it is a brass lamp, flickering a delicate flame.

The guru belts out a range of Tamil and Sanskrit mantras, invoking Hindu deities. Following a mantra, each of us throws in a pinch of dirt made up of various seeds, crushed tree bark and fertiliser, signifying the re-energising of our *chakras*.

These are things I do not know but which the guru explains to me, dismayed by my lack of knowledge. Ashamed of my ignorance, I do not ask him the significance of the last task.

He places a betel leaf in the cusp of my two palms. Atop the leaf is a silver coin and atop the coin is a dark betel nut, decorated with a sprinkling of sesame seeds. I say my birth name “Arushani Govender” and place my hands over a dish. The guru drops a jug of water upon my hands, washing away the offering.

I look into the dish — dried betel nuts of all who came before me — soaking, floating in murky water. I hear the lines in my head, "spitting betel-nuts, white husk" (Simon “Betel-Nut” 24).

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

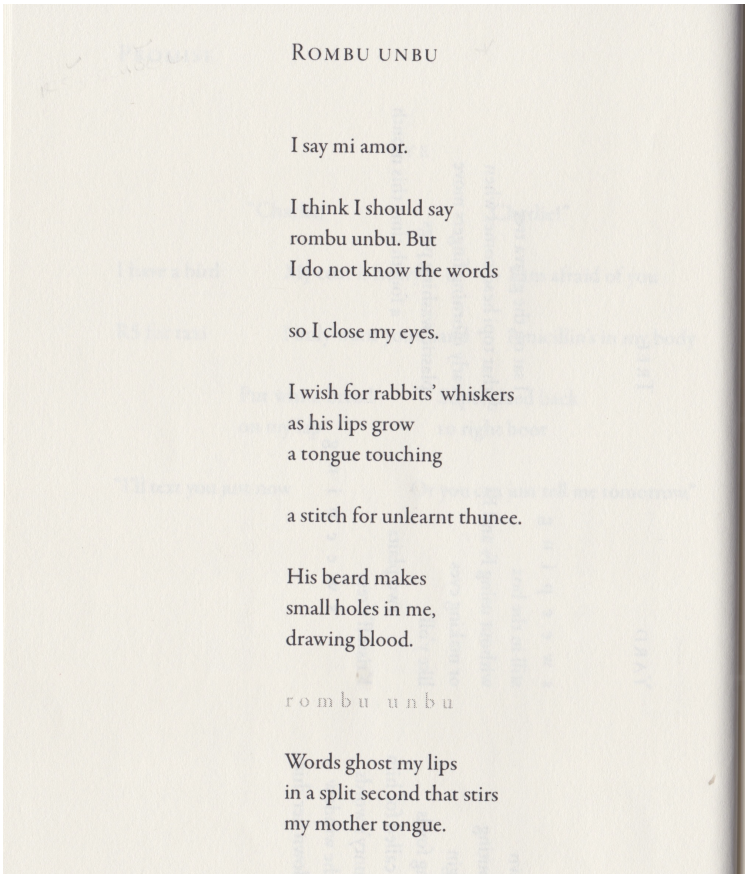
We continue to talk about “Betel-Nut.”

ARUSHANI
So you didn't feel like you were being pretentious when you were speaking like that?

FRANCINE
I was very self-conscious at the time. I didn't feel pretentious, I felt inauthentic because I thought – well you know. In this poem I'm not a child, I'm an adult obviously, the speaking points reflect that. When you have a knowledge of what you're doing you tend to feel a little more like you're pretending. I was really worried at the time, that I was just – I was not like my cousins – I was other to my cousins. They'll never say it though, they never will. My cousins are really sweet, nice people, they're not mean. Of course there was some teasing but they were never horrible.

Francine shared a few memories of her family visits to Chatsworth. Each memory evokes the conflict of straddling two worlds and her status as a perpetual in-betweener.

"ROMBU UNBU." ***THUNGACHI*****: 2017**



ROMBU UNBU

I say mi amor.

I think I should say
rombu unbu. But
I do not know the words

so I close my eyes.

I wish for rabbits' whiskers
as his lips grow
a tongue touching

a stitch for unlearnt thunee.

His beard makes
small holes in me,
drawing blood.

r o m b u u n b u

Words ghost my lips
in a split second that stirs
my mother tongue.

Fig. 4. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Rombu Unbu". *Thungachi*, 2017, p. 46.

“HOW THUNEE ORIGINATED”. NEWS24 WEBSITE, THE INTERNET: 3 DECEMBER 2015.

On December 3rd, 2015, News24 publishes an online article “How Thunee Originated”, written by Candyce Krishna. The opening paragraph reads as follows:

> THUNEE, after the Tamil word for water, is a popular trick-taking card game that originated in Durban. It was invented by Indian indentured labourers who arrived in South Africa to work in the sugar-cane fields. It is believed that there are variations of the game found in India and Mauritius. The game is mostly confined to the former Indian townships, where it is very popular as a family game and in fund-raising tournaments. The first thunee world championship was held in Pietermaritzburg in 2003.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

Francine describes her memories of *thunee* being played during the December holidays, either on Boxing Day or New Year’s Day, at her extended family's home in Bayview, Chatsworth.

FRANCINE

So it's just like a normal, Chatsworth house but like an older one. And then they take a metal table, a nice square one and they put it outside, four sides so four people sit there with the brandy and coke, cards, and the little bowl with nuts and raisins and then they would play that for the entire day, pretty much, of us going there. That's like my most vivid memory of *thunee*. I can't even remember the first memory of me seeing it because I've always seen it like that. I've always seen people in my family playing cards.

The image she describes is nostalgic; I could easily replace Francine's family members with my own.

ARUSHANI

Was it usually men or men and women?

FRANCINE
A mix. Sometimes men, sometimes a mix of men and women. Never only women.

ARUSHANI
But you never learnt how to play it?

FRANCINE
No I didn't.

After all those years of spectating in wonder, neither did I. The game appeared to be riddled with mysteries and complexities that added to the magic of life. Growing up, I had not known that *thunee* was a Tamil word or a game peculiar to the Chatsworth community. I had not known that indentured labourers created the game, at a time when Tamil was a home language. Today the game is still played — but by English-speaking players — who know little or no Tamil at all. Yet the game maintains a mystical ambience, as if each time it is played, Tamil is raised from the dead.

FRANCINE
This is pretty much a lamenting of not learning my mother tongue. Or what would have been my mother tongue. That's always for me, been really sad. I so wished to learn, I really did.

Francine’s mother tongue would have been Tamil.

ARUSHANI
If you had the opportunity would you have done it?

She nods.

ARUSHANI
I feel bad.

FRANCINE
Why?

ARUSHANI
I had the —

FRANCINE
But I think when you're like a teenager, you don't —

ARUSHANI
Yeah it had to be done after school.

I was a student at Erica Primary School, a small public school made up of three red-brick prisms at the end of Wren Street in Kharwastan. In grade four, I had the opportunity to take Tamil classes — a weekly class that was used to teach children the oldest language in the world. The weekly classes continued to the end of primary school. I could write vowels and consonants in Tamil and knew basic everyday words but could not string together a sentence. The subject was not included in our standard term reports nor did it have impact on our overall grades. I spent more time and effort on Afrikaans — a language that would affect my academic performance but that would not add any substance to my life. Once I commenced high school, Tamil was no longer a weekly class that was offered during school hours. Students were asked to take after-school classes and would have to travel elsewhere to write exams. Learning my mother tongue became a distressing task, so I stopped learning it.

FRANCINE
I was not — to me, I had to, had learned it as my first language or my second language when I was a child. When I was a teenager there was no way I could have learned it because I was too much of an idiot.

ARUSHANI
When you say first language as a child, what do you mean, at school?

FRANCINE
No not at school. Maybe my parents spoke English and Tamil at home —

ARUSHANI
Did they?

FRANCINE
No they didn't. But maybe if they had I would have learnt and been bilingual. But I couldn't have learnt it at high school because I was a dumb person who didn't have appreciation — as most teenagers do. So I'm not being mean to myself — but as teenagers you're not aware of how much impact things can have in your life. And then once I got into university and I started writing poems for this collection — that was in 2011, so seven years ago, I

quickly realised that I wished to have learnt that language. I really, like, a desperate wish to have learnt it.

ARUSHANI
I feel the same.

FRANCINE
Of course now I can learn it but in Durban I feel like holding onto the mother tongue is a bit – it's dying. I don't know many little kids who can speak their mother tongue.

ARUSHANI
I don't know of any and I think that's been from a while ago – not just now. It's only my mum's generation that can speak Tamil, in my experience.

FRANCINE
My mum can't even speak cause her parents talked amongst themselves, her parents and family and friends, but they didn't transfer it to the kids. But I think that my grandparents' generation, some of them learnt a good standard of the language and others learnt by just speaking at home. Which is two different things. So already then by our grandparents' age, the language was already on thin ice. My parents know certain words but they certainly cannot have a conversation. They can understand some stuff but that's as far as it goes. But I don't think that they feel as lost about it as I do. I think they are fine, they feel great. I don't feel good about it. I never have, after I realised it.

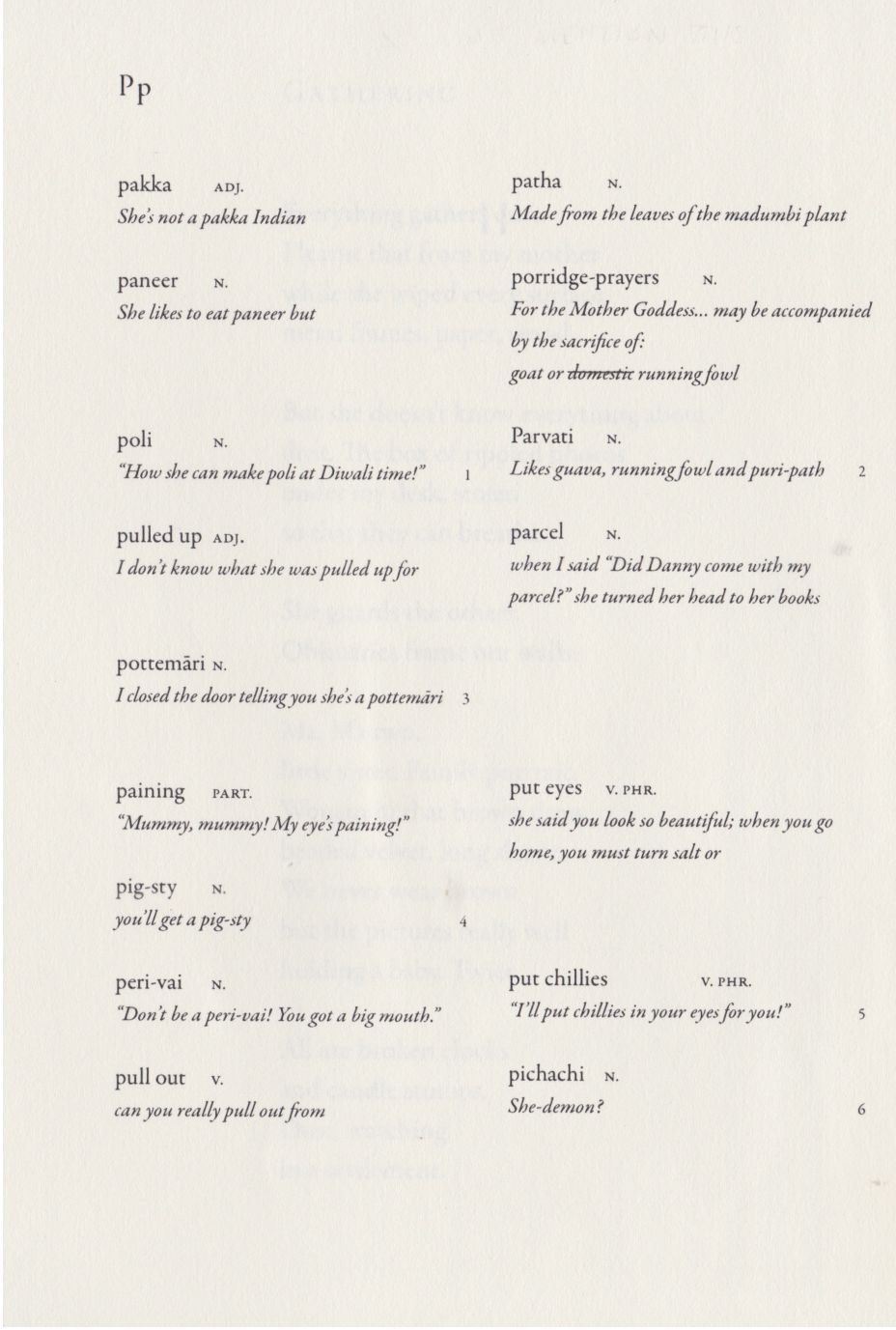
Despite not knowing her would-be mother tongue, Francine has an aptitude for languages. Schooled at Durban Girls' High, Francine had the opportunity of learning French, in addition to Afrikaans. Lately, she has been learning German from her husband.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD. DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

My copy of *Thungachi* is in Francine's hands, flipped to "Pp". She explains how the dictionary format of the poem was loosely inspired by the Harry Potter reference books,

such as the original *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them:* a slim book that provided an explanation of terms of the 'wizarding world'. Collecting a set of Chatsworth terminology, Francine noticed that several began with the letter *p*.

"Pp." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



Pp

pakka ADJ.
She's not a pakka Indian

paneer N.
She likes to eat paneer but

poli N.
"How she can make poli at Diwali time!" 1

pulled up ADJ.
I don't know what she was pulled up for

pottemāri N.
I closed the door telling you she's a pottemāri 3

paining PART.
"Mummy, mummy! My eye's paining!"

pig-sty N.
you'll get a pig-sty 4

peri-vai N.
"Don't be a peri-vai! You got a big mouth."

pull out V.
can you really pull out from

patha N.
Made from the leaves of the madumbi plant

porridge-prayers N.
For the Mother Goddess... may be accompanied by the sacrifice of:
goat or ~~domestic~~ running fowl

Parvati N.
Likes guava, running fowl and puri-path 2

parcel N.
when I said "Did Danny come with my parcel?" she turned her head to her books

put eyes V. PHR.
she said you look so beautiful; when you go home, you must turn salt or

put chillies V. PHR.
"I'll put chillies in your eyes for you!" 5

pichachi N.
She-demon? 6

Fig. 5. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Pp". *Thungachi*, 2017, p. 22.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD. DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

FRANCINE
It's really difficult to define some of these terms and to define them in English accurately. If you try to explain this to a person who doesn't understand the dialect, they're really going to be like 'I have no idea what you're talking about.' You have to get into an example in order to explain it to them. At the time I felt it was important to represent in a way that was different, I knew how I would have had to explain it to a person in real life.

ARUSHANI
What do you think, for instance, is the difference in saying 'she was pulled up about something' or saying 'she was mad about something.' What do you think that does to the textual language and the texture of the emotion?

FRANCINE
The second thing you said 'she was mad about it' — I don't think that 'pulled up' and 'mad' are the same. When you say ‘pulled up’, it means something, not necessarily very narrow, it gives texture in terms of a different way from standard English.

ARUSHANI
It's almost a new word in itself.

FRANCINE
Yes. Most of these words in the poem I don't see in a dictionary, in a normal book, anywhere. You wouldn't really call a ‘package’ a ‘parcel’. I don't often hear that.

ARUSHANI
In standard English, if you wanted to express the same emotion, to say 'this person is pulled up' could you do it? And as easily? Just using two words?

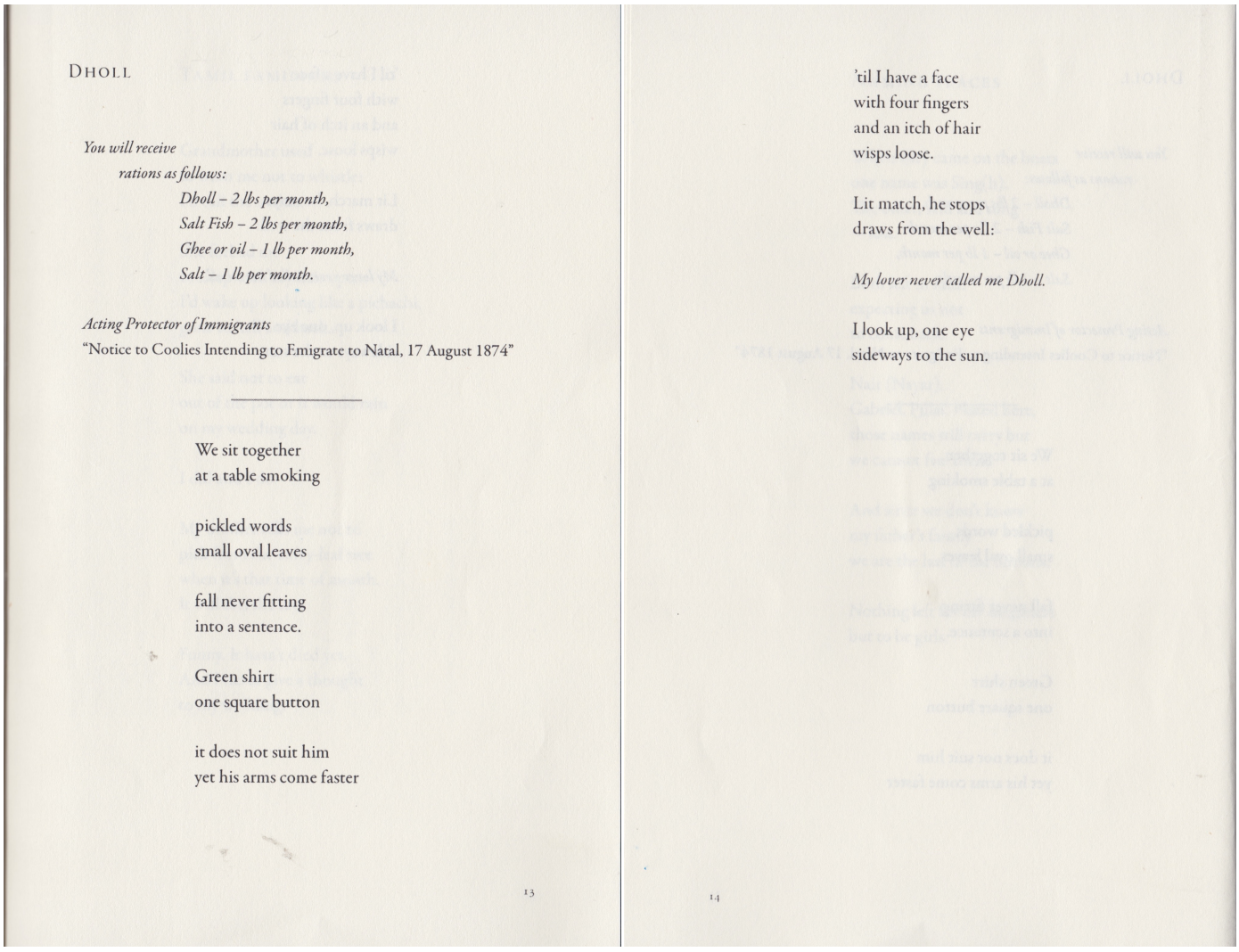
FRANCINE
I don't think I could do it.

ARUSHANI
So that's what makes it special.

Less than an hour earlier, we shared the same sentiments about the second poem of *Thungachi* – "Dholl."

Dholl, also known as *dhall*, is a delicious yellow, split pea curry, resembling soup. As a child, my mother prepared *dholl* at least once a week. Often, I would make a well in a plate of steaming white rice, where the *dholl* would be gently ladled and a knob of butter would melt delicately. It was the dish used to spike the appetite of children and it always worked.

"DHOLL." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



DHOLL

You will receive
rations as follows:
Dholl – 2 lbs per month,
Salt Fish – 2 lbs per month,
Ghee or oil – 1 lb per month,
Salt – 1 lb per month.

Acting Protector of Immigrants
"Notice to Coolies Intending to Emigrate to Natal, 17 August 1874"

We sit together
at a table smoking

pickled words
small oval leaves

fall never fitting
into a sentence.

Green shirt
one square button

it does not suit him
yet his arms come faster

13

'til I have a face
with four fingers
and an itch of hair
wisps loose.

Lit match, he stops
draws from the well:

My lover never called me Dholl.

I look up, one eye
sideways to the sun.

14

Fig. 6. Scanned images of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Dholl". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 13-14.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD. DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

FRANCINE
I found it in this dictionary of South African Indian English because South African Indian English was recognised as a dialect of English.

ARUSHANI
Mesthrie.

FRANCINE
Yeah that's the book that I have. In the book, under 'dholl', was that little excerpt.

ARUSHANI
So you actually got it from that book?

The book by Rajend Mesthrie is titled *A Dictionary of South African Indian English.*

FRANCINE
Yeah. I read that book back to front so much. I don't know how we found it. At the time that it did come out, my supervisor was like 'this would be an excellent resource to use' for the MA. I will carry that book everywhere in the world with me. It's such a great book. They should do a second edition.

ARUSHANI
Yeah it's very expansive.

FRANCINE
It's comprehensive.

ARUSHANI
Yeah. So did you conceive the poem after reading that? Or did you have an idea that you wanted to write about?

FRANCINE
I usually start with the first two lines. I was thinking about the idea of *dholl* as a word representative of the food, which is like my favorite food, cause I could live on *dholl* and rice. I don't need to eat anything else. I could just eat that forever. I just thought that it was interesting that South African Indian

Durban people called each other *dholl* but not 'doll' as in, 'you're a little doll'. It never seemed like that. It seemed like they were calling them *dholl* as in the food.

"NOTICE TO COOLIES INTENDING TO EMIGRATE TO NATAL." INDIAN IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT: 17 AUGUST 1874.

Plate 13

Notice, Indian Immigration Department, 1874

NOTICE.—IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT.

THE Acting Protector of Immigrants, in continuation of a previous Notice, now has the honour to publish, for the information of Planters and whom it may concern, the exact terms upon which Indian Immigrants have been enlisted for service in Natal.

F. ELTON, Acting Protector of Immigrants.

Immigration Department, August 17, 1874.

NOTICE TO COOLIES INTENDING TO EMIGRATE TO NATAL.

You will be taken free of expense to Calcutta, and, while there, will be well fed and properly lodged until the ship sails; and should you be ill, the greatest care will be taken of you.

When the ship is ready, you will be supplied with good clothing; the finest ships are selected, and the voyage takes about five or six weeks. The food, medicines, and other appliances on board are of good quality, and your health, comfort, and safety, will be most carefully attended to. The Indian Government has appointed officers, who are most strict and vigilant in securing for you all these advantages.

On and after your arrival in Natal, there is a Protector of Immigrants ready to advise you at all times during your residence there. You will be located on an estate where a medical man is employed.

Your religion will in no way be interfered with, and both Hindoos and Mahomedans are alike protected.

You will find over 5,000 of your countrymen settled there.

You will have a house rent free to live in, with plenty of garden ground to cultivate at your leisure, and care is taken not to separate families and relatives.

The climate is remarkably healthy, and there is an abundance of good water, fruits, and vegetables. If you are ill, medical attendance, medicines, and nourishment, are provided free of charge.

You will be required to cultivate sugar-cane and to make sugar, rum, and molasses. Great varieties of work, either for strong men or for women and children, are available.

You will have to work for five years, six days in the week, for nine hours, between sunrise and sunset—all Sundays and holidays excepted.

Besides rations the men receive for the first year, Rs. 5 monthly; for the second year, Rs. 5½ monthly; for the third year, Rs. 6 monthly; for the fourth year, Rs. 6½ monthly; for the fifth year, Rs. seven monthly. The women are paid half wages, and the children in proportion.

After five years you may return to India at your own expense, and after ten years you will be entitled to a passage back.

You will receive rations as follows:—

1½ lbs. of rice daily, or for three days in the week in lieu of rice 2 lbs of

Dholl	...	2 lbs. per month.	
Salt Fish	... ...	2	,, ,,
Ghee or oil	... ...	1	,, ,,
Salt	... ...	1	,, ,,

H. A. FIRTH, Emigration Agent for NATAL

8, Garden Reach, Calcutta, 21st March, 1874.

Fig. 7. Food rations for indentured Indians from: *Henning, Cosmo Greenville.* "Notice. – Immigration Department." *The Indentured Indian in Natal, 1860-1917*. New Dehli: Promilla & Co., 1993, p.49.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD. DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

FRANCINE
So I read the extract and I thought, these were the rations, these were the actual rations, so *dholl* is not just food. It's sustenance. It's survival. If you call someone *dholl* it's really special right?

ARUSHANI
Yeah.

FRANCINE
They're incredibly special to you.

ARUSHANI
Yeah.

FRANCINE
I was working a lot with those ideas and I was also aware that at that point in time I never had an Indian boyfriend so I never had the opportunity to be called *dholl* or to call someone *dholl*. I was on a different path in dating and dating white guys. White guys will usually call you very stereotypical, American kind of nicknames like 'sweetie' or, what are nicknames?

ARUSHANI
Babe.

FRANCINE
Babe. I'm very bad at this.

Our lack of knowledge of sugary terms amuses us both. The only pet name I've cared to remember is the one my father called me as a child — *kutty* (koo-ty) — an affectionate Tamil word loosely translated as "cute baby". My dad always used the word with a tone of adoration and longing. I always knew it was a Tamil word and that Tamil was used sparingly, especially, when addressing children. Like *dholl*, *kutty* has value beyond its literal meaning. The true meaning is derived from its soothing utterance, showing love for one's child by paying homage to its previous users. Somehow in merely two syllables, the Tamil word *kutty* gives one child the historical and eternal love of a million parents.

ARUSHANI
So you looked into Rajend Mesthrie's book and found all this information and that gave you an historical context of how to relate this on the idea of relationships?

FRANCINE
Yeah.

