

## OVERCOMING MORAL DISPOSSESSION THROUGH AN IDEAL SPACE TO BE: SPATIALIZING MORAL IMAGINATION THROUGH AN ANTI-IMPERIALIST FEMINIST PRAGMATISM

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**ABSTRACT:** Space-based injustices have disproportionately affected marginalized moral subjects; however, space has not figured as a primary concept in moral theory. *Moral mis-recognition* often happens due to the peculiarity of one's embodiment and the spatialized dimensions underlying this. As these aspects are overlooked in philosophical theories on moral worth, entitlement, and agency, we are left with the category of the *dispossessed moral subject*. The paper centers the question of moral dispossession and also develops the link between spatial dispossession and moral dispossession. Subsequently, I develop the notion of an *emplaced moral self*. I argue that coming to a moral self is intimately tied to overcoming dispossession on the one hand, and finding an *ideal space to be* on the other. I conceptualize ideal spaces as emancipatory spaces in which the dispossessed are able to find a home and cultivate a robust moral imagination. Spaces such as Hull House (in Jane Addams' work) or the fictional Tarini Bhavan (in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's work) can become blueprints for conceptualizing such spaces. These spaces become integral to the development of a relational and imaginative sense of moral self. In the context of my analysis, I interpret and develop resources from the works of two feminist thinkers from different parts of the world, both writing in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, namely, the North American feminist pragmatist philosopher Jane Addams and the South Asian feminist thinker Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Based on the dialogue between the two traditions, I generate a more global and anti-imperialist feminist approach to the concept of *moral imagination* for moral epistemology. The concept of moral imagination is spatialized for both pragmatist and feminist ethics through this anti-imperialist feminist pragmatist approach, thus contributing to discussions on moral aesthetics in these traditions at the same time. My analysis contributes altogether new conceptual resources such as moral dispossession and an emplaced (not merely embodied) notion of the moral self to moral theory. It also links the fundamental question of claiming moral subjecthood to that of regaining a sense of space.

**Keywords:** Jane Addams, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, feminist ethics, pragmatist ethics, South Asian feminist thought, moral imagination, dispossession, moral epistemology, moral aesthetics, embodied ethics, dialogic ethics, reciprocity, spatial ethics

Classical moral theories have been strangely silent about the embodied nature of the moral agent. The moral point of view, as Seyla Benhabib puts it, has been defined through the "generalized" other," (2008, 485)<sup>1</sup> where universality and reversibility between the epistemic perspectives of moral agents is assumed. Consequently, the individuality and concreteness of the other are neglected according to her. Furthermore, aspects such as detachment and impartiality become the hallmark of the moral point of view in theories such as Deontology and Contractarianism. We must note that detachment also entails detaching from one's spatial bearings and assuming that one's moral entitlement is space-neutral. I believe that while hegemonic moral subjects can take transition between spaces for granted, space-related discrimination has often been used to override claims to moral subjecthood of the marginalized. *Moral mis-recognition*<sup>2</sup> often happens due to the peculiarity of one's embodiment and the spatialized dimensions underlying this. As these aspects are overlooked in philosophical theories of moral

<sup>1</sup> Benhabib (2008) makes a distinction between the "generalized other" and the "concrete other." She argues that dominant versions of Western moral theory have operated with a version of the other, which is devoid of particularity, thus appearing as similar to the self. On the other hand, feminist ethics highlights the importance of responding to the needs of the concrete other. According to Benhabib, this difference in approach