ARUSHANI
Did you do any more research into that, further than that?

FRANCINE
In terms of research I concentrated more on — there's not a lot of academic research that's not historical, that's about stories — there wasn't any of that. So what I did for research was, I started asking a lot of questions to my family. I was pretty annoying but I just started asking questions like why do we say that? Where does that come from? What does this superstition mean? Or I'd read the book and say, does this really mean as it says in here? I feel like a lot of information has been passed down orally.

ARUSHANI
Yeah.

FRANCINE
So I spoke to my parents, my uncles, my aunts, my gran's sister. I just spoke to as many people as I could with concern to what I was writing.

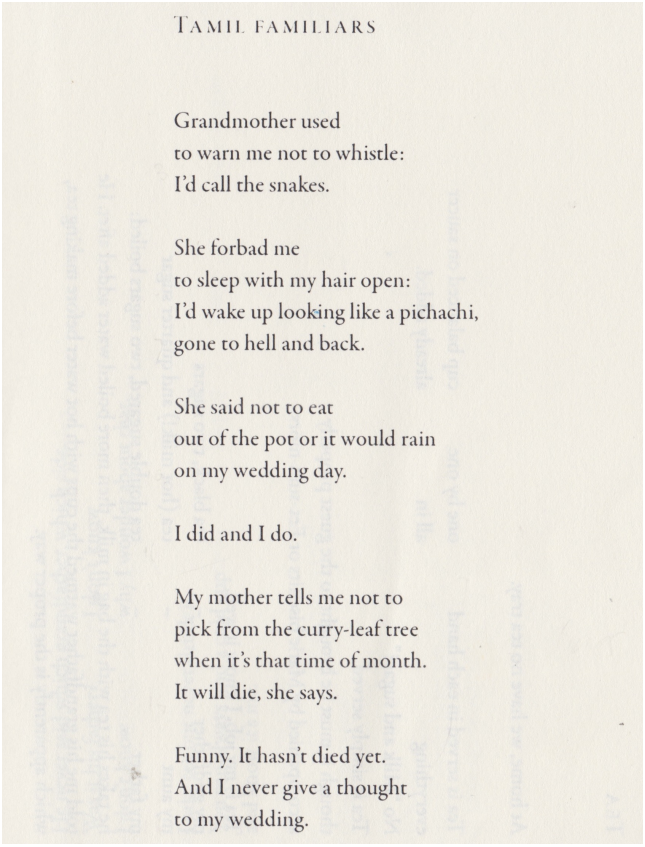
ARUSHANI
And what did they say, would they give you explanations that was somewhat in line with the historical research or what you read in books? They seemed to match up?

FRANCINE
They seemed to match up but they were very much fictionalised.

ARUSHANI
In what way?

FRANCINE
It seemed like everyone had a slightly different version of it. Not everyone but the way you tell a story is quite subjective. That means that each family would have slightly fictionalised versions of events. I found that very interesting and not like – I didn't feel restricted by that. I felt that it was actually quite freeing and an interesting space to work in. Cause that meant just because, there is factual evidence, but everybody sort of believes something slightly differently and I found that an incredibly productive space to work in. It's a collective hive kind of oral history. It's not like we have one version and a perfect history. I really enjoyed that aspect of the research, especially in terms of the oral history that was being passed down.

"TAMIL FAMILIARS." ***THUNGACHI*****: 2017**



TAMIL FAMILIARS

Grandmother used
to warn me not to whistle:
I'd call the snakes.

She forbad me
to sleep with my hair open:
I'd wake up looking like a pichachi,
gone to hell and back.

She said not to eat
out of the pot or it would rain
on my wedding day.

I did and I do.

My mother tells me not to
pick from the curry-leaf tree
when it's that time of month.
It will die, she says.

Funny. It hasn't died yet.
And I never give a thought
to my wedding.

Fig. 8. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Tamil Familiars". *Thungachi*, 2017, p.15.

I've heard the very same warnings as a growing girl, never quite caring about the consequence of disobeying, but ever intrigued by the implied possibility of magic. Could an arbitrary action be so symbolic that fate would change? Perhaps the knowledge of fate is more important: an implicit knowing that all things in the world are connected beyond scientific measure. Allowing the prospect of the supernatural to intertwine in daily life gives its believers a chance to view the world as mysterious and unconquerable. It is a humbling trait that maintains a person's respect for nature.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

Francine shoos a way a couple of flies. It's close to midday and the winter sun is at its strongest.

ARUSHANI
Would you say most of that poem is from information you gathered from family?

FRANCINE
Yeah. My maternal grandfather was Tamil. My grandmother was Catholic — strong Catholic family. He was eleven years older than her. They got married in Church but he stayed Tamil, so that Tamil influence is quite strong, but after many years of being with my grandmother, my grandfather asked a lot of questions about being Catholic. Eventually my grandmother said, maybe you should go to some classes, because I can't answer all of your questions. So he started going to classes at the church and eventually decided to convert. He converted to Catholicism.

ARUSHANI
He willingly converted?

FRANCINE
Willingly.

ARUSHANI
Your grandmother — was that also the case — do you know how the timeline with the conversion in your family began?

FRANCINE
It seems that we had an ancestor from India that was Catholic –

ARUSHANI
The initial –

FRANCINE
Ancestor. Yeah.

ARUSHANI
It began already, from India?

FRANCINE
Yeah. I don't know the India side. I have no link to India in terms of ancestry, unfortunately. My gran's sister told me that – it's kind of a legend – her ancestor was a Catholic missionary going onto the ship and thought 'good idea, I could convert all of them, its an opportunity' and then went with them. That's a very legend, myth –

ARUSHANI
Orally passed down so you can't –

FRANCINE
I can't. That's not fact.

ARUSHANI
But it could be.

FRANCINE
It could be. For sure it could be. I just don't know how true it is. I like to think it's true.

The poem “Naming Places” is based on the same family legend.

ARUSHANI
In terms of the specific superstitions that you talk about in that poem, did you try and do any historical research to see where those superstitions originated from? Or did you accept it as what your elders told you it meant?

FRANCINE
I tried to ask my family members where it came from, often nobody could really tell me. I didn't do much research because I wanted to keep that poem a lot more based on the family oral history, oral culture — I didn't want that to be too disrupted by the internet. I limited it. Nobody could really tell me about why they said the things that they did.

ARUSHANI
Yeah they didn't have a reason. At the same time, you probably couldn't research this legitimately but if you did, you'd probably find very different answers that is not so in line with what you're told by your family. And it would change your perceptions of those things completely —

FRANCINE
Yeah. I didn't want it to happen that way. I wanted to maintain the oral tradition. I often do research and bring it in to poems — I just had a feeling if I did that, that something would be disrupted.

ARUSHANI
Yeah so you were cautious about how much research you did.

FRANCINE
Yeah. I did the oral tradition research and asked family members and friends.

FORTUNES CAFE. WINDERMERE, DURBAN: 25 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

We're sitting at a cafe in a mall nearby Francine's parents' house. It's our first in-depth interview together and the first day we meet in person. Except for the waiting staff, we seem to be the only people of colour at the cafe. Three mixed-matched mirrors hang on a dark, exposed brick wall behind Francine. Her leather jacket hangs on her chair and without it, a tattoo of a Native American orca whale can be spotted on her left hand.

Francine got the tattoo after winning a bet with her parents — if she passed her driving test and got her license, she was allowed a tattoo. Having done a course

on 'Alternative Histories' as part of her undergraduate degree, Francine had a growing interest in minority cultures.

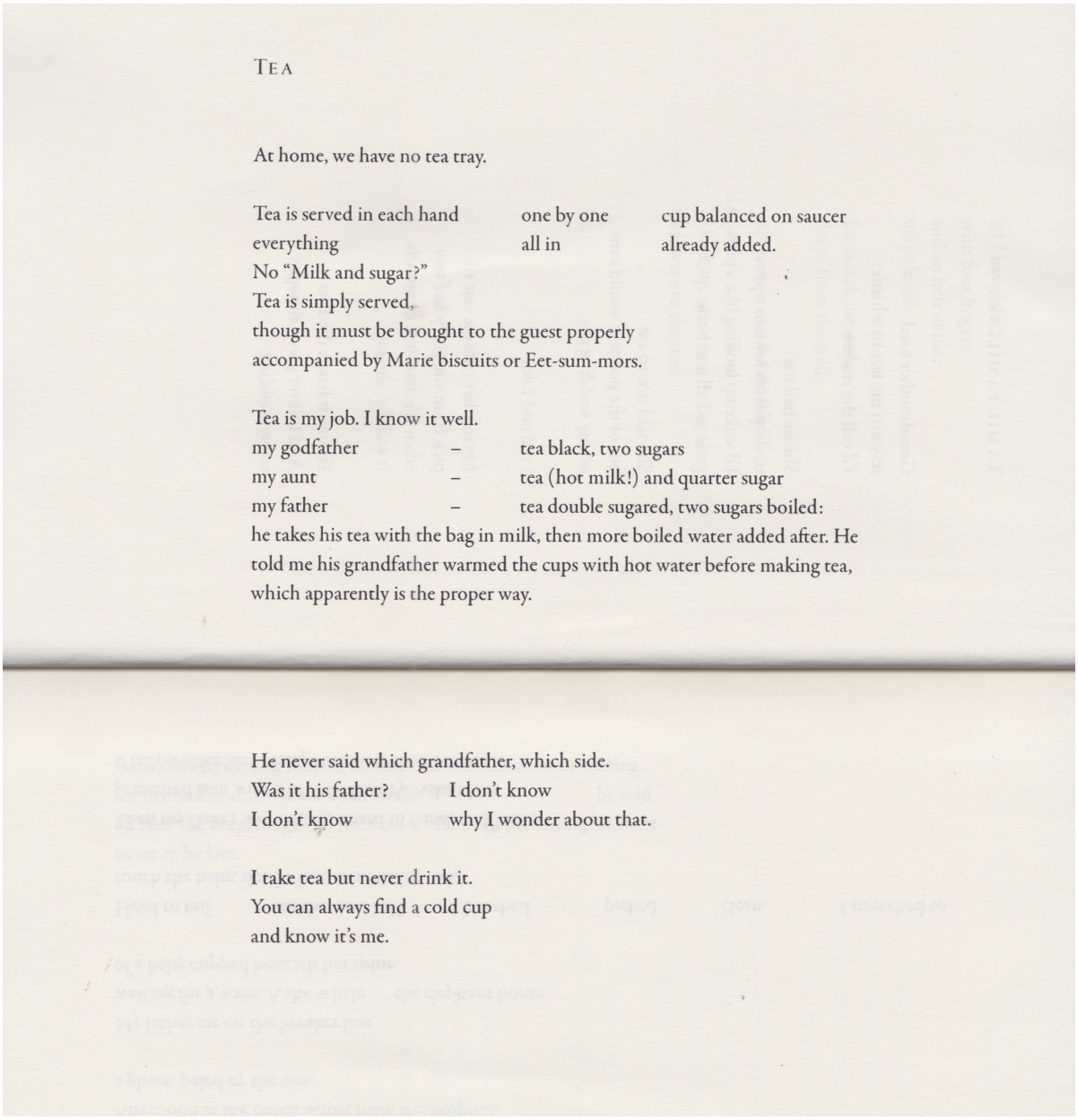
ARUSHANI
What's the appeal to you about alternative cultures or maybe even specifically what you found out about Native American history? What was the charm for you?

FRANCINE
I think it was, probably thinking back now, we have a minority history. By we, I mean, Indian culture and history in South Africa specifically, in Durban specifically. It's not a history that I've seen broadly taught at schools, or if any? I don't know if it is taught at schools. I don't think so. So I think I was really attracted to that idea, that someone was teaching, you know, relational history. I mean it's not like extremely relational but the connection is there and I was really excited about that. And Native American history and culture – it's a really rich culture that they have, that's been kind of twisted in strange ways – if you look at it now. The actual people, they are trying to sustain their culture but it's been penetrated by colonisation and pop culture, all of these kinds of things.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

ARUSHANI
Another thing you do quite often is show that there are gaps in narratives. As much as you're asking these questions, you also noticing there's a lot of gaps.

"TEA." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



TEA

At home, we have no tea tray.

Tea is served in each hand one by one cup balanced on saucer
everything all in already added.
No "Milk and sugar?"
Tea is simply served,
though it must be brought to the guest properly
accompanied by Marie biscuits or Eet-sum-mors.

Tea is my job. I know it well.
my godfather – tea black, two sugars
my aunt – tea (hot milk!) and quarter sugar
my father – tea double sugared, two sugars boiled:
he takes his tea with the bag in milk, then more boiled water added after. He told me his grandfather warmed the cups with hot water before making tea, which apparently is the proper way.

He never said which grandfather, which side.
Was it his father? I don't know
I don't know why I wonder about that.

I take tea but never drink it.
You can always find a cold cup
and know it's me.

Fig. 9. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Tea". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 16-17.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

ARUSHANI
In "Tea" when you're talking about –

FRANCINE
About the grandfather?

ARUSHANI
Yeah about the grandfather. You ask “was it his father?”

FRANCINE
Hmm mm. (In agreement)

ARUSHANI
Did you ask him? Did you answer that question or purposefully tried not to answer?

FRANCINE
I think I asked him.

ARUSHANI
You asked your dad?

FRANCINE
Like which grandfather are you talking about? And he kind of just brushed off my question. Sometimes he does that when he's thinking about something else and couldn't be bothered to answer my question. That's my dad. He kind of hates it when you repeat a question and he's too busy to answer you. I just stopped asking and I never really asked him again. Because it's in the poem, I like to at least keep the mythology of the poem. So I just left it alone.

ARUSHANI
So you like the curiosity that's already in your life than trying to resolve everything and have no mystery?

FRANCINE
I'm very okay with not resolving, sometimes.

ARUSHANI
And that makes it more interesting.

FRANCINE
It does. When you live in a poetic world there are some things that — in real life maybe I would want that to be answered — however I'm aware that my poetic life is very important and in order for that poem to have that curiosity, I shouldn't know. Maybe I will find out in passing but I

> feel like that wouldn't make the poem illegitimate. It's an inconsistency that I'm ok with. It seems like a lot of Indian people in Durban don't have, they have gaps and often those gaps will never be answered. In “Naming Places” I talk about surnames. That poem is pretty accurate fact wise. My dad's surname is Simon but we don't know what it changed from. In order for me to know, I would have to get in the car and drive to Greytown, which is inland. Go to the Catholic Church and ask them to look at their archives and then go through the archives and somehow find when they came through the church because we know they came through the church. But we don't know what year so I would have to go through the whole archive to find out. And that's a gap.

THE GANDHI-LUTHULI DOCUMENTATION CENTRE WEBSITE, THE INTERNET: 18 JULY 2018.

I navigate through the Gandhi-Luthuli Documentation Centre's website. I click on the link "Guidelines for tracing ones roots”. The guidelines are listed as follows:

> 1. The first step is to ascertain whether ones ancestors came as indentured labourers or as traders/passenger Indians. If either the male or female (or both) came as passenger Indians then their records may be traceable from the Who's Who or from family records and correspondences. The Home Affairs Department may be able to assist in this regard. The Documentation Centre has a complete set of the Who's Who.
>
> 2.Indentured Indians. One needs to obtain relevant documents that would assist in tracing ones roots e.g. a certificate of indenture, certificate of discharge, an immigration pass, marriage certificate that has indenture numbers etc. It is not necessary that one needs documents of ones parent or grandparents. Documents of even distant relatives may be sufficient – as long as they lead to the same root (e.g. grandparent's (male side) sister's marriage certificate would have numbers that would lead to the same root as the grandparent (male)). Similarly, one could

follow through with the grandparents (female) side.

3. Not all persons were married on arrival. Some were single, came as children or as single mothers/parents with children. It is therefore important when looking up the registers to look for numbers before and after a given number for husbands, relatives and children, if any.

The Documentation Centre has a copy of the Indenture Registers.

4. It is advisable to scan the documents when requesting information on one's ancestors – Often serial numbers of certificates or colonial numbers are confused with indenture numbers. Colonial numbers are assigned to those born in the colonies and are not the same as indenture numbers (sic).

I foresee a tedious struggle in tracing my roots and decide to leave them unknown for now.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

Francine takes a picture of *Thungachi* opened to the poems "Pp" and "Rati". She flips the book over and points to the back cover.

FRANCINE
This is a selfie.

The back cover has a crisp, portrait photograph of Francine, looking away from the lens with a thoughtful smile.



Fig. 10. Selfie portrait photograph by Francine Simon from: Simon, Francine. *Thungachi,* 2017, back cover.

ARUSHANI
Really? Doesn't look like a selfie, that's so strange.

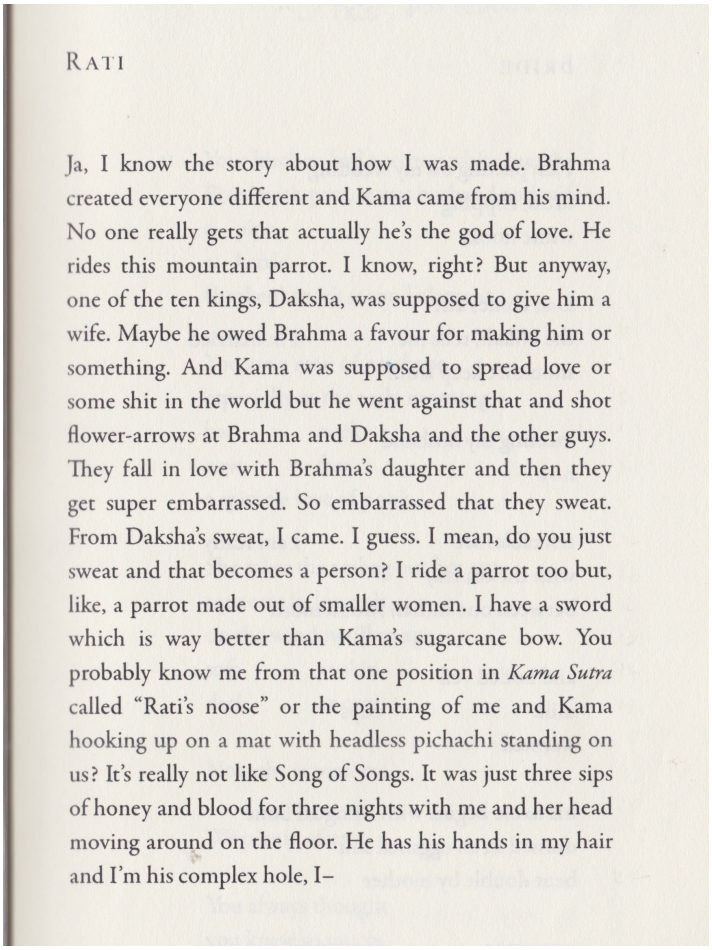
FRANCINE
I took it of myself.

ARUSHANI
And you managed to look away even.

FRANCINE
I always look away in pictures. I don't like looking at the camera because it seems a little – ok let's go on with the talk.

ARUSHANI
"Rati".

"RATI." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



RATI

Ja, I know the story about how I was made. Brahma created everyone different and Kama came from his mind. No one really gets that actually he's the god of love. He rides this mountain parrot. I know, right? But anyway, one of the ten kings, Daksha, was supposed to give him a wife. Maybe he owed Brahma a favour for making him or something. And Kama was supposed to spread love or some shit in the world but he went against that and shot flower-arrows at Brahma and Daksha and the other guys. They fall in love with Brahma's daughter and then they get super embarrassed. So embarrassed that they sweat. From Daksha's sweat, I came. I guess. I mean, do you just sweat and that becomes a person? I ride a parrot too but, like, a parrot made out of smaller women. I have a sword which is way better than Kama's sugarcane bow. You probably know me from that one position in *Kama Sutra* called "Rati's noose" or the painting of me and Kama hooking up on a mat with headless pichachi standing on us? It's really not like Song of Songs. It was just three sips of honey and blood for three nights with me and her head moving around on the floor. He has his hands in my hair and I'm his complex hole, I–

Fig. 11. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Rati". *Thungachi*, 2017, p.23.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
So a couple of your poems make reference to Hindu mythology but you were raised Catholic, how did these stories come to you?

FRANCINE
I do a lot of research, if something strikes me as interesting and that I would like to write about. I do as much research as I can on certain myths or certain Gods or certain Goddesses because I feel like I don't want to appropriate anyone's religion. I'm very aware that it's a religion and it's something that's very important to a lot of people so I don't want to mess with anybody's, just like I don't want to be messed with. For me it's also different because I have a different sense of Catholicism to others but I just don't want to step on anyone's toes.

ARUSHANI
How much research would you get into? What would you do exactly?

FRANCINE
Generally I would start with *Wikipedia* just to give myself a generalised view. I look at the *Wikipedia* sources to see where they have sourced their research — for the actual page — and read articles, sometimes journals, sometimes it's university websites, things like that. Very different from what we spoke about in terms of oral tradition because I don't really have anyone in my family to consult with on the myth and the legend and the religion of Hinduism. That's why I consult the Internet. Also I want more of an objective view before I think about how I'm going to process it into a poem. I think of it as the bare bones of the story. Sometimes *Wikipedia* pages are written quite — they have quite a narrative aspect to them — some of them, obviously some not. The idea for this poem, obviously came from the Goddess,

the name of the poem. Also, I think I had written a poem in something very similar to my everyday speaking voice and I was writing this during my PhD. I had written this poem very differently. It was very obscure and strange and difficult and cryptic. I had written another poem that was very close to my speaking voice like I'm speaking now and my supervisor said, 'wouldn't it be interesting if you merged the speaking voice from this poem and this poem to make it more accessible.' And I said, well I don't know about that because I've never really written in my speaking voice before and that might be difficult. By my speaking voice I mean the way the poem goes — it's not like the other poems.

ARUSHANI
Definitely sounds more youthful —

FRANCINE
Hmm and it's more colloquial so I was uncomfortable with writing in my own speaking voice because when I first started writing poetry I was very confessional, and I realised I was mimicking. I started to develop some kind of sense of what I would like to sound like. And then I started writing it like that. This poem is kind of derivative of that and I found it very fun to write because I had the story and I had to come to the point where, in the research that I had done, it started with the story and ended with me seeing this picture but then I thought I can't just end with this image that I have in my mind. It seemed weird to end with it pretty much there —

She points at the line of the poem. The image she refers to is an early twentieth century lithograph by Bhatuk Ramprasad, depicting the Hindu Goddess Chinnamasta sitting on top of a copulating Rati and Kama (Ramprasad 156). Variations of the image have since been reproduced as colour artworks. The image Francine refers to can be found on *Wikipedia* and depicts Chinnamasta in a standing position.



Fig. 12. Artwork of Hindu deities Rati, Kama and Chinnamasta from: "Chinnamasta." *Wikipedia*, 24 Mar. 2019.

FRANCINE

1, 2, 3, 4, 4 lines up. It just seemed weird if I ended it there. So I did some research and this is something that I actually often do – I did some research on a different myth with a different culture – that was, I believe was Norse mythology. It was pretty much about a similar Goddess to the Goddess from the Hindu Mythology that I had found in – and this happens a lot in mythology that there are similar mythology – not just like Roman and Greek. In Norse mythology and in Hindu mythology and in Chinese mythology – there would often be a similar Being that serves a similar function. It's not going to be exactly the same but there are similarities. Very often on *Wikipedia* what I do is – the whole page is set out and at the very end it says "see also", so I'll just click on it and I'll read about that and it'll

take me to more research and that's where I found this one.

ARUSHANI
That's where you found this one?

FRANCINE
The end part with the three sips of honey and blood and that kind of thing was from another myth, from a Norse myth.

ARUSHANI
So you mixed up mythologies from different cultures. I mean, I know you do research on Hindu mythology but what prompts you to do it? Is it something that happens in real life that prompts you to be like, let me look more into this, let me find out more about the religion — or do you think, I want to write a poem that has to do with Hinduism?

FRANCINE
I don't really start with 'I want to write a poem.' I'll start with kind of like, I'll be on the Internet and I'll be looking up something and I'll think, oh I wanted to research this. I think I was pretty much researching Kama and then from Kama I jumped to Rati and it kind of evolved from that. I also look very often at whatever images that I can find that's available, old pictures, old paintings of the Gods and the Goddesses. Because a *Wikipedia* page is great but I think pictures from the 1800s or 1900s, they distill a different set of feelings. And I don't know what those are but it's very evocative anyway. Especially really old paintings — they're so interesting of mythology, because obviously the person who painted it is influenced from the era. But you may never have an understanding of what that era was like. So it's like through the looking-glass into something really interesting and unusual, and that I will never understand. And that is what I like.

ARUSHANI
Usually the poems you've written on Hindu mythology — or that incorporates it —

FRANCINE
Would you say you're Hindu?

ARUSHANI
I am. I am Hindu. I was raised very Hindu so my family is religious.

FRANCINE
Who's your family's, who do you —

ARUSHANI
Pray to?

FRANCINE
Yes.

ARUSHANI
Out of the like, two hundred thousand Gods.

I laugh nervously, partly because I am uncertain about my beliefs and partly because she has unwittingly turned the tables again.

FRANCINE
I'm just asking because —

ARUSHANI
There's too many.

FRANCINE
Not that there's too many but some of my friends have a specific.

ARUSHANI
A specific. We don't have — my parents have a few because there's different prayers and different rituals for each God — formation. You can't do all of them so the ones that we generally do is Ganesha, Lakshmi, Hanuman, Shiva, Saraswathi, Muruga —

FRANCINE
Oh, they're quite traditional.

ARUSHANI
Hmmm, my parents are religious.

I struggle to answer her question. I begin to understand why her responses need to be long-winded. We both share a complex relationship with the religions of our upbringings.

UMHLATUZANA TEMPLE HALL. CHATSWORTH, DURBAN: 17 OCTOBER 2017.

A hundred people fill up the hall adjacent to the temple. I am in the front row, watching the beginnings of a vigil. The *bhajan* group delivers haunting renditions of devotional songs, voices exploding upon the throbbing of tablas and the shrill melody of the harmonium. My father's picture sits on a shrine, his frame lined with eight golden lamps on each side, and bursting flowers edging its borders. I am still uncertain about reincarnation but the desperate voices of the *bhajan* weave into my pulse. There is an overpowering aura in the hall, as if two worlds are colliding. As if two worlds have stopped dividing.

I wonder about whether I am Hindu or not. Despite my dubiousness, the past sixteen days of rituals, since my father's death, has given me survival tools. The persistent *bhajan* services every night at my house, the flame of a lamp remaining alive for over two weeks, the family visiting everyday with pots of edible condolences, the casual banters about his spirit – as if science never happened. Most of them did not even know or understand the details of Hinduism. What are the grounds for their beliefs? I wondered.

My mother dismisses any questions and I slowly learn that she has a limited theoretical understanding of rituals. She willfully practices the customs, mimicking her own mother. Explanation makes no difference to her. Yet she feels the knowledge gradually, imparted by every symbolic act, and displays the confidence and pride of a knower.

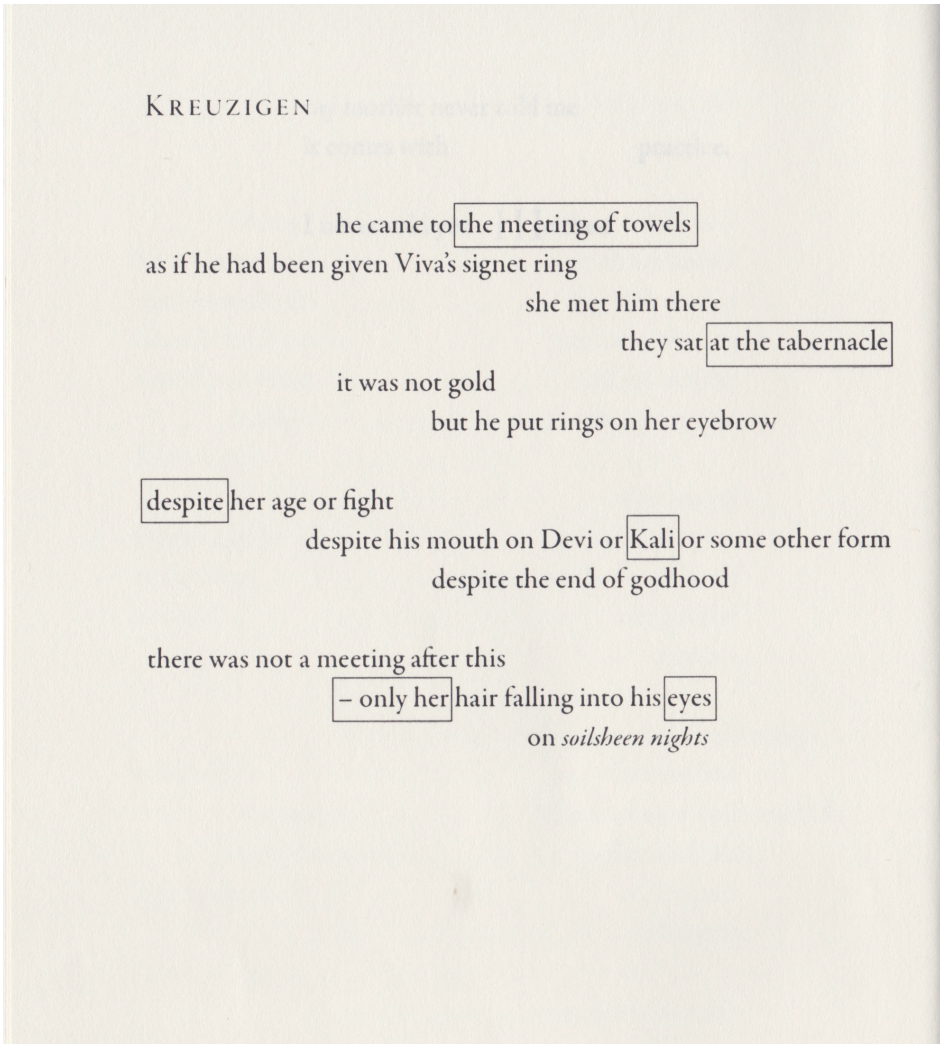
S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 – AFTERNOON

FRANCINE
Did you find any of these poems offensive?

ARUSHANI
I didn't find them offensive, no.

Francine sighs with relief.

"KREUZIGEN." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



KREUZIGEN

he came to the meeting of towels
as if he had been given Viva's signet ring
she met him there
they sat at the tabernacle
it was not gold
but he put rings on her eyebrow

despite her age or fight
despite his mouth on Devi or Kali or some other form
despite the end of godhood

there was not a meeting after this
– only her hair falling into his eyes
on *soilsheen nights*

Fig. 13. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Kreuzigen". *Thungachi*, 2017, p.32.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 – AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
How would you pronounce it?

FRANCINE
It's probably pronounced Khot-zi-gen. I can't say it properly either because it's German.

ARUSHANI
What made you choose German?

FRANCINE
It means "crucify".

ARUSHANI
But what made you choose it in German?

FRANCINE
I was trying to learn a bit of German at the time. Very often I would just say to, at the time my boyfriend, but now my husband, I would say, 'what does this word mean?' and then he'd tell me. And then I'd kind of attach myself to that word. Cause it's such a pretty word when he says it, unfortunately I don't say it that way so it's not very pretty when it comes out of my mouth. It's very pretty when he says it.

ARUSHANI
So it was more about the sound of the words?

FRANCINE
Yeah but it also means crucify and I think this poem is very much about — do you want me to talk about it?

ARUSHANI
Yeah.

FRANCINE
Something relationshippy but also I found out that there were different forms of Devi. And I thought that was interesting. Cause sometimes he was in love with her, and then a different version of her. And then a different version of her and the original version of her had a fight — I found that very interesting. I've never heard that in any other mythology — that's pretty interesting.

I've encountered only three forms of Devi growing up. One is Lakshmi, the Goddess of Spiritual Wealth, whom my family invokes once a year on 'Lakshmi Prayers Day'. On this day a red string with seven ambiguous knots is tied on my right wrist. The second is Saraswati, the Goddess

of Knowledge, Music and Wisdom. We also invoke her once a year, on a date determined by the Tamil astrological calendar. On this day, when we were younger, my siblings and I would leave our schoolbooks next to the lamp to be blessed by Mother Saraswati. The third is Kali, the Goddess of Death (the death of ego). I only ever encountered Kali at temples, where statues of her depict a fierce bare breasted woman, with her tongue stuck out of her mouth. She seemed to be feared and less talked about.



Fig. 14. Three incarnations of Devi, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Kali from: "2016 04 08 Vasanta (Spring) Navratri." *Kirtan Community*, 7 Apr. 2016.

ARUSHANI

I was going to ask because – usually when you reference Hindu mythology there's a female character and it somewhat explores female sexuality. Does something about Hinduism make it easier for you to do that?

FRANCINE

I think because in Hinduism there's more of a sense of sexuality. In the myths and the legends there's – ok in Catholicism there's like only one time when someone – there's no time. When is there a time when it's ever mentioned? In general, when is there ever a time that anyone ever talks about sex? Mary was supposed to have remained a Virgin even until death. So that means that she had Jesus and then she never had sex. She like – it's just inconceivable – that idea is just odd. Even at the time it would have been strange – for a wife in a patriarchal society not to perform her wifely duties. But in general there's no

mention of sex in the Bible except for Song of Songs which is great but that's in the Old Testament. Most of what Christians rely on is the New Testament. And in the New Testament there is not a lot of sex going on. There's very much the image of a virginal bride woman, and a ruined woman. There's only those two images. The ruined woman is very much like a Mary Magdalene kind of figure who was an adulteress. So basically she cheated on her husband or she was supposed to have cheated on her husband. And those are the only two images of women. Of course there's the Mother, but there's no reference to girls — or a girl figure. There's no reference to teenagers or like a young woman — there's none of those things. It's a very restricted mythology — if we're going to call it, the Bible, a mythology — I would say it's a very restricted mythology to try and produce any kind of work surrounding it. At the time, it felt like Hinduism opened a lot more doors in terms of what women could do.

ARUSHANI

So why the choice to — if you wanted to explore female sexuality and the different dimensions of women — what made it fascinating to specifically — to do that within the context of Hindu mythology — as opposed to just writing a poem about female sexuality and women in the real world?

The brewery gets louder. I notice that the table behind us is now full of people — a group of friends enjoying beers. I wonder if they can overhear our interview.

FRANCINE

I feel like women in the real world and sexuality has been done. I was, am and will never be interested in producing work that has been done. I'm trying to say it not-in-a-pretentious way. I don't want to write something similar to someone else because I feel I could do something different. I could do more. I could produce it in a different way. Yeah.

ARUSHANI

Do you feel like there's some link between you and Hinduism that makes you comfortable with appropriating, if you want to use that word, I don't know what word to use, or 'representing'?

FRANCINE

I feel like yes, I have a link. My ancestors are certainly not always going to be Catholic so it's part of me and a part I choose to recognise. I'm not like maybe other Christians who tend to sort of dismiss that aspect of themselves and don't like opening themselves up to the possibility of – you know. It's part of my heritage. I feel like it's important for me to research it, to learn about it, not just to learn about it through stereotypes – to actually engage with part of my heritage. What I consider it to be. Sexuality is a very complex subject for me. What I like about writing it in this way as opposed to a confessional poem, is that confessional poetry is very indulgent. I am so aware of that indulgence that I'm afraid to write. What happens usually is that I will write the confessional poem and then I will link it to something else. I'll have the poem and I'll have the – say it's Hindu mythology or a God or a Goddess, a myth – and then I'll see how I can work the two into each other to make something new. Instead of simply just writing a confessional poem. I know I could write something different and more representative of whatever is going on inside my head. I hope I don't sound pretentious?

Sylvia Plath is one of Francine's first influences. Fascinated by Plath's rejection of patriarchal ideals, she sought out Plath's notebooks and journals. Having been brought up in a household that combined the conservatism of Catholicism and Indian culture, the pressure of being moulded into a woman fit for marriage and motherhood, underpinned her upbringing. Francine, however, was not prepared to succumb to the roles that were prescribed to her.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

FRANCINE

Men play such a dominant role in the broader culture. Even when you don't have a physical man, that idea of the husband is always around. The anxiety of having to become someone worthy of a husband is a theme in her poetry. It's like '*you* have to aspire to it' not that '*we* both have to aspire to it.' In my house it was always like 'what's your husband going to say if he sees your tattoos, what's your husband going to say if you can't cook.' All of these things are quite similar to her underlying feeling. Of course in America it's different and she's a white a woman but I think the fact that – being put into a role is not easy.

After several relationships and a teaching residency in China, Francine registered for a PhD in English at Stellenbosch University. It was then that she met Christoph, who was studying a PhD at the same university. In 2017, Christoph became her husband. Although Francine enjoys a nourishing marriage, she is very much concerned about the old-fashioned expectations thrust upon many young Indian women in Durban, even today.

In August 2018, Francine and her husband will move to Italy for a year. She will continue working on a confidential writing project. The project will challenge misrepresentations and misconceptions of women in the South African Indian community, who are often regarded as sexually and intellectually passive homemakers.

FRANCINE

It's like if someone doesn't cook for them, in essence, something has gone totally wrong with their lives. To some extent, my dad is similar but he will also say 'your mother doesn't feel like cooking, I don't feel like doing anything so let's just go out for dinner' so I have a bit of both. Maybe because he's a bit different, it's encouraged to me to see that. That aspect of food – I don't understand why it's necessary for you to expect it. But I would be ok if someone asked me to do it for them because I

could say no. I would be ok with that. I'm not a person that will be offended – I would just want to be asked.

"MAIZENA" PRINT ADVERTISMENT. *CENTENARY OF INDIANS*: 1960



Fig. 15. Maizena Advert from: Pather, S.R. *Centenary of Indians*. Durban: Cavalier Publishers, 1960. p.57.

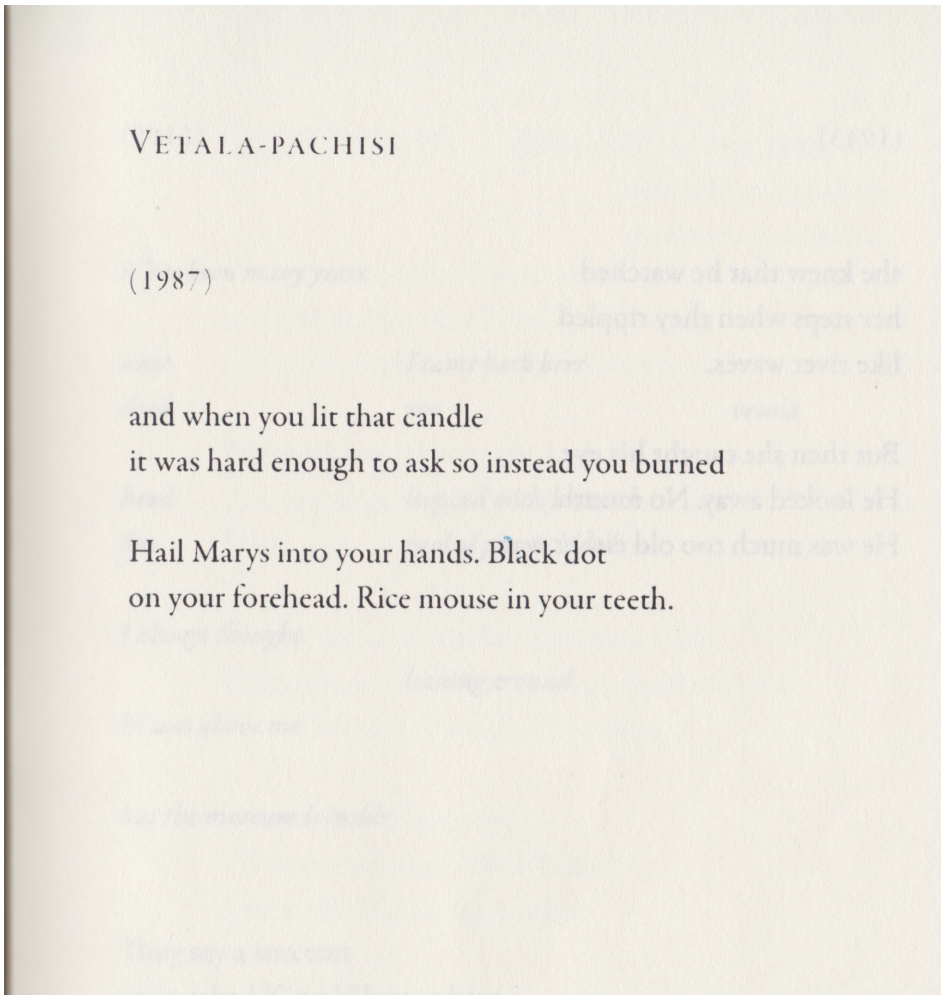
S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
How did you know about it?

FRANCINE
I was researching the word *vetala*. Did I say it right?

"Vetala-Pachisi" is a poem that runs over four pages in the collection. Three of the four pages contain no more than seven lines.

"VETALA-PACHISI." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



VETALA-PACHISI

(1987)

and when you lit that candle
it was hard enough to ask so instead you burned

Hail Marys into your hands. Black dot
on your forehead. Rice mouse in your teeth.

Fig. 16. Scanned images of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Vetala-Pachisi". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 33-36. (See next page for continuation of fig. 16.)

(1943)

she knew that he watched
her steps when they rippled
like river waves.

But then she caught his eye.
He looked away. No mouth.
He was much too old either way.

(2012)

it has been many years

since *I came back here*
dead *zoo* *vetala*

head *leopard with his catch*
feet *pool of plastic blood*

I always thought
looking around
he was above me

but the museum is inside

They say a sorcerer
once asked King Vikramaditya
to capture a vetala who lived in a tree
that stood in the middle of a crematorium.

The only way to do that was by keeping silent.

But each time the king caught the ghost
the ghost would enchant the king
with a story that ended
with a question.

No matter how much he tried
the king found himself
unable to resist giving
an answer.

Fig. 16. Scanned images of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Vetala-Pachisi". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 33-36.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
Yeah. But what made you research the word?

FRANCINE
I was looking up ghosts.

ARUSHANI
Ghosts?

FRANCINE
I have different — I would like to call them research fields but they're not — they're just things that I'm interested in. In terms of things I always go back to — paranormal stuff is really interesting to me, I'm not saying that I believe in paranormal stuff but I'm really interested in the fact that every culture has a name for a ghost or a ghost-like being. I was doing some research on ghosts, supernatural beings, and then I fell upon the term and then I fell upon the myth and I thought it was really interesting. The three other parts have significant meanings for the dates. It's an imagined time of 1987, 43 and 2012, was pretty much when I was writing it. So 87 is based on my mum, 43 on my gran and obviously 2012 is me. So 87 is from the perspective of my mother. 43 is from the perspective of my maternal grandparents. 87 was the year before my mum met my dad and 43 is possibly the year that my grandparents met. What seems to be prevalent to me about my mother figure in this collection, and it's kind of representative of my mum, when I was just out of high school there was a bit of an obsession about getting married. And who you're going to marry, at what age, how's it going to go, you better hurry up, need to find someone. All of these kinds of things were said. In writing poetry I came to realise that very often these things don't have much to do with me and has more to do with the way she was raised and probably what she

heard growing up or she has a bit of – a, what's the word – not obsession?

ARUSHANI

Concern?

FRANCINE

Yeah, for marriage. So for her, at my age, I made the assumption that it must have been a pretty big deal. At my age then, I was about twenty-three? Twenty-two, twenty-three. So at that age I thought, she must have been freaking out, like when is she going to get married, all that stuff. So that's based on this poem. In my family if you want something you have to pray and you have to pray to Mary to ask her to bring to you a good man.

ARUSHANI

Oh?

FRANCINE

Yeah.

ARUSHANI

So you had to actually pray for that. And did you?

FRANCINE

When I was younger I did, for sure. My mum probably did. It's kind of that idea of lighting the candle and saying prayers to invoke your husband. I just think it's a really interesting idea.

Several of the poems in *Thungachi* were written when Francine was completing her MA in English. The year was 2013 and marked a turning point in Francine's affinity with Catholicism.

FRANCINE

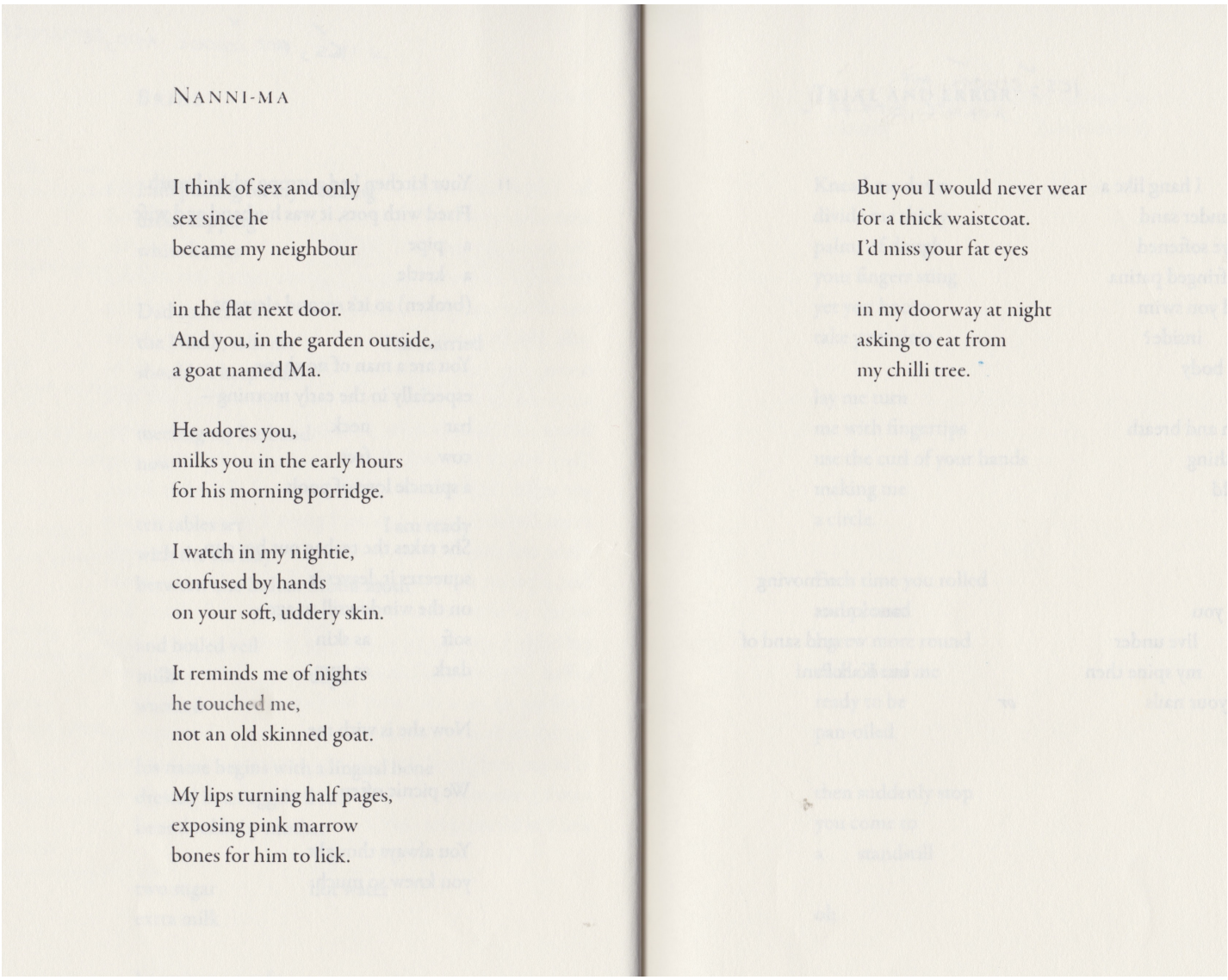
It's difficult to say but I definitely believe in a higher power. But I don't think institutional religion has always done me well. Especially when I think of the kind of religion I came from, which is quite patriarchal. I think, if there is a God, who am I to even ask? If there is, I would pretty much say it's whatever

magic that exists that brings the world together.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
Another poem that I want to ask you about, also dealing with sexuality — probably the most — is 'Nanni-Ma'.

"NANNI-MA." ***THUNGACHI*****: 2017**



NANNI-MA

I think of sex and only
sex since he
became my neighbour

in the flat next door.
And you, in the garden outside,
a goat named Ma.

He adores you,
milks you in the early hours
for his morning porridge.

I watch in my nightie,
confused by hands
on your soft, uddery skin.

It reminds me of nights
he touched me,
not an old skinned goat.

My lips turning half pages,
exposing pink marrow
bones for him to lick.

But you I would never wear
for a thick waistcoat.
I'd miss your fat eyes

in my doorway at night
asking to eat from
my chilli tree.

Fig. 17. Scanned images of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Nanni-Ma". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 26-27.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

ARUSHANI
I get the impression that it was set in the past but can you tell me anything about what was in mind when you were writing it and where did you envision it being set – in terms of time period and location?

FRANCINE
Time period –

ARUSHANI
And in terms of location because I feel like I could see this in Chatsworth but I don't know if that's what you had in mind when you were writing it?

FRANCINE
You felt like this could happen in Chatsworth?

ARUSHANI
I just felt like I could see this – yeah.

In Chatsworth many individual, double-storeyed houses are divided exactly down the middle by an interior wall. Two different families occupy one house – one family per side. In most houses, a short wall protrudes from the outer middle point, separating the yards of the two families, so that they each have distinct driveways and house numbers. Furthermore, each half of the house is painted a colour that is different to the other. Driving through the narrow, steep streets, an array of vivid colours in small spaces, give the impression of a larger life. Palm trees line the highways while most households nurture banana, pawpaw or mango trees in their backyards. Dogs are friendly and meandering, and fowls clack within yards.

FRANCINE
You know what I imagine – you know in Chatsworth – what do they call it, the barn door? The half-door? The door that's split, where you can open the top but keep the bottom closed.

ARUSHANI
I have that door at home.

FRANCINE
What is called?

ARUSHANI
I don't know what it's called, I just call it the door!

We both laugh and I am surprised by the late revelation. I grew up in Umhlatuzana, one of the later additions to the larger Chatsworth township. Houses of various shapes, sizes and style can be found in Umhlatuzana, resembling conventional suburban houses. My parents built their house in the early 1980s. We had no fowl or farm-life as far as I can remember, yet the barn door remains in our kitchen, possibly as a homage to Chatsworth.

FRANCINE
Ok. The image of the goats at the door – it's that door. That kind of door.

The waiter comes over, asking if we would like anything else. Francine checks the time and orders a margarita.

FRANCINE
I've never seen it in a white person's house – to the white people's houses that I've been to, except in a farm.

ARUSHANI
Oh ok that makes sense to me now.

FRANCINE
In Chatsworth people have chickens and they don't want the chickens to go inside – my grandmother's sister had chickens and that's why she needed the door – sometimes the chickens used to wander into the kitchen and then you got chickens in the house, or things like that. You know in Chatsworth there's stray dogs, they just come into the – cause they keep their gate open sometimes – so they just come in. So that door is always closed so that stray dogs don't just wander into your house or – I assume that's why.

I tell Francine about the door at my house and where my parents lived before moving to Chatsworth. She seems to be as interested in my story as I am in hers.

ARUSHANI
Anyway, getting back to the poem, so where was it set? Or was it just based on ideas —

FRANCINE
I had that idea of the door. I had an idea of a goat. Goats are very interesting creatures, they're funny. They're very funny creatures. They seem more intelligent than you would assume them to be. I often include animals in my poems because I love animals. The first line that I came up with, the first three lines, but not “in the flat next door”, that came slightly afterwards.

ARUSHANI
So did that make you contextualise more?

FRANCINE
I guess so. I needed to situate it. To say 'neighbour' and I didn't grow up in a — I grew up in a house.

ARUSHANI
So is it based on your experience but using inspiration from other ideas?

FRANCINE
I think this is — there's so many poems about that guy, God!

During our interview at Fortunes Cafe, Francine talked about a secret relationship she once had. Several poems in *Thungachi,* including “Dholl”, contain the character of a male lover, who is based on the same person.

ARUSHANI
Ah, was he a neighbour?

FRANCINE
No he wasn't. He wasn't a neighbour. But in terms of using the word neighbour it was about — the beginning lines are about sex as a personification. So that person helped me to see —

The waiter arrives with Francine's margarita in hand. He warns her that it's quite strong and that she should sip

it slowly. She laughs ironically, assuring him that she will try.

FRANCINE

He opened up a lot of things for me in sexuality that I've never experienced before even though I'd been in one one-year relationship and one three-year relationship, I had never considered myself to be part of the act. Like my needs didn't seem to be met in a way that was amazing. It was always just like, 'uh it's ok, it's nice to do it' but you know, it wasn't to the point where it was amazing. And that's probably because — this is something that he told me — I had probably never had a full-on orgasm. I probably just like, had not even gotten close because I wasn't being taken care of correctly. Probably because the two guys before him were virgins. My first boyfriend and I were both virgins. My second boyfriend also happened to be a virgin but I wasn't. So nobody knew what they were doing, pretty much. And then here comes this guy who's like mature and older and knows things, so he taught me a lot of necessary things that I feel like every woman should know but I didn't know that before. And I guess that's why the poem is so complicated and strange. Because I was learning a lot of things and I feel like 'learning' is the right word. I wasn't just like in the moment. I had to learn things about myself that I wasn't — that I had no idea about. I didn't know. Nobody taught me anything and my boyfriends were not — they had no idea either. I was in a bit of a weird space because I was mature emotionally but in terms of sexual maturity — I knew nothing. Which is what I feel like a lot of women probably go through — a lot of Indian women probably go through that even more. So I have a lot of sympathy for Indian women because I feel like your needs, as a woman, being in a sexual relationship, are often not taken care of.

ARUSHANI
And is that why you maybe, I don't know if this is purposeful or if this is my interpretation of it, that it's set in a more backward time? Because you invoke these images of farm life or something, I saw Chatsworth but I'm thinking of a very old-fashioned —

FRANCINE
You mean, not primitive but —

ARUSHANI
Yeah but in the past.

FRANCINE
Like a pastoral?

ARUSHANI
Yeah.

FRANCINE
I think so. I think that me invoking the more simpler times, because — life is a lot different now. Maybe it's possible that a long time ago women had more control over their own bodies but modern society has marginalised our need to know our own bodies. But it's also that, I feel like bringing in an animal aspect is just representative of the fact that we actually are animals, essentially. Especially in terms of our bodies — our bodies function in a certain way and certain things will make you feel a certain way — if you do certain things. That is biologically — that's what's going to happen. In that we are kind of animalesque because a certain set of actions is going to cause this reaction and that's very instinctual. It's really hard for me to write poems of intimacy that don't involve that sense of instinct. Of course now you have to work really hard on how that instinct comes about. It's almost like you have to disregard your intellect a little, sort of just go out of your mind and stop overthinking it and just be. And it's hard to write that into a poem, instinct.

ARUSHANI
So the instinctual is quite important to you?

FRANCINE
It's very important, yeah.

ARUSHANI
How do you use your instinct with your poetry?

FRANCINE
Generally – so I'll write a poem. It's easier if I explain about a poem. So I'll write a poem like 'Nanni-Ma' and I'll write it pretty much without indication of where the poem is going and then when I start to set it out, I'm really meticulous. What I'll do is – I'll write it – and then I'll read it and if it seems too plain or too cliché or something like that, I'll switch words. Sometimes from the line underneath it, sometimes from the line above it, I'll switch them. And then sometimes I'll switch them that way –

She points to words of 'Nanni-Ma' and twists her fingers on the page.

FRANCINE
So that way. So I generally try to do that and that's instinct based and that's not because I'm over intellectualising it and thinking, those words just don't belong here, I need to change them somehow.

ARUSHANI
So it starts off quite instinctively and then you analyse?

FRANCINE
How does it sound, does it sound better like this, does it sound better like that. Also the use of 'how does it sound' is very instinctual.

ARUSHANI
So when you're writing poems, after the initial putting the idea on paper, do you read it out loud? And then listen to —

FRANCINE
I never read out loud.

ARUSHANI
So when you say sound —

FRANCINE
In my head.

ARUSHANI
Okay.

FRANCINE
I can hear the sound of the words and then I; generally, if it doesn't sound good I'll pick a word out. Usually the words that I initially write are placeholders for the words that I will come to use. By placeholders I mean that it's just holding a space there, so say the word is, I don't know, 'dark'. For me sometimes a word like dark is too simplistic depending on the context. So I will look for synonyms then I'll find a synonym, then I'll look for synonyms of that word, or something like that. I actually have a book of synonyms, like a really old one. Sometimes I look at that book cause this book is not from now, so it's synonyms from like 50 years ago, different from the synonyms that we have now. I like to give texture to my writing in that way.

FORTUNES CAFE. WINDERMERE, DURBAN: 25 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

FRANCINE
At the time when I first started writing seriously was Honours, 2011. At that time I had ideas of what I wanted to write but I didn’t have a foundation — my writing identity wasn’t fully formed. I was still very much a fledgling writer. I was still coming into my own and I needed to latch onto someone that didn’t write the same

as me, but that I could look up to, like a role model writer. Usually you would look for someone older than you but similar to you. There was no one. My supervisor and I researched it a lot. We looked and looked and looked. There was no one with a debut collection of poetry of South African Indian female descent. There was no one.

ARUSHANI
Even looking at South African Indian males, that's also not that common.

FRANCINE
Yeah and the thing is, South African Indian men are very different. Women and men function in a very different way. We are raised very differently. Even though I did have a copy of a South African Indian young man's poetry collection – I could relate to it – but it didn't represent me.

ARUSHANI
Who was this?

FRANCINE
Dashen Naicker. I could relate to it for sure, I really enjoyed his poetry but it wasn't an accurate representation of myself, or something similar to me. I still felt that it wasn't enough for me to call him a cornerstone. Of course he was an inspiration because if he could do it – maybe I could do it. But in terms of 40, 50, even 60-year-old women writing poetry – there was really no one. My supervisor was even quite shocked. You don't think about it until you start doing the research and then you're like 'oh'. Because I was writing Creative Writing Masters, it was important for me to have someone that had written a debut collection of poetry that was at least part of the Indian diaspora. I've asked quite a few friends and family why they think there's not a lot of people writing and they say that writing wasn't really a career option. It's not a viable career option. For my mum for instance, it wasn't something that she could do. Even

if she wanted to write a book, how would she get into the publishing industry? She wouldn't know the road to make the road to get there at that time, when she was around my age. Not that she ever wanted to be a writer, just in general, if she had intended. It's really interesting. How do you feel about it?

ARUSHANI
I think you're right when you say that it's not a viable career option.

FRANCINE
Financially speaking.

1885 WRAGG COMMISSION REPORT EXCERPTS. *CENTENARY OF INDIANS*: 1960.

Industrious Indians

"Free Indians thrive in Natal, their industrious habits cause them to prosper in nearly every occupation in which they engage. They show commendable industry in fishing and fish curing; the Indian fishing settlement in Salisbury Island and Durban Bay has been of manifest advantage not only to the Indian but to the White inhabitant of the Colony. They do remarkably well as cultivators in the coast districts of small parcels of land on short leases. In such agricultural pursuits they have competed with their former masters and the quantity of maize grown by them has been an important factor in lowering for some years the market price of the cereal.

"In numerous localities in the uplands as well as in the coast districts, they have converted waste and un-productive land into well-kept gardens planted with vegetables, tobacco, maize and fruit trees. They settle in the vicinity of Durban and Pietermaritzburg and have succeeded in winning for themselves almost entirely the supplying of vegetables to the local markets. In fairness to the free Indian we must observe that the competition is legitimate in its nature and it certainly has been welcome by the general public. There can be no doubt that Natal is admirably suited whether as a temporary or a permanent home to the Indian immigrants."

Wragg Commission Report, 1885.

Fig. 18. Excerpts from the 1885 Wragg Commision Report from: Pather, S.R. *Centenary of Indians*. Durban: Cavalier Publishers, 1960. p.205.

FORTUNES CAFE. WINDERMERE, DURBAN: 25 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

The cafe is bustling with the lunchtime crowd.

FRANCINE
Do you have an answer?

ARUSHANI
My own answer, why don't Indians write a lot? No I don't. I'm trying to figure it out myself. I think it's such an instinctive thing that everything you do has to be enterprising and in some way benefit your survival. And I think that's a huge part of the consciousness.

FRANCINE
For sure.

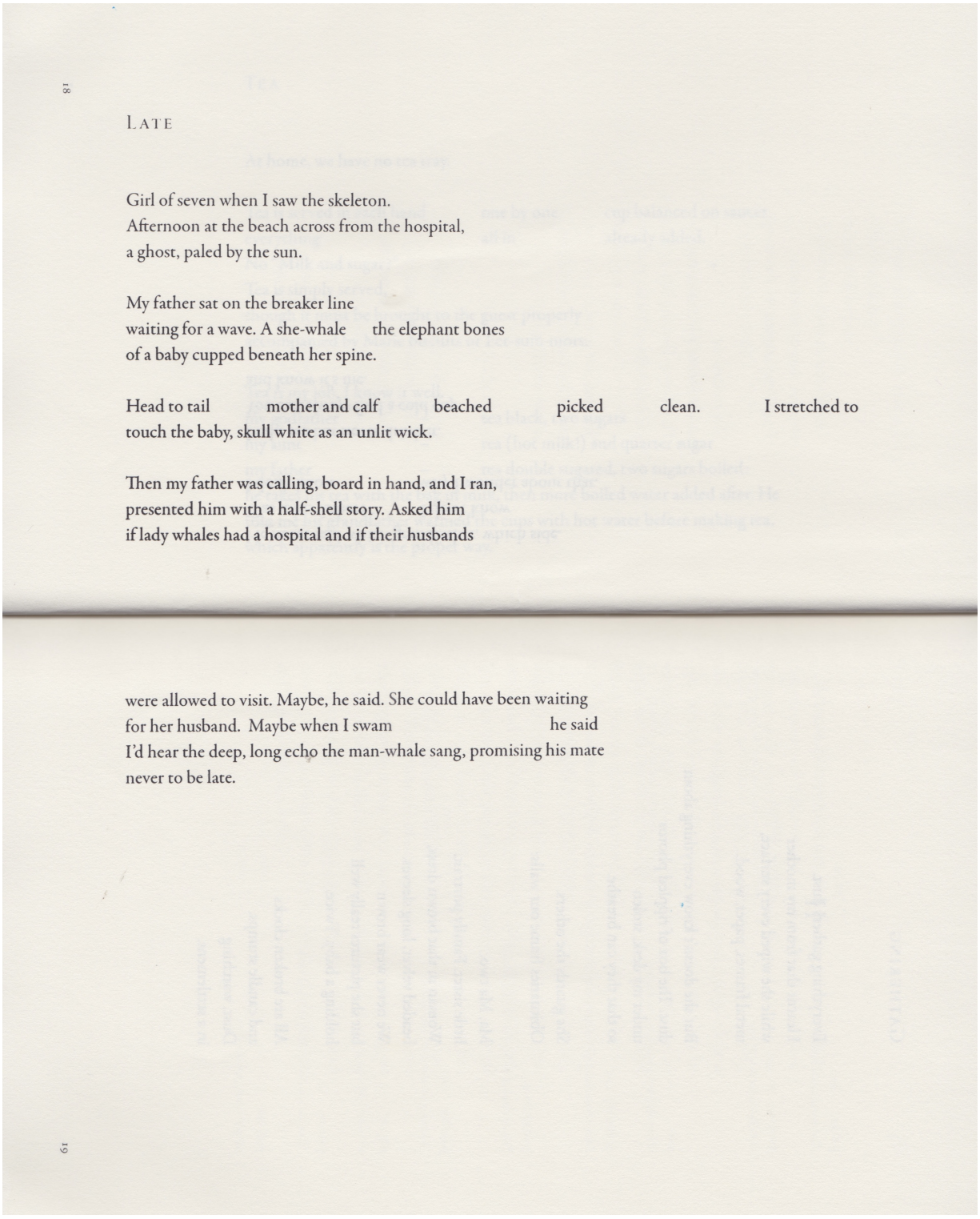
S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

Francine and I place our lunch orders. As we wait for our meals, we are momentarily sidetracked from the poetry. We chat about mental health issues, Durban cuisine and dating. For a while, it feels like we are on the crux of friendship. The mood is significantly lighter as we come to know one another.

Eventually we get back to her poetry, and discuss ”Late”. The poem, like “Tea”, on the page before it, runs over two pages and requires the book to be turned to a landscape position in order to be read.

The poem’s poignant description of a beached female whale, having died waiting for her mate, brings to mind the parting of families during indenture, the forbidden crossing of the *kala pani*, the myth of the return to India. Husbands, wives, children — late.

"LATE." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



18

LATE

Girl of seven when I saw the skeleton.
Afternoon at the beach across from the hospital,
a ghost, paled by the sun.

My father sat on the breaker line
waiting for a wave. A she-whale the elephant bones
of a baby cupped beneath her spine.

Head to tail mother and calf beached picked clean. I stretched to
touch the baby, skull white as an unlit wick.

Then my father was calling, board in hand, and I ran,
presented him with a half-shell story. Asked him
if lady whales had a hospital and if their husbands

were allowed to visit. Maybe, he said. She could have been waiting
for her husband. Maybe when I swam he said
I'd hear the deep, long echo the man-whale sang, promising his mate
never to be late.

19

Fig. 19. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Late". *Thungachi*, 2017, pp. 18-19.

"SHIVA'S DANCE." ***INSIDE INDIAN INDENTURE*****: 2010.**

Desai and Vahed express the need to investigate the narratives of those oppressed by indenture, beyond the scope of British documents:

> We still need to break the bounds of our national lens and relate the stories of those left behind, those whose lives were consumed by a 'signal' to come to Africa or by waiting for the return of their husbands, not to mention those women and children abandoned on their return at the docks of Calcutta and Madras by husbands who, because they were already married, couldn't possibly take their new wives back to their villages or had married out of caste and could never become part of the village any more. (*III* 5)

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 – AFTERNOON

FRANCINE
Well it's a culmination of moments. It didn't happen, literally. Definitely the poem is an imagined space. I was trying to capture the feelings of childhood – a childlike sensibility and my dad. I like the setting of Addington because of the hospital in the background. The the –

ARUSHANI
I know.

Francine is referring to Addington Hospital, a bayside hospital in Durban.

FRANCINE
And I kind of had this idea of, this image of, a whale beached on the beach. But not any of the gross stuff. Just the bones of a whale and how that would look on Addington beach. It was a really surreal image. I got this idea that I was sitting on the beach: there were a lot of times where I was sitting on the beach and my dad was in the water surfing, and I was looking for him and watching him. Sometimes you can't see and then they're there. All those kind of things culminated but the image of the whalebones was really the driving force

of the poem. It was such a strong image to me in my imagination because it was something that we would never see. But to me it would look incredibly beautiful if you had to see it. It's also incorporating questions you would ask as a child, not knowing, not having knowledge, and the kind of answers that your parents give you. My parents would often tell me stories – they didn't talk to me like I was a small adult...there's a lot of taboo and unspoken subjects in the Indian community and a way to not dismiss that – but to avoid the subject that is taboo or unspoken is to tell stories, that sort of bypass these issues.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

About a month earlier, Francine suggested I read *Chatsworth* by Pravasan Pillay. Ironically, I could not find a copy at Durban bookstores and hadn't read it at the time of our interviews.

FRANCINE
Ok. I'd be interested to see what you think as well. I found it just a wonderful book. It was super well written. It wasn't too caricature-esque. It wasn't.

ARUSHANI
A fair representation?

FRANCINE
Fair representation. I had to sort of reroute my mind in terms of reading because the description, just the narrative, is in standard English but the spoken English is not. It's in dialect. Completely. It's just not anything I've seen on paper before. I found that challenging but a good challenge. I was so happy to get used to that. I would want everybody in Chatsworth, everybody in Durban, to read that book. I really enjoyed it. I'm pretty much more critical on South African literature than international literature. I feel like

there's quite a high standard and people can aspire to that high standard. They can really try and should definitely do that. Just because you're of a different race and a disadvantaged background, you can write anything you want and you can do it well. South Africans have proved that, I think.

ARUSHANI
It's not appreciated internationally.

FRANCINE
No it's not. I wish it was.

"AUSTERE BEAUTY OF CHATSWORTH." ***THE MAIL & GUARDIAN*****. THE INTERNET: 21 SEPTEMBER 2018.**

The Mail & Guardian publishes an online article by Niren Tolsi. It's a review of Pravasan Pillay's recently published short story collection, *Chatsworth*. Pillay's description of Chatsworth in an interview is quoted in the article:

PRAVASAN PILLAY
It's a place where people were forcibly removed to, from other parts of Durban during apartheid [from 1950 onwards], so there is an obvious sadness in its origins — however, the melancholia I sense is something more, it's a way of being in the world, it's a heaviness.

STARBUCKS. FLORIDA ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 - MORNING

ARUSHANI
I look forward to reading his (Pravasen Pillay's) book. Probably the only other one that engages with the dialect that way is by Agnes Sam. I don't know if you read her book — it's a collection of short stories.

FRANCINE
Maybe I should ask you first. Would you say that the Muslim community in Durban is part of the Indian community?

ARUSHANI
I would say so but —

FRANCINE
Because it's quite a controversial question.

ARUSHANI
But because the Indian community is so diverse, I would say I see more of the Muslim community represented in South African Indian literature.

FRANCINE
Or even South African literature.

ARUSHANI
Yeah and anything from Chatsworth – that lifestyle – is rare to read. Almost non-existent.

Francine recalls one of her earlier inspirations, Shubnum Khan, the author of *Onion Tears*.

FRANCINE
She was sort of an example to me. She was the only woman of color that I knew that was writing a book, that was young. At the time I knew her, she must have been around my age, so 28, and I was like 22. I was like 'wow, amazing, she's doing it, maybe I can do it as well.' It's interesting. I think there's more representation of South African Indian Muslims, in S.A. lit. Imraan Coovadia is also from Durban?

ARUSHANI
I think so, originally. When you say that you're much more critical of South African Literature –

Francine starts taking her pills, having forgotten to take them earlier.

ARUSHANI
In comparison to international literature, how do you think of yourself as a writer? Do you see yourself as belonging to the South African canon or more to an Indian diasporic canon?

FRANCINE

I certainly want to be a part of the greater international canon. I don’t know who decides it. I definitely want to be a part. It’s the same with South African literature, of course, I am a part of it, sort of by default I guess. Whether I feel like I belong, I do feel...a little bit of a loner. I think that’s just because, if I go to events, if I go to a festival or a poetry reading or anything like that, I don’t often see the South African Indian community represented on the stage or even in the audience.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN. 27 JUNE 2018 - AFTERNOON

It's nearly 16:00 and my time with Francine is about to end. We talk about her hesitance to write prose stories about people in Chatsworth. She is currently looking into long-form techniques but ascertains that poetry will always be woven into her writing.

FRANCINE

I think it's because I hear it. I hear lines. I hear line by line sometimes in my head. So if you hear it. If I hear it I feel like I should write it down. And those are generally not the long form, those are more poems. It's very instinctual and I feel if I hear it I must write it down.

ARUSHANI

And then what about that makes it easier to write a poem about, let's say Chatsworth, than writing a story about people in Chatsworth?

She tells me about a new project she is working on which cannot be disclosed in the interview transcripts. We then continue to talk about her concerns with representation.

FRANCINE

The thing is, I'm really afraid of misrepresentation and cultural appropriation and I know that in the broader sense it's my culture but also, I'm not really –

ARUSHANI
From Chatsworth.

FRANCINE
I'm not really from Chatsworth but also I'm not really interested in stereotyping anyone. I couldn't do it. It's not in my nature to do it.

ARUSHANI
So you still negotiate the kind of ethical issues of representation —

FRANCINE
Yeah.

ARUSHANI
Even though you're Indian, and to someone else who doesn't know Chatsworth —

FRANCINE
It's very important. If I had to not care about that and just write whatever I wanted and publish it — it wouldn't be me. That is a subject that is very important to me. I think it's important to a lot of people to see themselves represented and to get that wrong would be, really not good. I feel like I would be failing, not just to myself — I really kick my butt about that, if I fail at something — but also failing to the greater community. It's not something I'm interested in. I'm dedicated to getting it right or as close as I can get to right.

It's 16:50 and Francine gets a call from her husband. I check my watch. We have gone over time. We ask for the bill and I remind Francine to sign my copy of *Thungachi.* She takes a few minutes, writing a message on the first page.

ARUSHANI
I'm really grateful you gave me so much time, especially since you're leaving.

FRANCINE
I wanted to.

I pack away my notebook and *Thungachi*, without reading the message. We leave the restaurant for Francine's parent's house.

SIMON RESIDENCE. WINDERMERE, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 — AFTERNOON

A palm tree towers over a double-storeyed peach house. White pillars and window awnings glisten in the heat. I pull over to the side of the road. Francine waits for her sister to help her up the stairs to the entrance.

FRANCINE
The sun sets so early here.

Francine and I say our goodbyes when her sister arrives at the car. I am about to make the 30km drive back to Chatsworth. I roll my window down. The beach is only three kilometers away but smells closer. I remember that it is the same beach that carried the beginnings of our ancestry. And no place in Durban exists without the subtext of our predecessors.

INDIANS RETURNING TO INDIA [1870?]. *CENTENARY OF INDIANS*: 1960.



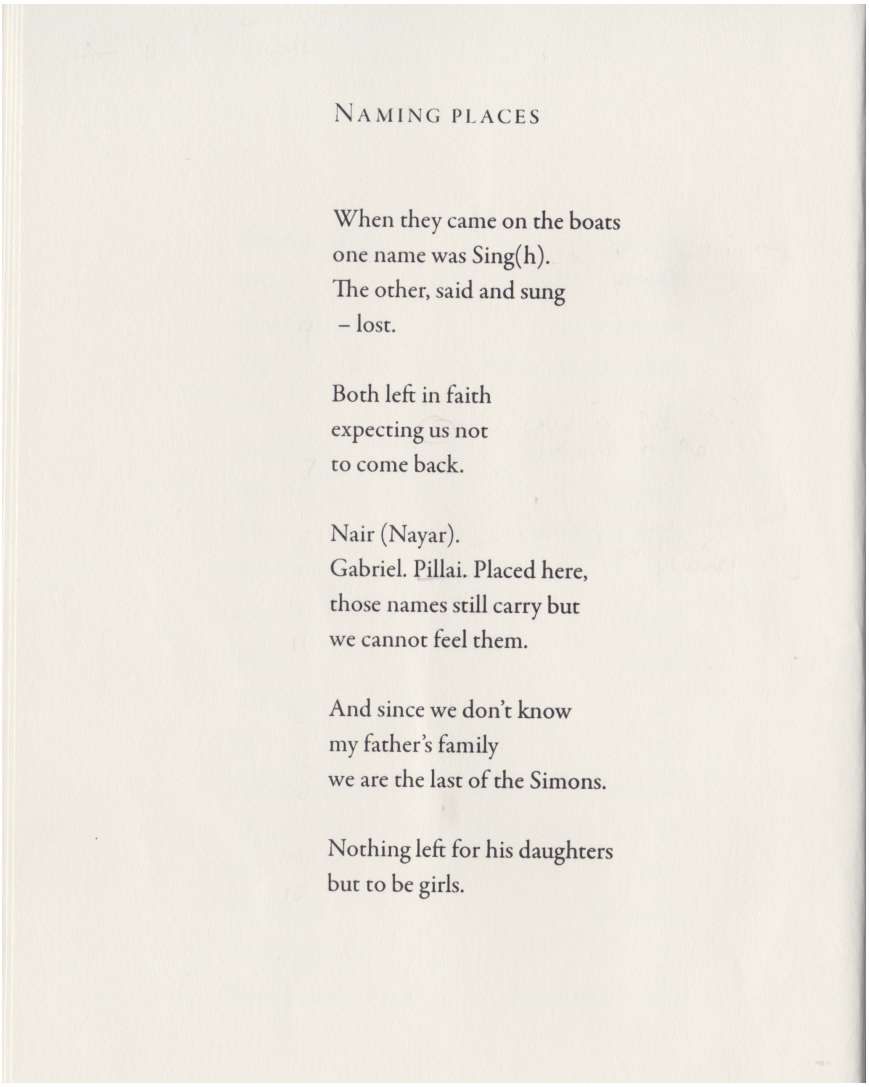
After 10 years of service, some Indians, taking advantage of the free passage, returned home where they lodged complaints of poor conditions and enslavement in the Natal cane fields.

Fig. 20. Captioned photograph of Indians boarding the ship to return to India from: Pather, S.R. *Centenary of Indians*. Durban: Cavalier Publishers, 1960. p. 61.

S43. STATION ROAD, DURBAN: 27 JUNE 2018 – AFTERNOON

FRANCINE
A lot of people have told me that they don't get my poetry because it's too cryptic, because it's difficult, because it eludes meaning. Not only the poems that we talked about but the other poems. A lot of people have told me that.

"NAMING PLACES." *THUNGACHI*: 2017



NAMING PLACES

When they came on the boats
one name was Sing(h).
The other, said and sung
– lost.

Both left in faith
expecting us not
to come back.

Nair (Nayar).
Gabriel. Pillai. Placed here,
those names still carry but
we cannot feel them.

And since we don't know
my father's family
we are the last of the Simons.

Nothing left for his daughters
but to be girls.

Fig. 21. Scanned image of poem from: Simon, Francine. "Naming Places". *Thungachi*, 2017, p. 12.

Chapter Five

Reading Selected Poems from *Thungachi*: Analysis and Findings

This chapter provides an analysis of five poems from *Thungachi*, namely: "Naming Places", "Tamil Familiars", "Rati", "Nanni-Ma" and "Betel-Nut". The discussion of the poems is presented in order of their appearance in the collection. This section delivers an additional layer of insight to Simon's poetry, unpacking some of the prevalent indigenous themes that arose in the interviews, where poems showed evidence of genealogical, empirical, spiritual, oral and experiential knowledge (Gone 4). I will interpret the selected poems using an *indigenous language of critique.* In doing so, I focus on a particular indigenous dynamic underlying each poem and suggest how it reframes or counters Western epistemology and/or patriarchal orders, through the use of decolonising principles. Throughout the analysis I draw attention to formal elements of the poetry, if and when it reinforces indigenous perspectives. Following the analysis of the five poems, I provide a brief summation of findings by making conjectures on Simon's attempt to indigenise poetry writing using feminist, decolonial aesthetics. I conclude this chapter by evaluating Simon's status as an IK holder.

5.1 The Politics of Naming in "Naming Places"

"Naming Places", the opening poem of *Thungachi*, deliberates about the arrival of multiple passenger ships that carried Indian indentured labourers to South Africa. The historical event, marking the beginnings of the SAI community, is paralleled by Simon's attempt at tracing the origins of her hybrid cultural identity. To indigenous peoples, place-names symbolise the reciprocal relationship between people and the Earth, denoting a unique connection to the landscape and invoking a sense of belonging (Kavanagh 47). Indigenous place-names were destroyed and replaced during the advent of colonialism, effectively dislodging people from their cultural histories (Kavanagh 54). In post-colonial poetry, place-names signify the reinstating of indigenous heterogeneity that was previously suppressed by colonialism (Ramazani

145). Simon's "Naming Places" ironically, focuses solely on surnames and has no mention of geographical places or landscapes:

> When they came on the boats
> one name was Sing(h).
> The other, said and sung
> —lost.
>
> Both left in faith
> expecting us not
> to come back.
>
> Nair (Nayar).
> Gabriel. Pillai. Placed here,
> those names still carry but
> we cannot feel them.
>
> And since we don't know
> my father's family
> we are the last of the Simons.
>
> Nothing left for his daughters
> but to be girls. (1-16)

Read in conjunction with the stanzas, the title interlinks people and place — people who have been displaced during indenture. Thus, 'places' are a metaphor for Indian bodies, whose place in the world and sense of belonging can only be found from within. The speaker maps out her ancestry, leading to the line "we are the last of the Simons" (14) allowing the reader to infer that the speaker is the poet herself. Simon describes the poem as a "hybrid poetics" used to track and piece together remembered and forgotten genealogies ("EWP" 36). Simon lists the oral narratives she received from unspecified family members regarding their precursors. She is prompted by varied renditions of Indian arrival on South African soil and is urged to "remember the historical event of Indian indentured labourers crossing the Indian Ocean to cut sugar cane in what was then Natal. A legendary feature of [her] maternal family's mythology" and to "remember that [her] father's family names have been forgotten" (37). Simon forages fragmented stories to determine her connection to India — a country she had never lived in but which percolates through her cultural repertoires. In the interviews Simon discussed a family legend of an Indian ancestor, a convert, who boarded the ship with the intention of promoting Catholicism. Simon heard this story from her maternal grandmother's sister. Her thesis reveals that she has a Hindu

ancestor with the surname *Singh*, whose name possibly changed before boarding the ship via Catholic conversion ("EWP" 37). It is unclear whether these two accounts refer to the same person. It is also unclear which ship was boarded, and whether the ancestor was an indentured labourer or a passenger migrant. The possibilities connote variable genealogies, pondered on throughout the poem.

In stanza one the *h* of the designator "Sing(h)" (2) is bracketed, conveying the transformation of Indian caste names into South African surnames during indenture administrative processes. *Sing* is a popular Hindu surname used in India, while the spelling *Singh* is predominantly used in South Africa. The discrepancy is attributed to the registration conducted by British authorities upon the arrival of ships at the Natal harbour. As per South Indian tradition, indentured migrants only had one name. These names were often misspelled and used as a first name along with a randomly assigned surname, abiding by the Christian order of naming (Hansen "WNFS" 214). The arbitrariness of the registration process allowed them to assume "caste names of intermediate or even higher castes" (215). The registration lists are the dubious point of reference if one wants to 'trace one's roots'. Simon highlights the issue with recorded historical evidence and effacement of oral histories through using the surname *Singh* as a pun for the verb *sing*. The speaker displays a sorrowful longing to hear the unknown ancestor, whose name and story existed only through the musicality of the spoken word in the lines, "The other, said and sung / – lost" (3-4).

The condensation of a diverse group of Indians, in the midst of the *kala pani*, allowed many indentured migrants to cast away their caste stratification — some of who claimed to return to their castes, only upon their return to India (Ebrahim-Vally 133). Thus, the "both" in stanza two (5) refers not to the two ancestors mentioned, but to their names which "left in faith / expecting us not / to come back" (5-7). As such, Simon presents *names* as *places* that people can leave and return to. Bodernhorn and Vom Bruck state, "Named bodies are manifestations of incorporate knowledge and as such have their own historicity" (20). In the context of indenture, names were unfixed signifiers, paralleling the Indians' lack of fixity to a geographic location. Simon negotiates the lack of continuity and stability by reimagining *named bodies* as *names without bodies*. Names then, are placeholders for missing homes and landscapes that would have otherwise served to be carriers of communal knowledge

and history. At the same time, names can be 'displaced' by people. For instance, the word "faith" (5) connotes religious conversions, resulting in name changes and to the hopes of greener pastures in South Africa. These hopes were thwarted by the exploitative and violent indenture system — prompting Indians to return to India, and thus to their old caste names (Desai and Vahed *III* 1-15). Stanza three reflects on SAI surnames that belonged to firstborns of Simon's South African family lineage ("EWP" 37). "Gabriel. Pillai. Placed here" (9), suggests that the names were constructed in South Africa. The paradox in "those names still carry / but we cannot feel them" (10-11), indicates that while many of the names are preserved, names cannot be felt unless the people belonging to them give them life, character, identity and body.

Not knowing her ancestors, Simon can only wander through her genealogy on the basis of names *without bodies* but considers this a substantial task in its own right. Bodernhorn and Vom Bruck postulate that name-changing signifies the processual disposition of subjectivity and identity (20). Simon's complex genealogy propels the cartographic task of plotting the terrains of family names because locating herself in relation to her predecessors is a significant determinant of her womanhood ("EWP" 36-37). As the poem develops, the name as a fixed identifier is obstructed to the point of a concluding bloodline in stanza four, "we are the last of the Simons" (14). Again we see names as provisional markers that are manifested by what Hansen calls an identity "in suspension" ("WNFS" 203). After charting her heritage, Simon ends the poem with lines laced with cultural commentary and gender politics, "Nothing left for his daughters / but to be girls" (15-16). The two lines deviate from the metrical pattern established: four-line stanzas followed by three-line stanzas — giving an abrupt, poignant ending. The patriarchal order has naturalised the convention of women and/or children she bears, taking on the last name of the husband/father. Considering the importance of names in deriving a sense of history and belonging, the loss of name is equivalent to the discontinuance of women's genealogies. In the end, all a SAI girl inherits is a gendered identity burdened by cultural and colonial patriarchal forces.

All the information Simon attained regarding her ancestors came from the women of her family. Her maternal grandmother changed from a Gabriel to a Pillai and there are

no stories from her father's family, with the exception of her paternal grandmother, with the last name *Nair* ("EWP" 37). Thus, her women ancestors are sources of information and subjects within the poem. In SAI culture, older women are perceived to be the keepers of names; addressing younger generations by their registered birth names without truncating or 'nicknaming', as is a contemporary SAI practice (Hansen "WNFS" 216). Old women are regarded as the custodians of Indian traditions and knowledge despite being historically the 'subaltern' — both within the borders of the sub-continent and colonial South Africa.

Throughout the poem, Simon refers to names as signifiers of people and their place in the world. The constant movement of the *names* across continents and movement of people *from* their original caste names, at times renders the name a *signifier without a signified*. Sharing similar views with Kristeva, Eagleton suggests the transcendence of the signifier in poetic language, such that the signifier is no longer a dissolved transmitter of the signified (68). Simon's use of language illustrates the possible detachment of the name (signifier) from the person (signified). Boderhorn and Vom Bruck deduce the separability and inseparability of names to their bearers: sometimes the name reflects the persona of its bearer while at other times, names are detachable forms of property (25). They make the following conjectures on the politics of naming:

> In many of these cases, names may form an aspect not of individual, but of collective property, the basis on which rights may be asserted and transmitted. In cases where names classify, they may convey coded information about, for instance, kinship, gender or class; and in the most individuating cases, they may convey no information other than a particular person is a particular name. (25)

Simon shifts from names as signifiers without signifieds (people) in the first three stanzas, to "we are the last of the Simons" (14). She places herself within the identifier *Simon* and furthermore, genders the 'we' as "girls" (16). One can only understand the context and significance of the other surnames in the poem by researching Simon's background and creation process. Read in context of the poet's ancestry, the poem values names as cultural remnants and simultaneously rebukes them as methods of subjectification. When names transcend to the level of place, they can either be mere property or complex landscapes inscribed with events and experience. If one moved rapidly between landscapes the way Simon moves between

various names in the poem, one would find themselves in a "provisional and indeterminate space . . . with only a remote and at best sketchy idea of India as a cultural 'Motherland'. . ." (Hansen "WNFS" 203).

Smith highlights 'naming' as an indigenous project to recuperate and reinstate IK, which must not be understood as a simple contribution to history, but as accounts that converge with and unsettle Western approaches to history-making in order "to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying" (28). Although many names are lost or unheard of as a result of colonialism and indenture, Simon salvages pieces of her erratic genealogy, to better (dis)locate her place in history and the world. The tactful positioning of the poem at the front left page, with no other poems creating a palimpsest affect behind its print, emphasises Simon's lack of historical rootedness. Consequently, the poem sets the foundations for Simon to mediate her history without relying on textual sources and the lack thereof.

5.2. Orality and Animism in "Tamil Familiars"

During our interview discussion of "Tamil Familiars", Simon revealed that the poem is based on the regulations of her maternal grandmother — a daughter of a staunch Catholic family who married a Tamil man. Some of her grandmother's beliefs bore no resemblance to evangelical teachings, and which Simon could only associate with the second half of her cultural heritage — Tamil ("EWP" 21). A census report taken in 1936 indicates that that majority of Indians shipped to South Africa (83 731 out of 211 071) were Tamil-speaking (Mesthrie *ELS* 9). Tamil is currently one of India's twenty-two official languages (H. Singh) and according to Zvelebil, "Tamil can claim one of the longest unbroken literary traditions of any of the world's living languages" (2). Given the oral genesis of Dravidian languages, a linear dating sequence for pre-historic forms of Tamil cannot be determined (Shulman 40). Semantic explorations into the Vedas — the earliest Indian literature dating as far back as 1000 BCE (Dasgupta 6) — reveal that the Sanskrit inscriptions of the texts contain phonetic influences of Tamil (Shulman 45-6). Moreover, linguistic analyses of the Hebrew Bible indicate the use of Tamil words, stemming from the history of Christian missionaries arriving in South India and borrowing words from indigenous speakers. Thus, there is speculation of Tamil being one of, if not the oldest, language in the

world (Shulman 45-6). Tamil is a fervent, rhythmic language that requires rapid tongue movement and hard-hitting of the palate, and yet it is "perhaps the only case of a very ancient language that still survives as a vibrant mother-tongue for tens of millions of speakers" (Shulman 17). By the 1980s in Natal, the use of Indian vernaculars as home languages was virtually non-existent. Ancestral languages were reserved for religious rituals and dialogues amongst the older generation, "yet the attachment to linguistic identities has persisted long after the vernaculars fell out of daily use . . . vernaculars became a sign of the past and purely of sentimental value" (Hansen *MoF* 75). Tamil in present-day South Africa is a cultural identifier beyond the scope of language. It is a way of life for its speakers, often imparted to their non-Tamil-speaking descendants. Shulman aptly describes its affect and influence:

> Tamil is, at its most basic, an intoxicating, godly fragrance . . . delicate, and pervasive, an existential undercurrent flowing through everything that lives, and as such intimately linked to the human faculty of memory and to musical poetry as the voice of memory and awareness. (19)

It is perhaps for this reason that Simon laments never learning her mother tongue during our discussion of "Rombu Unbu", and this is certainly why I shared the sentiment with her. Although Tamil is *familiar* to Simon, given by her grandmother's endorsement of animism, she is unable to access the ontological mindset that comes from being a speaker — a tension repeatedly reflected in her poem "Tamil Familiars":

> Grandmother used
> to warn me not to whistle:
> I'd call the snakes.
>
> She forbad me
> to sleep with my hair open:
> I'd wake up looking like a pichachi,
> gone to hell and back.
>
> She said not to eat
> out of the pot or it would rain
> on my wedding day.
>
> I did and I do.
>
> My mother tells me not to
> pick from the curry-leaf tree
> when it's that time of the month.
> It will die, she says.

Funny. It hasn't died yet.
And I never give a thought
to my wedding day. (1-18)

Simon explained in the interview that it is only her grandparent's generation that "learnt a good standard of the language" but that her parents only "know certain words". The first three stanzas relay a list of three warnings from the speaker's grandmother (based on Simon's maternal grandmother). The cautions are followed by the childlike rebellion of, "I did and I do" (11) indicating two possibilities: the speaker is not an ardent believer of the warnings, or is enticed by the idea of playing with fate. Stanza five outlines the instructions given to the speaker by her mother and makes up a third of the warnings mentioned in the poem, indicating the limitations of the mother's knowledge in comparison to the grandmother. The structure of the poem captures the varied levels of knowledge holding and knowledge dissemination amongst the three women figures in the poem. Stanzas four and six display the concurrence of the speaker's disbelief and curiosity. "Funny. It hasn't died yet" (16) clarifies that the speaker does not simply reject the warnings but puts their powers to the test and anticipates their consequences. Here we feel the tensions between rationalisation and scientific objectivity, due to increased exposure to Western influences, and the trajectories of thought that stem from indigenous theory and practice.

In the interview, Simon revealed that she is unsure of the origins of her family's worldviews, stating, "often nobody could really tell me". Thus, she wanted the poem to represent her family's oral culture in its naturally occurring form. She avoided consulting the Internet based on an instinctual prediction, "I just had the feeling if I did that, that something would be disrupted". Simon alludes to the importance of 'living archives'. To Davids, the 'living archive' is not "necessarily interested in being a part of the larger story or of being woven into the fabric of a place or event" and "does not necessarily pander to the demands of the material archive, but once included into that archive they can be grafted into its mythologies and made to demonstrate its truths" (81). Simon demonstrates an interest in according oral narratives their own space, hence using her written poetry as a form of material archive that encompasses the 'living archive'. As such, Simon blends permanence and transience by recording orality in written form. The poem shifts from past to present;

all past participles are applied to the speaker's grandmother: "Grandmother used / to warn me not to whistle:" (1-2), "She forbad me" (4) and "She said not to eat" (8). However, the mother's assertions are written in present tense: "My mother tells me not to" (12) and "It will die, she says" (15). During our interview session on 25th June, Simon confirmed that her maternal grandmother had passed away and that the day before (24th June) marked the tenth anniversary of her grandmother's death. The use of the past tense in the poem to refer to the grandmother's philosophies and the present tense for her mother's, indicates the continuity of oral traditions stretched over a vast period of time. The grandmother is no longer a 'living archive'. Now, the mother fulfils the responsibility of imparting Tamil wisdom to the family. Furniss postulates that "orality is performance", intimate and expository, and unlike the written word, it elicits an existing relationship between the speaker and listener (158). Simon is cognisant of her attempt to translate orality to written text and thus sidesteps any textual inquiry that could further tamper with the quality of knowledge imparted. Once on the page, the oral vignettes become subject to the gaze, static and susceptible to multi-perspectival readings (Furniss 12). "Tamil Familiars" blurs oral and written history in order to represent the attitudes of an acutely marginalised culture.

Facing the task of critiquing this poem in a framework that favours indigenous epistemologies, I consciously refrain from an etymological analysis of the grandmother's and mother's warnings in the poem, aware of the fact that I have only written anthropological accounts at my disposal, and that such origins do not tally with those of my own family elders. However, it is useful to note aspects of African and Hindu philosophies to suggest the wider ontological outlooks at play in the poem. I refer to both African and Hindu IK, given the melded cultural influences on SAI identity and similarities between both strands of thinking. Furthermore, Simon questions the incongruence of animistic thinking with her Catholic upbringing. Her thesis states, "However, this and other superstitions that we retain co-exist with our Catholic belief systems, sliding between various forms of inherited family spiritual traditions and epistemologies" ("EWP" 21). Simon associates animism with superstition when perceiving her family's ontology from the boundaries of scientific thinking. I have also inadvertently used the word *superstition* in our interview, sharing the same dilemma as Simon. I must reiterate that Western ontology renders human beings as possessors of agency to configure reliable knowledge through

dualistic separations of mind/body and natural/supernatural (Teffo and Roux 193-96). The poem reveals the tensions experienced by a speaker who is caught between two varying ontologies and who is, at times, prompted to view her family's beliefs through the lens of Western science.

In stanza two, the grandmother refers to the imagery of hell as a punishment for sleeping with loose hair. Some interpretations of Vedic scriptures postulate that hell is a literal place where evildoers are temporarily punished before being sent back to Earth (Dasgupta 25). Yet to a Catholic family, hell has more threatening, eternal connotations. In this case, one cannot go "to hell and back" (7). Still, it is unclear which 'hell' the grandmother was referring to. One possibility is that her Catholic understanding of hell, merged with the image of the "pichachi" (6) — the Tamil word for 'she-demon' (Mesthrie *DSAIE* 183) — brings both belief systems into co-existence. The mythical figure of the *pichachi* has the ability to travel to hell and back. Being a devilish spirit, the *pichachi* is immune to the rules of the human soul.

Ironically, the mother's caution seems to be in complete disjuncture with Catholic beliefs. "My mother tells me not to / pick from the curry-leaf tree / when it's that time of month" (12-14), illustrates the intimate relationship between the natural order of the female body, and the spirits residing in plants and trees. Communication in this case, is not a purely human ability, but occurs amongst all elements of nature. To understand this fully, we must understand the law of karma, whereby an individual's action has the power to ordain their happiness or misfortune. When consequences of one's actions cannot be experienced in one lifetime, the soul of the individual is reborn into the form of any living organism (Dasgupta 71). If all humans, animals, insects, flora and fauna contain souls, then humans are inevitably and inextricably linked to their natural counterparts. At the deepest level, karmic law presupposes monism, but on the level of human consciousness, it reinforces the mind/matter duality (Kak 5). It differentiates between psyche and physicality (Kak 5), only to demonstrate that the soul's connection to worldly phenomena is illusory (Dasgupta 74). This belief system has led Hindus on the path of Vedic rituals and rites of passage, which if performed correctly, are believed to purge karma (Dasgupta 72). Other governing mystical forces can produce certain outcomes, deterring some of the regular processes of causation. Thus, all occurrences are the result of an exchange

between mind and matter (Kak 11) and in this context it is plausible that the curry-leaf tree can respond to signals of the menstruating, female body.

Yet the ontology in "not to eat out of the pot or it would rain / on my wedding day" (8-10) transgresses the interconnectedness of living beings, bringing causality into the realm of objects. I have, countless times, been warned not to eat out of the pot or sleep without a hairband. I too, received no explanation on how my engagement with mundane objects could summon sinister forces. Naidoo posits that due to regional, ethnic, linguistic and class divisions amongst South African Indians, there is no singular standard of worship used by Hindus (9). For Tamilians, the ancient poetic texts of the Sangams and the Vedic holy writings of the Puraanaas are considered the dominant sources from which understandings of cultural history and religious customs are derived (Naidoo 58). Thus, Tamil formularies depict the most complex rituals due to an abundance of symbols and liturgies, making it easy "to lose track of meaning and reduce them to magic and superstition", furthermore, "[rituals] were influenced by transplantation to South Africa" (Naidoo v).

Animism is not peculiar to Hindu metaphysics. African IKS also postulate a hierarchical interplay of forces. Each force is subsumed by all beings and non-beings: humans, animals, nature and objects (Teffo and Roux 196). The African view of causality rejects the prospect of chance. Scientific or literal causation is a secondary effect of impenetrable predisposing factors such as witchcraft, ancestors or spirits (197). As a result, families must undergo rituals to evoke ancestors, who are to safeguard the moral consistency of their human relations (200). Notwithstanding their distinct approaches, African ontology is comparable to the Vedic system. Similar to karmic rules and regulations, African philosophy sees destiny as a preordained order, but one which is subject to alteration via rituals and ancestral interference (Teffo and Roux 206). The ring of post-humanism can be heard in the African animistic ontology. Post-humanist theory advocates the decentralisation of the human as a discrete constituent in the category of objects, as this "marks the end of a dual ontology based on the nature-culture split and a shift to an object-oriented philosophy" (Mbembe 43).

The poem represents a multiplicity of ontological thinking within the minds of women figures, all being SAI Tamil women who were born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal. Again, we find the motif of women as the preservers of IK, who are in turn expected to comply with the gender roles stemming from that knowledge. The speaker's rebellious behaviour indicated by her refusal to abide by the rules, is not equivalent to the rejection of her elders' instructions, but explicates a dismissal of their sexist innuendos. Simon asserts, "my femaleness is influenced by familial pressures from traditional patriarchal culture, yet, this is also mediated by the changes that have accumulated in this culture over time" ("EWP" 24). Smith contends that colonisation has had "a destructive effect on indigenous gender relations" (151) and makes a claim that can succinctly elucidate the varied indigenous and feminine inflections interchanged in "Tamil Familiars":

> Indigenous women across many different indigenous societies claim an entirely different relationship, one embedded in beliefs about the land and the universe, about the spiritual significance of women and about the collective endeavors that were required in the organization of society. (Smith 151)

The version of the SAI woman presented in the poem exhibits an intense convergence of myriad cultures. Each cultural influence varies in measure and significance, sometimes amalgamating, and sometimes rapidly fluctuating from one to another. I have tried to illustrate the difficulty in ascribing a specific ontology to the oral conjectures of the women represented in the poem. Rather, I have alluded to a fusion of epistemologies – indigenous and Eurocentric – at work in the poem, and in the lived experiences of SAI Tamil women.

5.3. Mythology and 'Femaleness' in "Rati"

Earlier I established that indigenous literary forms favour a multimodal approach to poetry, allowing a fusion of various genres. I also mentioned that Simon identified 'language poetry' as an influential poetry genre. Drawing from experimental women's poetry, Simon uses 'language poetry' as a point of departure to exceed lyrical expressivism, in order to negotiate the multiple strands of her identity and femaleness ("EWP" 10-11). In effect Simon describes her poetry as "a curious mix of inventive family history, verbal-visual experiment, and sexually transgressive representations,

in language and page representation, of femaleness" (13). Simon's claims validate "Rati" — a twenty-two-line chunk of prose — as product of the poetry genre (59). As such, I consider "Rati" to be a poem apt for analysis from an indigenous perspective, which accommodates multimodality:

> Ja, I know the story about how I was made. Brahma
> created everyone different and Kama came from his mind.
> No one really gets that actually he's the god of love. He
> rides this mountain parrot. I know, right? But anyway,
> one of the ten kings, Daksha, was supposed to give him a
> wife. Maybe he owed Brahma a favour for making him or
> something. And Kama was supposed to be spread love or
> some shit in the world but he went against that and shot
> flower-arrows at Brahma and Daksha and the other guys.
> They fall in love with Brahma's daughter and then they
> get super embarrassed. So embarrassed that they sweat.
> From Daksha's sweat, I came. I guess. I mean, do you just
> sweat and that becomes a person? I ride a parrot too but,
> like, a parrot made out of smaller women. I have a sword
> which is way better than Kama's sugarcane bow. You
> probably know me from that one position in *Kama Sutra*
> called "Rati's noose" or the painting of me and Kama
> hooking up on the mat with headless pichachi standing on
> us? It's really not like Song of Songs. It was just three sips
> of honey and blood for three nights with me and her head
> moving around on the floor. He has his hands in my hair
> and I'm his complex hole, I— (1-22)

During our discussion of "Rati", Simon expressed a keen interest in researching mythologies of various cultures. Raised Catholic, Simon said she does not have anyone in her family "to consult with on the myth and the legend and the religion of Hinduism". Due to the lack of oral tradition in this regard, Simon consulted the Internet, particularly *Wikipedia*, to gain an overarching understanding of the narratives. While the bulk of the poem refers to the Hindu deities Rati and Kama, there is also a reference to Song of Songs. Simon confirmed in the interview that the last four lines of the poem are based on a Norse myth. Before delving into the indigenous and feminine connotations of the poem, I will briefly provide background of the three mythologies referenced in the poem. First I must clarify the misconception that Hindu followers are polytheistic (Dasgupta 17). Naidoo asserts:

> God in the Hindu religion is non-being therefore formless . . . the Eternal
> Unconscious . . . The Ultimate Reality . . . To bring God closer, Hindus

> have given form to what they consider to be God's attributes (power, knowledge, love, etc.). As these attributes are personified and given individual names, they have become deities and intermediaries between the devotee and God. (3)

Brahman is the word used by Hindus referring to the formless and genderless force of the eternal God. Thus, the deities are usually presented in male/female pairs — the masculine element symbolising *knowledge*, while *energy* and *will* are the feminine principles. The two are regarded as inseparable (Naidoo 4). The predominant myth referenced in "Rati" is of the poem's namesake, the Hindu deity Rati and her male counterpart, Kama. Rati features as a side character in the Puraanaas. She symbolises sexual pleasure or union and is often used in Hindu demonstrations of the science of lovemaking. She is the wife of Kama: a cupid-like deity who impales people and Gods with flower arrows that incite love. Together, the couple is emblematic of conjugal perfection (Jayaram "Hindu Goddess - Rati Devi"). In tantric iconography, Rati and Kama are illustrated copulating on a mat, under the feet of the headless Chinnamasta — one of the Mahavidyas (Ramprasad 156). The Mahavidyas are variations of the Great Goddess Mahadevi (also known as Devi) whose duty is to dissolve dual consciousness (Bhattacharya Saxena 64-65). Simon uses old artworks as inspirational and informative reference material, thus the poem is an adaptation of a particular artwork by Bhatuk Ramprasad. In his lithograph, Chinnamasta is seen holding her own head in one of four arms, while three streams of blood emanate from her neck. Two naked, female attendants devour two streams, while the decapitated head consumes the remaining stream (Ramprasad 156). Chinnamasta represents the non-duality of life and death (Bhattacharya Saxena 65-67). The first eighteen lines of the poem deal with narrative of Rati and her supporting characters.

The final four lines make a brief comparison to Song of Songs from the Old Testament. The literal content of the Hebrew text celebrates the sexual intimacy of two lovers, while the daughters of Jerusalem form their audience. This view is highly contested by theological hermeneutics, reading the poem as an allegory (Tanner "The History of Interpretation of the Song of Songs"). The lines "three sips / of honey and blood for three nights with me" (19-20) alludes to the Norse tale of Odin, the Chief of Gods, upon his search for the *mead of poetry*. The mead is a magical drink made from honey and divine blood and is believed to give its consumer wisdom and poetic

mastery. Due to its power, the mead was hidden inside a mountain, guarded by a female giant named Gunlod. Odin shape-shifted into a serpent to enter a hole in the mountain and once confronted by Gunlod, offered her three nights of passion with him, in exchange for three sips of mead. To Gunlod's dismay, Odin consumed all the mead in three great sips (Daly 77).

Above, I have demonstrated a superficial explanation of the poem. I am not going to execute a post-structural analysis of the myth but will rather focus on the indigenous conception of the role of mythology and its disconnection from colonial formulations of history. Smith argues against the chronological system of history, ordered around periods of discovery, literacy and societal emergence. As a result, anything existing before the chronology is assigned prehistoric status and classified as mythologies, functioning outside the historical domain (31). IK from countries like India, which had strong literary traditions prior to Western involvement, was delegitimised in other ways (32). Therefore, if the erosion of indigenous myth was a method of colonialism, then reconfiguring those myths signify efforts to decolonise.

Roy offers characteristics of the myth that are applicable here, namely: myths are sacred stories of unknown authorship, often linked to ritual and worship of gods, heroic figures, anthropomorphic beings or spirits; myths are set outside human historical time; and myths are purposeful in sanctioning human behaviour (31). While these characteristics point to the allegorical dimension of mythology, they restrictively pertain to colonial visions of history. What Simon offers is not a simple reinstatement of the myth, but a reinterpretation that invokes ways in which "considerable dilution and degeneration has taken place over the last millennia" (Roy 38). At this point it is relevant to look at the deliberate mismatch of form and content. Simon divulged in the interview that the poem is written in her "speaking voice." The use of prose allows a natural and fluid presentation of the *speaking voice* while subverting the conventional forms of mythology and of poetry. Simon experiments with myth through subverting conventional forms of poetry, and vice versa. Indeed, the interview excerpts bear strong resemblance to the voice of Rati in the poem. Additionally, Simon expressed her reluctance towards the self-indulgence of confessional poetry, opting to combine a confessional poem with a myth, interested in "how the two work into each other to make something new".

This approach is also taken in the poems "Kreuzigen" and "Vetala-Pachisi". What is unique about "Rati" is that Simon uses *her own* speaking voice *as the voice* of Rati, offering a first-person narration of Rati's story: a story that occupies the margins of Hindu mythology, and further concealed by the metanarrative of Westernisation. "Ja, I know the story" (1), indicates that Simon's speaking voice incorporates the use and pronunciation of white South African English. Her verbal speech also includes the colloquial vocabulary of an Americanised stream of consciousness, "I mean, do you just / sweat and that becomes a person?" (12-13). "Rati" reads like a monologue and makes an array of grammatical errors. Yet its contemporary Western cadence delivers a more comprehensible abrogation of standard English than, for instance, a purely SAI dialect. Thus, the use of white local dialects in the poem end up being the abrogation of their own origins, further disrupting the so-called universality of standard English. In effect the poem's language becomes a commentary, suggesting, in its form, how Western versions of history encompass the retelling of indigenous stories. If we do not consider that it is Simon's real-life speaking voice being used, we might interpret the poem as problematically appropriative. The rhetorical voice and frequent questioning, for example, "I know, right?" (4), "I guess" (12), exemplify the limitations of rationalised, chronological history-making. We *see* the voice of Rati, entangled with Western influences, buckling under the pressure of Hindu mythological storytelling, in efforts to flatten out its differences. The speaker further unsettles the Western historical paradigm by retelling mythology from the vantage point of Hinduism, and moreover, from a woman's perspective.

In its entirety, the poem is a cross-cultural excursion, demonstrating a psycho-geographical coalescence of Eastern and Western culture through the medium of mythology. The poet displaces the Norse myth, passing it off as part of Rati's story in a single narrative, inverting the Western colonial model that is notorious for absorbing IK as its own. The poem urges us to separate myths and contextualise them within their cultural origins in order to understand the metaphors at play. In doing so, the locality of Western culture is exposed, subverting the illusion of its universalism. Blended with Rati's monologue, Simon illustrates the heterogeneity of IK and dialogical relations of culture. In the words of Ramazani, "the friction between figure and frame, the wobble of assimilation or alterity" (114) is depicted in the poem. Moreover, it is in the tradition of ancient Indian texts to "reflect and refract, invert and

subvert one another" (115). That is not to say that the damage of colonialism is irrelevant, but rather that Simon is not on a far off tangent to Indian indigenous methodological trends. Liyong posits that emerging South African creators should be equipped with IK and use it as a catapult to venture into new arenas of possibility (27). The imperialist mission, having halted the continuation of indigenous literary forms, has impeded indigenous peoples' ability to be spontaneously inventive and to "display how our minds and spirits work" (18). The poem does not conform to ancient Indian literary forms, such as lyrical hymns compounded with cosmological philosophy (Dasgupta 6). However, Simon mobilises and transforms the genre of mythology, aspiring to the unabashed sexual freedom and agency of women represented in the sacred texts. Simon explores the portrayal of female bodies/energies/consciousness in such mythology, discovering its potential to attain equitable gender relations. I will not execute a symbolic analysis of the original myth, as that it is a different project, but I will now briefly explore the gynocentric connotations of the poem.

Simon's aesthetic exploration of femaleness as a style of representation is showcased through a range of motifs in *Thungachi*. One of them, already established, is that of 'the woman as the teller of stories'. No doubt, "Rati" preserves this motif, making the poet and Rati the speaker and the teller of her/their individual/collective story/stories, involving other powerful female characters. As such, the poet breaks the myth of a singular female subjectivity. Nfah-Abbenyi postulates that the use of contradiction and recurring shifts are necessary in order to recast colonial gender dichotomies (275). Simon discusses the complexities of her femaleness in her poetry, describing it as "sometimes marginal, but more often pushing to the foreground because it was not well-accommodated, even in ideas of non-linear cultural shift" ("EWP" 27). Simon postulates marginality as a productive, in-between space to assert her femaleness and explore, "how encounters amongst otherwise binarised ideas and modes, or even traditional and taboo subjects, could be addressed, even reinvented" (16). These notions are comparable to Bhabha's rendition of the *Third Space* as a "contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation" where all cultural identities are formulated (Bhabha 55). Simon favours such liminal spaces, portraying both culture and femaleness as inveterately hybrid. Thus, the search for a pure culture or a neatly categorised rendition of femaleness becomes implausible.

Throughout "Rati" the use of myth is manoeuvred to break the patriarchal myth of the subordinate woman. "You / probably know me from that one position in *Kama Sutra*" (15-16), implies the speaker's recognition of her role and representation in mainstream, patriarchal culture. Before that, we learn about her creation; that she rides "a parrot too but, / like, a parrot made out of smaller women" (13-14) and that she has a sword "which is way better than Kama's sugarcane bow" (15). Yet she acknowledges that the information regarding her warrior-like persona is not of interest to her audience. Nonetheless, the speaker audaciously embraces her role as the Goddess of lovemaking. She refers to Chinnamasta as a "headless pichachi" (18) — connoting the frightful, threatening qualities of her female counterpart. The image of a female figure, standing atop another female figure in the midst of sexual rejoicing, is taboo. Simon stated in the interview that her interest in engaging the taboo is spurred by her concern regarding sexually neglected SAI women whose needs "are often not taken care of". Sinha posits, "Love and sexual cravings are the persistent themes with Indian women writers since the time of the Vedas" (46). As a result, Indian women writers look to indigenous teachings as a means of finding support or kinship for feminist perspectives that defy conservatively patriarchal cultures (49). Similarly, Simon uses ancient Hindu religion as subversion. The speaker confesses that her love story is "really not like Song of Songs" (17), suggestive of the lack of the representation of women in the Bible. In the only biblical story comparable with her own, the speaker finds that their stories are dissimilar. During colonialism indigenous views of sexuality were spurned, resulting in the dominance of biblical ideologies in the Indian diaspora, regardless of Hinduism. Simon reminds us to locate our indigenous forms of thinking as a means of reconceptualising gender relations.

In the concluding lines, the blood of Chinnamasta's decapitated head is figuratively associated with the *mead of poetry*, signifying the fluid of the female body as intellectually, spiritually and physically nourishing. Yet to Kama, the speaker is a "complex hole" (22) again, drawing comparisons to the mountain hole in the Norse myth as an entry point to obtain the mead. In " 'Conjuring Up Her Wholeness': Post-transitional Black South African Women's Poetry and its Restorative Ethic", Boswell propounds that *embodiment* as a literary mode, is a restorative ethic that entails the reclamation of the black, female body from the paralysing and debasing colonial gaze,

by reframing it as a site of beauty, pleasure and freedom (19). Consequently, the theme of embodiment becomes a collective motif, aimed at decolonising the black, female body. With the exception of the phrase "headless pichachi" (18) the poem does not explicitly mention female body parts; however its reference to the painting allows stark imagery of female genitalia. In the context of Hindu mythology, Chinnamasta's head symbolises the destruction of ego and self-involved practice of attaining absolute freedom solely for oneself (Bhattacharya Saxena 72). Thus, the image indicates "not only sensual pleasure, but also a deeply inward experience; it is the flow of desire to reach out to the other, mutually encompassing each other in to the depth of beings" (Bhattacharya Saxena 72). The "blood" (20) of Chinnamasta "and her head / moving around on the floor" (20-21) are the only female anatomical denotations in the poem, presumably drawing attention to the intellectual and life-giving properties of the female body that should be concurrently viewed with her sexual abilities. The enjambment in the penultimate line "He has his hands in my hair" (21), swiftly moving to "and I'm his complex hole, I—" (22) gives the impression of the speaker describing the sexual act whilst in the midst of it, thus the abrupt ending is a double entendre. Either it correlates the unfinished poem with the speaker's inability to climax due to Kama's failure to satisfy her; or the speaker, in the process of climaxing, cannot finish her story. Both options present the female body as a sexually desiring recipient of gratification. Boswell postulates that the indication of cunnilingus as a pleasurable act for women is used to break taboos and furthermore, likens sexual intimacy "to a spiritual experience" (" 'Conjuring up her Wholeness' " 21).

"Rati" showcases a convergence of indigenous mythologies, symbolising an inflection of layered, multicultural variations of femaleness. The poem crosses boundaries between time, dimensions and cultures and emerges as neither locally anchored in South African specificity, nor global, universal and frameless. Rather it illustrates Simon's attempt at locating her SAI femaleness, hugely informed by her family's religious affiliations and historical subjection to a variety of political and ideological shifts. Simon achieves her goal of engaging marginal or taboo knowledge "using the convention of poetic voice *unconventionally* so as to trouble expectations about the breaking down *or* building up of coherent subjectivity" (Simon "EWP" 13). She borrows allegory from the myth of Rati to construct a feminine stream of

consciousness that resists the notion of an immutable subjectivity, and to reconstruct the female body as a sexually assertive receptacle of myriad pleasures. In effect, "the body and mind's language are articulated through the language of the intimate" (Gqola " 'Pushing Out from the Centre' " 217).

Simon retrieves important IK regarding the perceptions of women from mythical dormancy within the pages of the Puraanas. The ancient texts, being vital repositories of Indian IK, are incomprehensible to the majority of Indians, with the exception of Sanskrit speakers (Dasgupta 1). Naidoo suggests that the displacement of Hinduism to widely Christian contexts furthered the modification of the religion (v). Thus, as South African Indians lost touch with their mother tongues, so too were they distanced from their indigenous wisdom. Wilkinson cautions against the risk of reinstating IK values that encourage the subservience of women in the name of tradition (420). As such, IK must be reconfigured in the context of globalisation to avoid the re-instigation of subalterity. IK projects must actively engage the work of feminists, so that cultural preservation occurs in an equitable manner (420). The above analysis clarifies that this Simon's interest in IK is adjoined with her investment in de-marginalising her femaleness as a SAI woman.

5.4. Nonduality and Use of the Erotic in "Nanni-Ma"

In her interview responses, Simon explicates a need to draw analogies between human and animal instinct when dealing with themes of intimacy. She frequently depends on intuitive impulses when crafting the soundscape of her poetry. I will now discuss how Simon's motif of female sexuality, in relation to animalistic compulsions, resonates in "Nanni-Ma". Simon confirmed that the poem is not based on real life events, although its confessional nature is influenced by revelations made in a past relationship. The poem "Nanni-Ma" is a direct address by a woman speaker to her neighbour's goat named 'Ma':

> I think of sex and only
> sex since he
> became my neighbour
>
> in the flat next door.
> And you, in the garden outside,
> a goat named Ma.

He adores you,
milks you in the early hours
for his morning porridge.

I watch in my nightie,
confused by hands
on your soft, uddery skin.

It reminds me of nights
he touched me,
not an old skinned goat.

My lips turning half pages,
exposing pink marrow
bones for him to lick.

But you I would never wear
for a thick waistcoat.
I'd miss your fat eyes

in my doorway at night
asking to eat from
my chilli tree. (1-24)

In SAIE, *ma* is the common term used to address one's mother. For Tamil speakers, it denotes an elder generation of woman and is generally used for maternal or paternal grandmothers (Mesthrie *DSAIE* 142). Similarly, *nanni* is the term used in homes of North Indian speakers (for instance, Hindi, Gujarati or Urdu), referring to the family's maternal grandmother (165). The addition of *nanni* to the goat's name in the title, suggests the speaker's exceeding endearment towards the goat. The goat is both mother and grandmother (maternal and paternal); constituting variegated Indian femaleness, implying its own genealogical legacy. Presumably, the speaker situates herself within this legacy by referring to the goat, as she would her human grandmother.

Throughout the poem the speaker longs for physical intimacy with her neighbour, expressed through her enthrallment with his relationship with the goat. She is so enthralled that she confesses her desires to the goat, venturing into biologically explicit detail. Often the speaker's arousal is effected by her neighbour's delicate treatment of Nanni-Ma. She watches as he milks the goat "for his morning porridge" (9) and admires his adoration for Nanni-Ma as a source of sustenance. Nanni-Ma's

milk, much like a mother's breast milk, satisfies his human cravings and is tantamount to his wellbeing. Earlier I established that both African and Indian indigenous ontologies share sentiments regarding the interconnectedness of all living beings, subverting the Cartesian duality that is widespread in the Western episteme. Simon depicts non-binarised relations amongst human and animals by highlighting their interdependence. Moreover, her focus on female relations across species is comparable to the ecofeminist perspective. Akin to indigenous studies scholars, ecofeminism as a theoretical body of work argues against the scientific method as the only producer of valid knowledge. Goldin Rosenberg elaborates on the reductionist logic of the Western episteme:

> It perceives the universe as a mechanical system, and social life as a competitive struggle for existence. . . . This mechanistic paradigm of Western industrial society is often described as dualistic, dependent on rationality, and exploitative of women, nature, and indigenous and other marginalized peoples. In contrast, in most indigenous cultures, rational and intuitive thought are regarded as complementary. (138)

Although I am not implementing an ecofeminist analysis of the poem, I posit that its praxis offers valuable insights that support decolonising and indigenising agendas in addition to the poetic strategies undertaken in "Nanni-Ma". Boswell discusses African ecofeminism as a response to the dominant white, capitalistic, patriarchal power that has destroyed the union between humans and nature ("Ecofeminist Poetic" 33). Thus, African ecofeminism is concerned with restoring indigenous cosmologies that recognise the need for equitable relations between human beings and all other living organisms (34). This is evident in the poem given by the speaker's tendency to perceive the goat as her neighbour's lover-like figure. "I watch in my nightie, / confused by hands / on your soft, uddery skin" (10-12) indicates the speaker's uncertainty about her association of milking with carnal pleasure. At this point, it is questionable whether the speaker is titillated by her neighbour or particularly by his ethereal bond with Nanni-Ma. Consequently, Nanni-Ma symbolises the full potential of female eroticism, unrestricted by the scientific division of species. The opening lines, "I think of sex and only / sex since he / became my neighbour" (1-3), conveys that the speaker's obsession with sexual thoughts surrounding her newfound neighbour. However, the line "And you, in the garden outside," (5) suggests that the speakers obsession is not merely attributed to the persona of the neighbour, but also to the presence of Nanni-Ma. Let me clarify that these connotations should not be

reduced to some fetish or bestiality on the speaker's part. Rather, it shows how Simon uses the innate sincerity and instinctual substratum of animals to reclaim a sense of cross-species femaleness, disinfected from Western interpellation and patriarchal modes of thinking. Justifying this view, Lorde explains the use of the erotic as a powerful, political tool:

> The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. . . . As women we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. ("Uses of the Erotic" 53)

Arguably, the speaker demonstrates cognisance of her 'distrust' towards her erotic inclinations when she admits to being "confused by hands" (11). As she continues to watch the milking of Nanni-Ma, she is subsumed by the erotic and begins to make comparisons between her own human anatomy and that of the goat. She yearns for the memory of the neighbour touching her the way he touches the "old skinned goat" (15), suggestive of her jealousy towards Nanni-Ma. Jealousy here is not meant to obstruct the speaker's connection to the goat, but is symptomatic of her strong emotional investment in Nanni-Ma. On those nights the speaker likens her genitalia to "pink marrow / bones for him to lick" (17-18). Her body being consumed and satisfied by the neighbour becomes a metaphor for eating animals, suggestive of the succulence of her own female parts. Simon manages to assign the speaker and Nanni-Ma the same level of status without personifying the goat, with the exception of "asking to eat from / my chilli tree" (23-24). Instead, sexual instinct is rendered a spiritual manoeuvre to relegate human beings from their misconceived superiority afforded by the capacity to rationalise.

"I think of sex" (1), followed by indications of sexual stimulation throughout the poem, exemplifies the body's control of the mind and not the other way around. The speaker's thoughts are constructed through her bodily demands: thoughts often repressed and contested by society. Therefore the goat, without the prejudiced, sexist, industrious mind of a human, becomes the empathetic addressee of the speaker's profound confession. As the poem progresses it becomes easier to offload her untold desires. In effect, her questioning mind opens up her body, "[which] refuses to wear masks and be closed to others" (Maldonado-Torres "Ten Theses" 27). Upon writing

the poem, Simon questioned "Could a young, Catholic, South African Indian woman articulate such taboos without risking herself? (Could she keep quiet, suppressing this part of herself, without risk of emotional self-injury?)" ("EWP" 51). Maldonado-Torres believes that such questions are integral to decolonisation, stating that "decolonial artistic creation and decolonial spirituality aim to keep the body and mind open as well as to keep the senses sharpened in ways that can best respond critically to anything that aims to produce ontological separation" ("Ten Theses" 27). The speaker's subversion of ontological separation in the poem culminates in "But you I would never wear / for a thick waistcoat" (19-20). In the end the erotic has played an important role in formulating her relationship with Nanni-Ma. The speaker and Nanni-Ma, having shared body-to-body encounters with the neighbour, develop a sense of communion, love and recognition. The neighbour, who delivers erotic fulfilment to the speaker and the goat, mediates their relationship through the use of his own body. The poem initiates a transpersonal ecology, which subverts the master/beast consciousness predominant in Western ways of knowing (Mthatiwa 50) by erasing the mental partition between self and nature. The speaker would never use Nanni-Ma as a coat because she does not see the goat as a resource to exploit, while acknowledging that the slaughtering and commodification of animals are common in the world she lives in. Mthatiwa argues that ecofeminists are cognisant of "animals' otherness, separateness or difference from us", while also conceding the interconnectedness of all living beings (50). Similarly, the speaker of the poem does not abstain from differentiation by representing herself and Nanni-Ma as one and the same being, but suggests that her relationship with the goat is of equal vigour, if not more, to that of her relationship with her neighbour.

In the interview, Simon indicated that the "doorway" (21) described in the last stanza is modelled after the farm-style, split doors found in many households in Chatsworth. The first time I read the poem, I imagined it being set in Chatsworth, on account of the goat's name, the speaker's "chilli tree" (24) (common amongst Chatsworth households) and "the flat next door" (4) which reminded me of the close proximity of Chatsworth houses that allows neighbours to peer easily into one another's yards. I also had the sense that the poem was set in the past due to the neighbour's morning routine. Indeed, today one will not find a man in Chatsworth milking a goat for his breakfast. I realised that what I had imagined was a Chatsworth that never existed.

Rather, it was a version of Chatsworth with residents who returned to their indigenous ways of knowing. In this version, the human has a keen eye for observing the intricacies of nature, like the indigenous poets of ancient India (Zvelebil 3). Language, as in oral societies, is used above and beyond human communication. The human, then, sees all beings as expressive subjects capable of sharing conversations (Kavanagh 44). Hence, the poem's form of eight, three-lined stanzas — each a vignette revealing an attribute of the innate, each line hardly varying in length — is an act of balancing myriad feminine traits reflecting the poet's attempt at restoring equitable relations amongst living organisms.

Instinct and intuition are not merely ontological themes of the poem, but are woven into the creation of the poem. In the interview, Simon indicated her tendency to change structure, words and flow, depending on how the poem 'sounds'. Interestingly, she relies on the imagined sounds of the words inside her head. The poem is captured by internal senses, reconfigured by Simon's emotional, intellectual and biological impulses at that given time. Smith indicates that "Many indigenous creation stories link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish, animals, insects and plants. To be connected is to be whole" (148). Simon works in the tradition of holistic indigenous ways of knowing as a means of attesting to her femaleness as a SAI woman.

5.5. Language and Beyond in "Betel-Nut"

"Betel-Nut" is the last poem of *Thungachi*, offering a culmination of the cultural and gendered politics oscillating in Simon's debut collection. According to Simon's interview responses, the poem is not based on a single event but on her present continuous experiences in Chatsworth. Historically, these are events, feelings and images replicated in past visits, some of which will replicate in her future visits to Chatsworth. In the interview Simon verified that she shifts to SAI dialect when amongst her Chatsworth relatives, identifying it as a "code switch", resulting in feelings of self-consciousness and inauthenticity. "Sometimes I would feel like I wasn't a real Indian person because I was pretending", she said. There is an inference to the power of language as a repository of local knowledge that if manifested, allows the acquisition of the status 'real Indian'. Chatsworth is a melting pot of diverse

Indian linguistic, cultural heritages. Primarily, the poem interweaves Chatsworth dialect with local ways of being. On a secondary level, the use of Earth imagery — vegetation, soil and plants — illustrates the poet's attempt to exceed language. By physically immersing her body into the land and consuming its produce, the poet finds an alternative route to excavating her ancestral ways of knowing. I will explore the poet's reflection on dialect as a carrier of Indianness followed by an examination of flora as mediators of indigenous knowledge in "Betel-Nut":

> I am dark but
> they say I'm bluffing.
> I snack on tamarind seeds
>
> sucking while Mom makes brinjal.
> Black tongue, mangrove mud between my toes.
> *She's not like us but.*
>
> This is why I am not like them.
> I wouldn't say *that*,
> but I would say that
>
> when she tells me all about climbing
> jackfruit trees at aunty's house, she calls me
> girl, losing my name.
>
> Lately, I try out their voice: oiyoh, but it's so hard eh!
> *She, she don't fright for nothing.*
> *She don't know nothing too.*
>
> It's ayyo when I check
> my brand new dictionary,
> a book to mark bed-made words.
>
> The Indians, they put eyes on me except
> when I go to Chatsworth
> then my sentences end but.
>
> What happened to my degree?
> That's what I wonder anyway,
> spitting betel-nuts, white husk. (1-24)

The first point cannot be considered without a reiteration of Ngugi's extrapolation that language is culture's collective memory bank. He posits that culture is both the outcome and reflection of history and mediates understanding of the self, between the self and others, and between the self and nature, by transmitting collective realities into the spoken or written word. In effect, "culture is not transmitted through language

in its universality but in its particularity as the language of a specific community with a specific history. . .” (15). For this reason, language was mobilised as a colonial force in reshaping human subjectivities (J. Singh 69) and is centralised by decolonial thinkers, as a solution to cultural reclamation (J. Singh 74). In the poem, the speaker is conflicted about her performative use of SAIE when surrounded by her Chatsworth family. “I am dark but / they say I’m bluffing” (1-2), suggests her family’s disposition on her ‘false’ Indian identity despite their shared racial and genealogical attributes. The word *bluff* is often given preference in SAIE as a synonym for lying, or “to insist that something is true, knowing it to be false” (Mesthrie *DSAIE* 29). The voice in italics, “*She’s not like us but”* (6), is a direct quotation representing the voices of the relatives. In contrast with the speaker’s use of standard English, the italic quotations serve as evidence of why she is “not like them” (7). *But* is commonly located at the end of a sentence in SAIE. Mesthrie postulates that the clause-final use of *but* has a “weakly adversative sense . . . the primary meaning of *but* is ‘though, really, truly’, etc.” (*ELS* 108). He propounds that SAIE is a form of ‘language-shift English’ as a result of English replacing the culture’s vernacular in daily communication (3). Simon, having been educated at Model-C schools in the mostly white neighbourhood of Durban North, communicates in standard English, except when around her family or other dialect users. Outside of those contexts, she re-adapts to the version of English accepted in white or educational environments. She writes in her thesis:

> Because I simply do not hear such usages, when I am out of habitual context, and thus they contract and shrivel in my linguistic repertoire, waiting for the water of community connection so that they may once again well into the presence of the ear. (“EWP” 25)

While the syntactical errors of SAIE can be adapted to, accent and tone require added performativity that is more difficult to assimilate. This is evident in Simon’s poetry reading of “Betel-Nut” in the pilot episode of AVBOB’s poetry documentary, “I Wish I’d Said” (00:08:48-00:11:45). The video recording can be found on *Youtube*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga5kexHib0Q. Here, Simon modulates a white, South African accent with some attempt of departing from it when stating dialect lines like “oiyoh, but it’s so hard eh!” (13). According to Mesthrie, white South African English is used in conjunction with SAIE by a small group of bidialectical speakers in the country, who “tend to be young professionals employed in prestigious commercial houses” and who “run the risk of being gently ridiculed” (*ELS* 61). Using incorrect

syntax and the idiom *oiyoh* — an exclamation loosely translating to 'Good Lord', suggesting pain, surprise or sympathy (Mesthrie *DSAIE* 10), elicits a disorientation from white enunciation. However, Simon's reading does not demonstrate a performance of the Chatsworth accent. Presumably, that is why she wishes to "try out their voice" (13), acknowledging her limitations. Her linguistic shifts are thus not the task of appropriation, but an effort to speak the *same language* as her relatives, as a means of connecting and seeing the world from their perspectives.

Simon expressed her fascination with Rajend Mesthrie's *A Dictionary of South African Indian English* in our interview; and it may well be the "brand new dictionary" (17) she refers to in stanza six. Published in 2010, Mesthrie's book is the first written compilation of SAIE terminology and expressions. The speaker solemnly reflects on this as "a book to mark bed-made words" (18), provoking the absence of orality in the intervention of objective written record. In the poem, dialect is assigned to the relatives at "aunty's house" (11) — the ambiguous "them" (7) forcefully reverberating the voices of a collective. With the shift to italics, we are able to *see* different voices on the page and are propelled to imagine their elocutions. We see, in the italic phrases, orality's resistance to being captured on paper, and capacity to live beyond the page. *Oiyoh* is best described in the activity of speech, having no precise English word equivalent to house its complex resonances and ideological perspectives. Likewise, "they put eyes on me" (19) is an idiom exclusive to South African Indians, used to describe bad energies emitting from an observer. For instance, if I look at my brother-in-law while he eats food, my glance will be met with "Don't put eyes on my food, my stomach will pain!" The potential evil from having someone *put eyes* is thwarted by turning salt around the targeted individual. Thus, the everyday language of Chatsworth exceeds denotation. It engages mythologies and ontologies that lead to ritualistic practice. Translation, then, reaches only the contours of a vocabulary, even when the translation is between standard English and 'English in language shift'. Kavanagh highlights that the vocabulary of indigenous literature is typically used to convey tradition, not simply in form or genre but "in the use of words specific to the culture" (40). Through language shifts, the poem fluctuates on a spectrum with institutional homogenisation on one end and indigenising resistance on the other (Ramazani 8). The speaker, anticipating her family's judgment, tries to attain Indianness through the language of the Earth.

Throughout the poem, the speaker consumes a number of ingredients that are popular in Durban Indian cuisine, particularly in Tamil households. At this point I must reiterate that the Cartesian view of the world sees the Earth as a sum of separable parts. Each part must be studied in isolation in order to be objectively understood (Kavanagh 43). As a result, post-colonial cultures are left with fragmented remains of IK. The poem displays an effort to upset the objectivist paradigm through the speaker's appreciation of Chatsworth plant life as reservoirs of cultural history. In other words, it is through contemplating each natural item in solidarity that the speaker gradually develops a broader understanding of the cultural discourse surrounding those items, working from the ground up, so to speak. For instance, when the speaker is accused of "bluffing" (2), she retaliates by snacking on "tamarind seeds" (3): a sour seed used in several South Indian dishes, including brinjal curry. "Mom makes brinjal" (3) is based on the real life image of Simon's mother cooking brinjal at her aunt's house. The inclusion of this image represents the norm of Tamil women in Chatsworth who often cook in the homes of their relatives and friends. The tamarind seed in its raw form is an acquired taste that demands an experienced palette. The dark pulp causes the speaker's physical and metaphorical "Black tongue" (4), indicative of her efforts to put her cultural modes of communication back into her mouth. Her blackened tongue helps her to further depart from her educational conditioning. The "mangrove mud" (5) induces a tropical atmosphere, allowing the speaker to move deeper into the Earth. Gradually nature moves into her body, resulting in mud "between [her] toes" (5). She moves onto "climbing / jackfruit trees at aunty's house" (10-12) thus behaving like her Chatsworth relatives and affording her mother the ability to call her "girl" (12). *Girl* is used in SAIE to denote 'daughter'. Additionally, when a girl gets her period for the first time, she is called a *big-girl*, and when a woman gets married, her family and friends are referred to as the *girl's side* (Mesthrie *DSAIE* 85). *Girl*, ironically a standard English word, is riddled with traces of Indian linguistic cultures. The speaker being called *girl* marks her belonging within the collective identity of Chatsworth people. In her thesis Simon attests:

> The designator *Francine Simon* is mediated by patterns of fixity . . . *and* by ripples of shift, in the gesture of Indian South African parents who chose to give their eldest child an English sounding name that does not visibly or audibly enunciate 'Indianness'. (25)

Losing her name altogether makes space for the assertion of Indianness. Hansen observes that residents of Chatsworth perceive their neighbourhoods as intimate spaces and as "a site of strongly asserted insider-culture defined by accents, food, jokes, and, racial features. . ." ("WNFS" 212). The speaker, cognisant of her white accent and struggle to wear a different voice, assimilates insider culture through alternative routes. She establishes her racial features, "I am dark" (1), proceeds to instil her palette with flavours of Chatsworth, loses her name and then is confident enough to "try out their voice" (13); rather comically conveying both the voice and the difficulty in achieving authenticity, "oiyoh, but it's so hard eh!" (13). Hansen deduces that in Chatsworth's community theatre and radio entertainment, accents are exaggerated for comic relief, furthermore, "exaggerated 'white' accents are deployed to portray the typical overambitious lahnee who tries to expunge every trace of his Indianness. . ." (*MoF* 93). Consequently, the speaker enacts both measures of comedic entertainment, strengthening her Indianness.

The final stanza demonstrates the metaphoric relation between the speaker and the betel nut. Betel nuts are staple items in Hindu rituals and "are not only used for prayer but are also eaten as an after refreshment both in India and South Africa" (Moodley 129-130). The light-coloured husk is peeled off before consuming or using the betel nut. The title is analogous to the nature of the speaker — who is 'Indian' on the inside despite sounding white. The speaker connects with the local cultural knowledge of her relatives through a collection of flora. In chewing on betel nuts, she becomes a betel nut, self-deteriorating by shedding her "white husk" (24). The betel nut is not merely refreshment, she requires its coarse structure, its darkness and woody bitterness to reshape her tongue. Thus, the betel nut is used as a means of reaching the "cultural composite of communication" (Kavanagh 43), which the speaker must rebuild for herself before she can understand her relatives' worldviews.

The poem corroborates the Fanonian view that "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture. . ." (*Black Skin, White Masks* 8). Moreover, it shows that dialect encapsulates unique, local worldviews and mindsets (14). Simon's use of natural elements illustrates Ngugi's reservations that "culture does not merely reflect that history, or rather it does so by actually forming images or pictures of the world of

nature and nurture" (15). If language is the image-forming liaison of culture, and if the speaker cannot adopt the desired language, she resolves the issue by focusing on the images of nature and nurture in their tangible configurations. Understanding "Betel-Nut" requires an insider's understanding of SAIE. I have referred to lexical definitions throughout this analysis, conveying the poem's need for translation. As such, the use of language certifies the poem's local specificity.

The colours implied in the poem belong to the dark brown palette. Each plant product evokes a specific texture and taste. The imagery of vegetation outlines the ontological nature of the relationship between Indians and South African landscape, where exploitative agricultural pasts are part of the culture's defining factors. The sounds of the dialect colliding with standard English take us back to the initial hybrid moment of Indians setting foot on South African soil. The mouth and tongue are given purpose beyond their verbal duties — they constitute a palette so tightly intertwined with nature. The poem points to the intrinsic communality amongst Chatsworth residents: an African indigenous ontology that sees subjects as relational forces that generate community (Teffo and Roux 204). It is an ontology also echoed in Hindu philosophy where "individuals are not regarded as unique, self-identical, irreplaceable human beings, of one time and one place, but as incumbents of positions which survive them" (Zvelebil 3). While Simon's poetry is experimental, her selection of content and sensory imagery closely linked to elements of landscape, can be likened to the tropes of indigenous literatures (Kavanagh 32).

In the book, "Betel-Nut" runs over two pages with the final two stanzas on the left page. Given the quality of paper used in the printing of *Thungachi*, the last stanzas of the poem become a palimpsest, overwriting all the other poems of the collection. The opening poem, "Naming Places", saw the page as an empty space to rebuild the poet's cultural history and genealogy. This positioning signifies a metaphor for how colonialism "erased prior constructions of the land, allowing it to be seen as an empty space, ready to receive their own inscriptions" (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 191). Simon inverts this notion by taking agency to re-inscribe her history. Contrasting with the opening poem, "Betel-Nut" signifies the poet's achievement of reimagining her ancestral roots and locating herself in the world. The vague imprints of the twenty-nine poems that came before "Betel-Nut" signify how "all present experience contains

ineradicable traces of the past which remain part of the constitution of the present" (Aschroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 190). The concluding line of the poem, "spitting betel-nuts, white husk" (24) illustrates the poet's ultimate rejection of colonial oppression and white-washed versions of SAI history and culture, in favour of her family's oral narratives, and of her lived experience.

5.6. Summary of Findings

Genre and Form

Based on the interview dialogues and Simon's academic writing, there is no evidence of her conscious attempt to work within any particular indigenous genre or form. For this reason, I have not examined the selection of poems as 'indigenous poetry' but instead I have opted to implement an *indigenous language of critique.* While a comparative study with indigenous poetry might discover similarities, for instance, to the ancient poetry of Tamil bards, which encompassed "a total human erotic experience" (Zvelebil 10), such is not within the scope of my study. Furthermore, her thesis verifies her inclination towards experimental poetry, focusing on the productive spaces of the 'in-between' ("EWP" 16) and thus developing a hybrid poetics, constituted by overlapping ideas, themes and identity factors. She sees the linkage of form and content as a poetic device in its own right (13) that uses "language as a site of experiment" (61). In the interview, Simon confessed to searching for a poet who resembled her, before the development of *Thungachi* commenced:

> . . . I was still coming into my own and I needed to latch onto someone that — didn't write the same as me — but that I could look up to, like a role model writer. Usually you would look for someone older than you but similar to you. There was no one. My supervisor and I researched it a lot. We looked and looked and looked. There was no one with a debut collection of poetry of South African Indian female descent. There was no one.

Simon conveys a concern for specificity and was not willing to settle for anything less. She could not find a poet who had produced a sufficient collection to illustrate poetic artistry particular to SAI women's consciousness, and thus relied on syncretic experimentalisms (Simon "EWP" 61). Ultimately, she sought guidance from women poets who "*blurred* genre boundaries" and made use of "a generative mixture of

linguistic-conceptual abstraction and formal-stylistic de-forming" (170). These included poets of the 'Gurlesque' genre who reconfigured femaleness as permeable constructs, challenging the coherence of subjectivity and engaging risqué subject matter (14). While Simon's poetry may reflect Gurlesque influence, this was not the focus of my project. I argue that her use of syncretic forms, textured with cultural and linguistic inferences, demonstrates a degree of *indigenising*. The selected poems are but five examples of the thirty poems that make up *Thungachi*. I have tried to illustrate the integration of indigenous and Western ways of thinking that co-exist in the examples. Simon offers a contemporary treatment of IK, where the present is shaped by the historic continuity of cultural values, and the conditions of the present impacts on the narration of the past (Dei 9). Ramazani acknowledges the fragmentation caused by a globalising modernity but concurs that it is still worth exploring "poets, working in a genre with especially abundant formal and linguistic traces" who have creolised Western genres by centring their specific local experiences (10). Simon, while not abiding by or seeking to emulate the stylistic attributes of indigenous poetry, has delivered an imaginative convergence of genres, dialects and indigenous ontologies. Her deviations from lyrical verse prompt the emergence of local knowledge, while her performances of language critique language itself.

Indigenising poetry writing

The poems analysed in this chapter, and those included in chapter four, elucidate a number of indigenous themes and preoccupations. "Naming Places" exemplifies themes of re-historicising through use of oral narratives around indenture and lineage. Kumar and Tiwari expand definitions of oral traditions as follows:

> Oral traditions may include eyewitness accounts, hearsay, testimonies, reminiscences and commentaries too. Oral traditions, transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth, and retained and relayed through individual and collective memory, embody truth of a different kind. (21)

Gunner postulates that orality in Africa does not merely signal the absence of literature but must be appreciated as an alternative model that charts the development of human beings (1). While Indian indigenous cultures contain a long history of literacy, for South African Indians, orality flourished as compensation for broken

genealogies, lost traditions, and fractured cultural identities. Simon's application of SAI orality can be likened to broader African traditions. On the one hand orality challenges Western history as chronological, universal, coherent, totalising, patriarchal accounts of all human experience (Smith 30-31), and on the other, orality provides tools for self-regulation (Gunner 1). In chapter four, the juxtaposition of Simon's oral accounts, her poetry and archival material, reveal discrepancies, gaps and silences. Simon provides visibility to these gaps by leaving us with incomplete stories: sometimes purposefully suggested in the poem's form, and sometimes an honest representation of her limited knowledge. Chapter four thus emphasises the role of subjective lived experience in supplementing the quantifiable claims of SAI historiography. In the selected poems of this chapter, memory is represented as a collective enterprise — where an individual's memory is often accompanied by memories of others. Thus, cultural continuity is a communal undertaking, and customs are practiced for the preservation of the culture (Kumar and Tiwari 29).

The above analysis illustrates the ontological standpoints of the poems. "Naming Places" draws on the indigenous significance of naming as a means of calling place into being (Kavanagh 46). The naming of places was not a privilege afforded to South African Indians, therefore Simon replaces place with people, marking their need to call themselves into being via naming. "Tamil Familiars" creates tensions between indigenous and Western ontologies, while signifying a potential syncretism of African and Indian indigenous knowledges. "Rati" locates and dislocates Hindu, Norse and Catholic mythology from their cultural origins. Mythology personifies ideologies of the Third World and is often viewed as immutable, ahistorical tales, bound to religious teachings (Ponzanesi 94). Mythology is reinterpreted in the poem through mutable feminine perspectives that reframe the female body as a spiritual reservoir. Similarly, "Nanni-Ma" restores harmony between women and nature by challenging the "sovereign imperial worldview that both refuses the human's animality and insists on the mastery of 'animal' others" (J. Singh 122). Lastly "Betel-Nut" reflects on SAIE as a unique worldview informed by an attachment to linguistic identities, as a compensative measure for the loss of Indian indigenous languages (Hansen *MoF* 2). Additionally, the poem sees nature as a historical archive (Boswell "Ecofeminist Poetic" 37) that has the power to ignite the speaker's connection to her cultural past, where her spoken word falls short. *Thungachi,* as the selected poems tell us, is a

genealogical project of tracing IK in the subtext of the poet's life. Dei contends that a culture's indigenous past constitutes its identity, not without ongoing influence by its socio-political contexts (12). His following conjecture corresponds to the indigenous dynamic in Simon's poetry:

> Even as local peoples present their Indigenous cultures for external consumption they are able to combine an intimate knowledge of their societies with the complexities and particularities of the modern world systems. (10)

Simon's experimentation with form, language and genre, combined with tracing and traces of IK, provides 'intimate knowledge' in its entanglement with imperialist strictures (Ramazani 5). At this point we can deduce that while Simon does not produce 'indigenous poetry', her poetry demonstrates efforts towards indigenising.

A Feminist Decolonial Turn

The selected poems are reflective of a motif in the complete collection. Women are portrayed as the bearers of knowledge and as the remaining links to India. Simon discloses that the characters are based on influential people in her life, stating in the interview:

> If I think about the collection, there are obviously characters. The more you read it the more you can see that there are characters. There's a mum character, there's a dad—a little bit less of a dad character. There's a grandma character. There's an aunt. There is also a selection of different lover characters.

The concept of women as knowledge-holders is mostly expressed through themes of orality. However, poems like "Rati" and "Nanni-Ma" turn focus on the female body: itself a repository of spiritual freedom and poetic modulation. Notions of the female body are paired with implications of non-dual consciousness, supplanting white patriarchal rule. Hence, the use of the erotic as a tool for power that initiates indigenous ways of knowing is a strategic turn away from Western dichotomies. The binaries of human/non-human and male/female — as the prime factors in the *coloniality of gender* — are disrupted in Simon's poetry. Lugones prescribes that to recognise coloniality, one must understand how humans have been relegated to animal status, and how this in itself is "a schizoid understanding of reality that dichotomizes the human from nature, the human from the non-human . . . [and] in its

power and constitution, disallows all humanity. . .” (“Toward a Decolonial Feminism” 751). I have already pointed to these tensions in Simon’s poetry and its stimulation of Hindu and African philosophies. Importantly, the reclamation of IK in Simon’s poetry is pitted against any implication of women’s subservience.

It is relevant to examine briefly the connotations of the book’s title, *Thungachi*: the Tamil word for “little sister” (Simon “EWP” 27). Brought up in a Catholic household with an already-English sounding name, Simon’s family did not participate in the tradition of nicknaming, like many other Indian families in Durban (26). Upon demanding an explanation from her parents who could not provide an answer, Simon’s father granted her the nickname *Thungachi,* an ironic name given the fact that Simon is the older of two daughters. Eventually the name became “a running joke, but affectionately so” and Simon appreciated its potential to graft the complexities of her hybrid identity (27).

Hansen explains the SAI tradition of nicknaming, particularly in the Chatsworth suburb, where many Hindu residents are registered with elaborate, traditional Indian names. Double naming became a popular solution to fit into white-dominated labour markets (“WNFS” 222) and Indian names were restricted to the domestic stratum, typically used by elderly women (216). Hansen emphasises that the domestic environment is conceived as the core of Indianness, associated with cuisine, ceremonial activity and authority over women’s bodies (216). As a result, “parallel names in Chatsworth . . . [reflect] the imperative of straddling several, often rather incommensurable, social fields. . .” (221). Similarly, Smith contends that with the advent of Anglicisation, indigenous communities resorted to hiding their birth names, reserving them for sacred endeavours (157). We can now deduce that the title of the book *Thungachi* — juxtaposed with the poet’s name *Francine Simon* — quite literally gives a name to her reconciling efforts of her fragmented condition. The collection oscillates from Catholic femaleness to Tamil femaleness, both differing yet coerced by familial and systematic patriarchy.

5.7. Concluding Remarks

Remembering the motif of women as the custodians of tradition and Tamil knowledge, the poet positions herself as the *thungachi* — the 'little sister' — the learner of ancestral knowledge, reacting reflexively to her process of becoming. The poems and interview responses are supporting evidence of Simon's orientation as a curious investigator and archivist of indigenous views underlying her family life. I am able to conclude that Simon is not an expert holder of cultural knowledge and ontologies but maintains a perpetual insider/outsider dynamic within her so-called Indianness. As the insider Simon absorbs her family's teachings, is susceptible to indigenous ontological thinking, and performs her gendered household duties as tea-maker and agreeable daughter. As the outsider, Simon's analytical and feminist reflections allow her to question the patriarchal imputations of Tamil 'superstition' and Catholic education, while distinguishing the power of women as sources of subversive knowledge and potential agents of ontological paradigm shift. Mbatha's discernment of explicit and tacit knowledge offers insight here. He indicates that explicit knowledge is generally that which is susceptible to extraction by the material archive through its comprehensible forms — either dialogue, written word, art or physical mediums that offer little resistance to codification and storage (175-76). Conversely, tacit knowledge "cannot be readily articulated by a knowledge-holder" (176). Given its deep, philosophical submersion in cultural belief and lived experience, tacit knowledge is responsible for those intuitive tendencies that cannot be captured by the framework of rationality.

Simon makes an attempt to represent tacit knowledge through her experimental usages of 'language poetry'. The poems that strongly correlate with her lived experiences, such as "Naming Places", "Tamil Familars" and "Betel-Nut", ironically demonstrate the extent of her alienation from her Indian cultural roots, and her disillusionment towards its collision with her family's Christian orthodoxy. However, Simon's use of poetic language unveils indigenous ontologies, suggesting her absorption of tacit knowledge. Simon's interview responses do not directly attest to this, presumably due to the inexplicable nature of tacit knowledge. Since she does not firmly practice animism, SAIE or the gendered identity bestowed upon her in family circles when outside of those circles, I argue that she is an IK *holder* who engages in

occasional IK *practice*. This is due to the speculation that practising IK does not appear to be an entirely naturalised aspect of her being, as it was for her grandmother or mother. Gone suggests that an IK holder can be identified as an individual who knows and lives by indigenous epistemologies (8). Simon has demonstrated theoretical engagements with indigenous and Western epistemologies in her poetry, thus embracing a contemporary and hybrid rendition of IK. From the interview material, we can presume that the same applies to her lived experiences. Dei's conviction is useful here:

> Recognition of situational, contextual, historical and political embeddedness of culture should lead us to the understanding that the Indigenous is not an undifferentiated category. It is a term that is contested and articulated in multiple ways, none of which implies that we cannot speak of the 'Indigenous'. (12)

Ultimately, if we imagine IK as a continuum, then Simon does not occupy a fixed position on either end but maintains a to and fro movement along the continuum. It is clear that given the transplantation of Indian cultural wisdom, its persistent collision with colonial forces, and intermingling with African indigenous methodologies, possibly no SAI individual belongs on extreme ends of the spectrum. SAI cultures, albeit hybrid and a synthesised amalgamation of British, Indian, African and Afrikaans constituents, is not void of an indigenous dynamic and local ways of thinking that differ from other national and global cultures. It is necessary to critique Simon's poetry from an indigenous perspective in order to appreciate its layered meaning and cultural complexity. Yet is also clear that her poetry demonstrates artistry, experimentation with language and form, and innovates a genre of feminist poetics that creates room for the multiple strands of identity amongst South African Indian women.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This dissertation explores the poetry of Francine Simon from an indigenous perspective using the particularities of an *indigenous language of critique*, conceptualised by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. As such, my dissertation identifies with decolonial theory and decolonising research praxis, reinforced by the resurgence of IK. Approaching research from an indigenous perspective prompts innovative attempts to "self-define outside the prescriptions of whiteness" (Almeida and Kumalo 11). An indigenised reading of poetry demands that the research methods used accommodate and recognise the ontologies of colonised bodies (11). According to Maldonado-Torres, "This includes the suspension of method, and the attention to problems and questions that emerge in the very effort to liberate oneself from the view of certain areas or bodies as epistemologically irrelevant" ("Decolonial Turn" 10). While I have tried to engage with decolonial praxis in executing literary analysis, I do not claim that my research delivers a *new* approach to academic inquiry: something that post-qualitative theorists have claimed to do (St. Pierre "Post Qualitative Inquiry"). Rather I have adapted the tools for institutional research in ways that serve indigenous and decolonial interests (Minor 155).

This research is not without limitations. It pays careful attention to indigenous expressions of SAI culture, favouring women's perspectives. Thus, it partially engages with issues of diaspora, the diversity amongst Indians in South Africa and how these issues translate in the South African literary canon. Focusing on the contemporary, it recognises a number of indigenous worldviews or concerns in Simon's poetry, such as naming, language, orality, women's agency, mythology, non-duality and animism. There is room for further, rigorous research into each of these characteristics. Furthermore, I have chosen to use one poet whom I identify with whose work represents the intricacies and intimacies of a repeatedly marginalised population in South Africa. I do not profess that all contemporary South African poetry may be analysed from an indigenous perspective, it is clear that a history of colonial and political oppression is closely associated with what is considered to be

'indigenous'. Nonetheless, my intention is to provoke further research into contemporary indigenous South African poetry. There is much to be investigated in terms of genre and experimentation with poetic language in the South African context. In the case of Simon, I have centralised indigeneity in the conceptual analysis of her poetry. However, given the feminist nature of her poetry, which was not foregrounded in this dissertation, my future research wishes to produce more theoretically intersectional analyses of her work by dealing explicitly with indigenous feminist theory.

Seeking to deliver an experiential rendition of academic research, I devised two major methodological approaches, which were outlined in chapter three. The first approach exemplifies creative writing techniques, inspired by post-qualitative and non-representational research strategies, in producing a montage of my interview encounters with Simon. Presented in chapter four, the montage allows the reader a glimpse into Simon's life, SAI history and the tensions I faced as a researcher who is inclined to interpret data through my own subjectivity and lived experience. The montage not only serves to stimulate a connection between the reader and the text that surpasses the subject/object binary in abstract academic research, but also serves as a preliminary indigenous analysis of Simon's poetry. Thus, chapter four supplements the critical analysis of the selected poems in chapter five. Consequently, an indigenised reading of poetry complements the indigenised production of poetry, where poets write "from within their own worldviews that integrate all genres of art into life" (Minor 185).

The aforementioned creative and analytical segments of the dissertation converge and reconcile in the setting of research *bricolage*. Research *bricoleurs* recognise that qualitative academic inquiry is interactive, participatory and shaped by history, culture, gender, race and class (Denzin and Lincoln 6). In my attempt to become a research *bricoleur*, I engaged in participatory research, given by my semi-structured, conversational interviews with Simon. The interview excerpts are presented against the historical background of indenture and apartheid – two integral systems of oppression in the shaping and culmination of current South African Indian identity. Attending to contextual facets of identity and the discourses that surround them, this dissertation finds that Simon's poetry encapsulates various strands of IK attributed to

various South African cultures. The prevalent characteristics of IK were highlighted in chapter two and used as conceptual tools in approaching an indigenous reading of Simon's poetry, namely, IK is: local knowledge which is *empirical*, based on observations and deductions regarding all elements of nature; *spiritual,* promoting and maintaining relationships with non-humans; *oral* or largely disseminated through oral narratives; and *experiential* in that is derived from lived experiences (Gone 4).

Simon emphasises the need for representation in literature and poetry of the *particular* texture of her identity as a SAI woman. I have tried to establish the problematic impression of homogeneity bestowed upon an extremely diverse population of Indians in South Africa. It is not surprising then, that while SAI women's literature and poetry exist (however minimally), regional and linguistic cultural backgrounds produce differing renditions of Indian women in South Africa. Nfah-Abbenyi cautions against uniform generalisations of womanhood in Africa, and this easily applies to the population of SAI Indian women. She postulates that "Fixed identity must therefore be destabilised and by doing so, fixed relations of gender and power hierarchies can also be disorganized" (274). Chapter five illustrates that these attributes are conveyed and embedded in Simon's poetry. As such, Simon negotiates her cultural identity through multiple dimensions of femaleness. Each dimension is textured with the ontology of a particular cultural influence. Yet through her poetry and interview responses, Simon demonstrates an acute awareness of the marginalisation of SAI culture and the troublesome ironing out of SAI heterogeneity. She remedies these issues through the creation of experimental poetry that distils her specific variation of the South African Indian woman's experience.

I have demonstrated, through the example of Simon's work, that contemporary South African poetry holds significant value in the current goals towards decolonising knowledge and education in South Africa. Dei, Hall and Rosenberg describe the relevance of IK in current education and academia, stating:

> In other words, indigenous knowledges are emerging again in the present day as a response to the growing awareness that the world's subordinated peoples and their values have been marginalized — *that their past and present experiences have been flooded out* by the rise in influence of Western industrial capital. (6)

Effectively, this dissertation has identified the colonial dichotomies that permeate the academy; literary genres; the lived experiences of SAI people; and current gender relations in the SAI community. In conducting a deep analysis of *Thungachi* in close relation to the poet, and implicating myself, this research has engaged and provoked the political, through a reclamation and centralisation of the local and the personal.

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Interviews

Simon, Francine. Personal Interview. 25 June 2018.

---. Personal Interview. 27 June 2018.

---. Skype Interview. 25 Apr. 2018.

Appendix A

Interviewee: Francine Simon (FS)
Interviewer: Arushani Govender (AG)

Interview Sample 1:

Extracted from Transcriptions of Interview Day 1: 25 June 2018 at Fortune's Cafe

The waitress arrives with our orders and places Francine's cappuccino on the table.

FS: Um, we actually drove passed my school

AG: Durban Girl's High right?

FS: No. Yeah that's my high school. But my old school, when we were coming down the road —

AG: Oh ok

FS: There were two schools. And on your left hand side, that was my primary school

AG: Ok, I'll ask you when we're going back

FS: Ya

AG: That way, so maybe I can get a picture of it

FS: Ya

AG: Ok, so I mean. Just because you're here and getting back to your home life — did you always live in Windermere?

FS: In the area?

AG: Yeah or did you live somewhere else before?

FS: When I was born I think my parents were still living in Isipingo. Cause my dad grew up majority in Isipingo and Clairwood area. And my mum grew up in town. So she moved in with him I guess. And um, and then, they had me two years later, after marrying. And then, he's always, I think he, the business was starting to move to town. So they decided to move closer so they moved to Greyville. And that was after 1990. So uh, things were a lot different. The group areas act was sort of dissolving at the time I guess. So people could move into, not wherever, but ya. They moved — my dad moved a lot as a kid so he liked to move when I was younger. And my mum was the opposite so they moved to a little, like a two-story flat in Durban North. And then my sister was born so by that time- when they moved to Durban North — my gran

was living with them. And then it was me. And then my sister came along. So there's a lot of people, so they moved to a bigger house in Durban North in a similar area. Um and then we lived there for quite a while. A lot of my poems, like my childhood poems, in my imagination, they're based on that house. Because I have a lot of vivid memories from that house. And then we were supposed to actually immigrate to Australia, um but my mum couldn't do it. She didn't want to leave, her mum here, and she, I guess we were too young to really like be part of the decision on that — cause I was around grade 7, so I was like 12. And so they sold the house in Durban North and we were supposed to leave but then we didn't so we moved to this area. So from the age of 12, 10 or 12, around that time we moved into. Uh, we just lived upstairs of the building, the bottom is owned by someone else. Ya, so I've lived there since around 12, 11 or 12.

AG: Did you move out after completing your Masters and going to China, was that —

FS: I moved to China, yes.

AG: So that was the time that you permanently moved out of your house?

FS: Yes. I didn't like move into a boyfriend's or something because that just wasn't the um.

AG: Were you already like, with Christoph at that time?

FS: No. Christoph and I met three years ago. But I had boyfriends. But my parents would never allow me to just like move out and get a house or a flat with someone. They would never allow that because that they're quite strict in that sense. So, I just lived with them because it was cheaper and easier. I was at UKZN and I got dropped off before I could drive. Then when I got my license I used to drive myself and — my sister is four and half years younger, so I'd pick her up after school, for instance, after university, and go home. My university life was still very much in the home space, very different from most of my friends.

AG: When did you get your license?

FS: I was 20. Uh, it took me quite a few times, cause I guess I was just really nervous about every — about driving in general. Driving's not so easy when you first start. And then it was fine. I had a bet with my parents that if I could get it, on the la — the final time that I took it, uh that I could get a tattoo. And they thought that — that was very funny — but then I did get the license and one of the first things I did was get a tattoo.

AG: And what tattoo did you get? I know you have several.

FS: (points to tattoo right arm) That one.

AG: That's a — is that a dolphin?

FS: It's a orca whale

A: Ohh

FS: It's a Native American orca whale. And it's a really badly done tattoo as I've learnt since getting more tattoos. But I'm still kind of attached to it because

AG: Sentimental

FS: Ya, it's like my first tattoo.

AG: What made you get that specific image?

FS: This one — we were learning about alternative cultures — I think it was — in university. Cause I'm a history major as well —

AG: History and English right?

FS: Yeah, so alternative cultures just means — yeah you learn about American history but do you learn about Native American history? So we learnt a lot about Native American history or Aztec history, or like minority history. I can't even remember who was our lecturer but it was so interesting and I wanted to be a marine biologist when I was younger, so it was like a combination of a few things. So a combination of like loving dolphins and whales and marine life, and loving history and alternative cultures, and stuff like that.

AG: What's the appeal to you about alternative cultures or maybe even specifically what you found out about Native American history? What was the charm for you?

FS: I think it was, probably thinking back now, we have a minority history. By we, I mean, Indian culture and history in South Africa specifically, in Durban specifically. It's not a history that I've seen broadly taught at schools, or if any? I don't know if it is taught at schools. I don't think so. So I think I was really attracted to that idea, that someone was teaching, you know, relational history. I mean it's not like extremely relational but the connection is there and I was really excited about that. And, Native American history and culture — it's a really rich culture that they have, that's been kind of twisted in strange ways — if you look at it now. The actual people, they are trying to sustain their culture but it's been penetrated by colonisation and pop culture, all of these kinds of things. So —

AG: (pushes phone with the voice recording application running) Can I push it closer to you?

FS: When did it get loud?

AG: Maybe it's like breakfast time.

FS: Ya, so. History was my dad's major at university.

AG: Oh?

FS: And I didn't get to do it in school.

AG: Why didn't you get to do it? Was that like a choice or?

FS: Um, it wasn't really a choice. I had no idea what I was gonna go into, in school. And my mum really wanted me to be a uh, occupational therapist. Um, unfortunately I just have no talent for science or biology or maths.

AG: What did you do — what subjects did you do in matric?

FS: I did biology and physics and maths. Because those were the subjects required to do occupational therapy. And I did not do well. I also did English, Afrikaans and French. So I did three languages and three sciences.

AG: And when you say you did three languages — we all did Afrikaans in school and I absolutely forgot it like after matriculating —

FS: Ya.

AG: It's out of my brain. Do you still remember or do you use any of the other languages?

FS: With French — my uncle's married to a Belgian woman, but she's born in — she's raised in South Africa — so she's South African, but she's fluent in French. And her parents are French-speaking, so I have that kind of connection to hold onto my French a bit more. But when I moved to China, I really didn't have anyone speaking French to me so I kind of lost it a bit. And Afrikaans I just, it's such a — I work a lot with the sound of languages, I really like the sound, and Afrikaans is such a coarse language, I just can't connect with it (chuckles).

AG: (chuckles)

FS: So, even living in Stellenbosch, I just like — for three years — been resisting it. Like I don't want — like if somebody speaks to me in Afrikaans, I'm gonna reply in English. I can understand fully, I just don't enjoy speaking the language.

AG: But you would say that you're multilingual — if you had to describe your relationship with language?

FS: I would say that's generous (laughs). I would say that definitely I'm not multilingual but I'm multi-appreciative of other languages? I like when you're in another country, to learn words and phrases from that country. You know, just to absorb the culture that you're in if you're visiting as a tourist, or — when I was in China I lived there — so, it was a necessity to learn for instance, how to count or how to identify the difference between fish and chicken and pork and beef cause I don't usually eat pork a lot, and at that time I just wasn't sure if that was gonna be something that I was gonna cook all the time, by myself, living alone there. So I had to learn those things — the difference of how to say things — or if I was going to a street food stall, how to tell them what to put in my food. I really enjoyed learning those phrases and the people in China were very nice. They obviously could see I was not from there and they would sort of help me along. You know, and then, now I have

this German-speaking, Italian side. My new family, so I'm learning. I'm very good at understanding it, just by ear, but speaking it is very compl—, it's a very complicated language. I'm still learning.
AG: Is that — are you referring to German or Italian?

FS: Uh they are German first language speakers —

AG: Ohh. Ok.

FS: And their region is 30% German, 70% Italian. But it's in Italy. It's in Italy. So they are Italian, but they're German-speaking. But I understand the written Italian because of learning French — and they're similar. So I've got a weird combination of all the skills that I learnt over the years, culminating.

AG: That's really interested. Do you read French still?

FS: Uh —

AG: I mean after high school.

FS: After high school, I do really like watching a lot of foreign movies, uh I know that sounds a little pretentious —

AG: No (giggles).

FS: (Laughs). I just got into watching movies from other places. So I like French movies but then I got interested in the European region in terms of film. Just to give me an alternative to American film.

AG: Yeah.

FS: So I really like Danish stuff, German stuff is good, Italian. Like any movie that seems interesting to me, I'll give it a go. Polish, also interesting, just like a different culture that you have a looking glass into.

AG: So you like kind of discovering alternative cultures or things that you're not often exposed to?

FS: Yeah, because I feel like South Africa is really Americanised, in a lot of ways. (Pauses) Yesterday — I'm thinking of an example and this comes to mind — we went, we were all — um, it was Christoph's supervisor, cause Christoph is doing a PhD, so his supervisor and then another friend who is in the PhD, who's American, and he's supervisor's German. And then my cousins and me — my family. So our American friend said his wife was bringing supplies for s'mores — you know what s'mores are right?

AG: Ya, marshmellow —

FS: Yeah, in South Africa we know what s'mores are because, I guess because of TV right? And everyone in South Africa but my husband's supervisor was like "what's

that?" He had absolutely no idea so I thought it was really interesting that German — in German culture, they have no clue what that is. It was so interesting.

AG: Hmm.

FS: Unusual. His wife is Italian — our American friend's wife is Italian and I guess I make friends a lot more with, older — older than me people. I don't really make a lot friends who are younger than me in Stellenbosch cause it's very Afrikaans, very white group of people. It's not easy to make friends there. It was never — I don't know why I thought it was going to be. It wasn't but it's fine, we've made friends. Most of our friends are older though.

AG: But still Afrikaans mostly?

FS: No no, a lot of like expats

AG: Oh ok.

FS: So American, Italian, German, a lot of Germans because my husband is German — speaking so it's kind of like his people cause he can speak his own language with them, so we do hang out with quite a few Germans. I have friends from — a Namibian friend and his wife is Afrikaans, South African. In Cape Town I have a few more but my friend group is very small.

AG: Sorry?

FS: My friend group is very small.

AG: Oh ok. And the moving to Stellenbosch, was that purely because of the university?

FS: Yeah. I got a scholarship and they said in the letter, 'you have to move here' or it's like a full residential scholarship, which, that means you have to move there.

AG: And that's also where your husband is doing his PhD?

FS: Yes. We met a month after I arrived in Stellenbosch — less than a month — and he had arrived one week in Stellenbosch. He was only there for 6 months to do an exchange sort of a programme for Masters, and we met and then got together. We've been together since I started my PhD, literally, I had started.

AG: When you enrolled for your PhD, was that directly after returning from China? Was that already in the works?

FS: I had said to my supervisor that I wanted to do a PhD directly after Masters and she told me that I should try and get away from research because I was young. I mean, I don't know if everyone's young at that time, but I was pretty young and she said 'go do something else' and then come back to me if you still want to do it. So after about 8 months in China, I said to her, 'yeah I wanna come home and I wanna do the PhD with you. And she said 'let's start doing some research and start getting together a

concept note on what you want your proposal — on what you want your PhD to be about.' So I came home in August 2014 and was preparing. My application was due, I think it was October, I had an application — for the PhD. I submitted it and I was in Durban just doing pretty much odd jobs.

AG: What sort of jobs?

FS: Baby-sitting, au pairing, helping my mum with her business. I also worked in a little shop. I did a couple of things just to have income. After that I got the notice that I was going to be moving, I think it was in November — late November, so I had to make a plan to move. But I had gone to China with the intention of coming back to study so I had saved money. I paid for my rent — my three months rent — all that kind of stuff, with that money. And moved over there with all my own money. I moved there in January the following year. So I was only in Durban for about — August, September, November, December — 4 months, 4 or 5 months.

AG: A lot has happened since you initially moved out of your family home.

FS: Yeah.

Interview Sample 2:

Extracted from Transcriptions of Interview Day 2: 27 June 2018 at Starbucks

AG: Going back to what we spoke about the other day, about how Indian people are represented one-dimensionally in the media?

FS: Yeah.

AG: Do you feel that's also the case with how they are represented in arts or literature or even film? Did you watch any of the Indian films?

She asks to repeat the question because she was texting her mum.

FS: South African Indian?

AG: Yeah all of it. I don't know if you watched the comedies based in Chatsworth?

FS: I haven't but a friend of mine was in *Keeping up with the Kandasamys*?

AG: Yeah.

FS: Have you seen it?

AG: I have seen it. The lead actor was in my school.

FS: The girl, she's got really interesting eyes, am I thinking about the right one?

AG: The main actress?

FS: Yeah, she's fair.

AG: She's very pretty. I forgot her name.

FS: Mishqah.

AG: Mishqah yes.

FS: Mishqah was in high school with me and I really wanted to watch it but I didn't get a chance to watch it though. That's so funny that the main actor was in your school.

AG: And the main actress was in yours.

FS: Durban's so small.

AG: I'd be interested to hear what you thought of it if you do watch it. It's fully set Chatsworth.

FS: I feel like I can't answer your question until I have watched it.

AG: That's fine. If there's anything else that you read? There's very limited literature but there are some.

FS: Well the book that I sent you a picture of. (She is referring to *Chatsworth* by Pravesen Pillay)

AG: I haven't gotten a chance to read it yet.

FS: I'll double check if my dad took it or not.

AG: I've ordered it actually.

FS: Ok. I'd be interested to see what you think as well. I found it just a wonderful book. It was super well written. It wasn't too caricature-esque. It wasn't.

AG: A fair representation?

FS: Fair representation. I had to sort of reroute my mind in terms of reading because the description, just the narrative, is in Standard English but the spoken English is not. It's in dialect. Completely. It's just not anything I've seen on paper before. I found that challenging but a good challenge. I was so happy to get used to that. I would want everybody in Chatsworth, everybody in Durban to read that book. I really enjoyed it. I'm pretty much more critical on South African literature than international literature. I feel like there's quite a high standard and people can aspire to that high standard. They can really try and should definitely do that. Just because you're of a different race and a disadvantaged background, you can write anything you want and you can do it well. South Africans have proved that, I think.

AG: It's not appreciated internationally.

FS: No it's not. I wish it was.

AG: I look forward to reading his book. Probably the only other one that engages with the dialect that way is by Agnes Sam. I don't know if you read her book—it's a collection of short stories.

FS: Maybe I should ask you first. Would you say that the Muslim community in Durban is part of the Indian community?

AG: I would say so but—

FS: Because it's quite a controversial question.

AG: But because the Indian community is so diverse, I would say I see more of the Muslim community represented in South African Indian literature.

FS: Or even South African literature.

AG: Yeah and anything from Chatsworth—that lifestyle—is rare to read. Almost non-existent.

FS: I would say the same. Because I was going to say an acquaintance of mine — Shubnum Khan

AG: I've heard of her but I haven't read her book.

FS: I haven't either and it's really bad because she was my tutor at university.

AG: Oh.

FS: She was sort of an example to me. She was the only woman of color that I knew that was writing a book, that was young. At the time I knew her, she must have been around my age, so 28, and I was like 22. I was like wow, amazing. She's doing it, maybe I can do it as well. It's interesting. I think there's more representation of South African Indian Muslims, in S.A. lit. Imraan Coovadia is also from Durban?

AG: I think so, originally. When you say that you're much more critical of South African Literature—

She starts taking her pills, I tell her not to rush. She says she forgot to take it earlier.

AG: In comparison to international literature—how do you think of yourself as a writer? Do you see yourself as belonging to the South African canon or more to an Indian diasporic canon?

FS: I certainly want to be a part of the greater international canon. I don't know who decides it. I definitely want to be a part. It's the same with South African literature, of course, I am a part of it, sort of by default I guess. Whether I feel like I belong, I do

feel—a little bit of a loner. I think that's just because, if I go to events, if I go to a festival or a poetry reading or anything like that—I don't often see the South African Indian community represented on the stage or even in the audience. Often I'll see one or two, sometimes three other people. More than five is rare. It's really a rarity. It's difficult to feel like part of the literary scene when you're often the only one at an event, representing. As an audience member as well as a speaker. There's this writer that my publishing house is publishing. Her name—I have to remember her name. I did a reading with her a long time ago, now. Saliah Bhanjee?

AG: I haven't heard of her.

FS: I think that she is releasing a book with uHlanga.

AG: Ok.

FS: I'm not sure if she's from Durban. I think she might be from Johannesburg. She's South African Indian Muslim.

AG: It's still very different from your kind of work. You were very hesitant when you started writing *Thungachi* — in that you needed a model, someone to aspire to or someone to show you an example of how to present your identity. In the end you sort of had to assemble different styles from other writers —

FS: Yeah.

AG: Who had similarities to you but didn't come from your background.

FS: No.

AG: But why were you so resistant to be the first and accept that 'there's no one like me and I just have to be it.' What was the fear?

FS: I think it's quite scary. You look out to such a vast world of writing and such a vast country and see absolutely no representation of yourself. That is really sad. I really hesitate to say I'm the first one. I'm really not sure if there was anyone else who came before me. If there is, I'd like to know. From my research, it's a no. I don't know about your research? Have you found anyone, an older writer that represents what we're discussing?

AG: No. The closest thing I found was you.

FS: Isn't that sad. Not sad, isn't that scary?

AG: It is. It's intimidating.

I tell her about my writing goals since I was a kid and about my insecurities in writing about myself or my culture.

AG: There's no space for my type of work to be represented so I feel like I need to motivate why their needs to be a space before doing anything.

FS: Interesting.

AG: Yeah.

FS: It's a similar thing to what I did.

AG: But you actually did the work, which is great. I'm scared. I feel like it needs to be there before I can put my own voice into it.

I go on to tell her about when Phillippa Yaa Devilliers lectured me in a Creative Writing degree and how I was previously used to writing stories that assimilated Western narrative models. Only during the degree, did I realise that I had to write about my own experience but am still hesitant to share my work publicly.

FS: I feel like I shared similar feelings. That's why I'm nodding. I thought, in the first place, how am I going to do this? So I developed the poetry as much as I could, until the point where, my supervisor said to me 'you know maybe you should start submitting it to places to test the waters.' Eventually after a lot of encouragement, I did it. What also broke the ice with those feelings—when I was in my Honours class—there were less than 10 of us. There were only 1, 2, 3 people doing poetry. There were two other girls and me. Then there was short story writer. Mostly all others—short story writers. In that class we would have writing exercises to help us and the next part of the seminar was sending your work, your writing, your package, to the supervisor. The supervisor sends it out to everyone else, they read it, they take a week, they read your work and then they come in and critique you about your babies. For me, my poems are my children. I feel very attached to them and that kind of broke the feeling of defensiveness for me. I realised very quickly, nobody was trying to be mean. I would have to do it to them, they would have to do it to me. We were all pretty much friends. It was hard but it was still really beneficial. That's how I made the transition into submitting. However, I left within a year and half, from South Africa, and I really wanted to get up on a stage and read but I knew that I couldn't do it. It was too much. It was too much exposure for me. I thought, who's going to care about this stuff? Seriously who's going to care? That whole idea of reading the poetry out loud to anyone seemed like an impossible thing. Even now, I really struggle because I don't perceive that people would want to read what I write and that's because there is so little representation. But people do come. Very few times there's been an Indian person in the audience that has come to me and said you know 'you're really like this. You've said some things I've always thought and it's represented on a page.' That happened to me about three times. I've done a lot of readings, just to force myself into the space of readings so I get used to it. I told my publisher I'm never going to get better unless I have a lot of experience so he started pushing events towards to me and I do as many as I can. I have a lot of experience now but I still have those feelings of inadequacy, fear, resistance in general. It's such a sparse environment in terms of Indian writing. I think it would get better but I don't know when there'll be a time when we could have a festival with only Indian writers. Or a festival event with a panel with four of us. If you think about that idea that seems really—could that happen right now, I don't think so. But could that happen in two years—I really hope so—a diverse panel with different Indian people as well. Like a Muslim person, and me I'm Catholic and a Hindu and maybe an atheist person. A whole bunch of different people. Maybe even different genders—a non-binary

gender, all of these things seem really kind of impossible at this time…I got invited to the McGregor Poetry Festival this year.

AG: Oh?

FS: Yeah. So that's from the 24th- 26th of August—just before I leave. I've gone to the festival twice—once as an emerging poet and then the following year as more of a featured poet. So this year they said to me, 'ok you've done really well. We want you to bring someone else in.' I was like, I want to bring in an Indian person with me so there's two of us. One of the girls who reached out to me and who I know has published poetry—I reached out to her and I said, do you want to join me? And she was like, 'yeah sure.' I'm really excited about that because it's not a panel but it's two people and that's really special, I think.

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Working title of research project:
Contemporary South African Poetry as an Indigenous Knowledge System: A case study on Francine Simon

Researcher: Arushani Govender

I, Francine Simon, agree to participate in this research project. I have been briefed on what the research project will entail and the extent of my participation.

(Please tick on the line provided)

I agree to participate in up to five in-depth interviews with the researcher:
Yes___ No___

I agree that my identity may be revealed for purposes of the case study on my poetry:
Yes___ No___

I agree that interviews may be audio recorded: Yes___ No___

I agree that only the researcher, her supervisors, the relevant examination committee and I, will have access to the original audio recordings upon request: Yes___ No___

I agree that the audio recordings will be stored in at the Wits Institution Repository and data store once the researcher's dissertation is complete: Yes___ No___

I agree that the researcher may observe me in public performances, talks or poetry events that I may participate in: Yes___ No___

I agree that the researcher may make notes based on observations of me (including observations during the interview process): Yes___ No___

I agree that the researcher may take photos of me according to my discretion:
Yes___ No___

I agree that I will request audio recordings, interview transcriptions, observational notes and photographs taken of me, in order to approve what is used in the final dissertation: Yes___ No___

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this research project at any time: Yes___ No___

Name of participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____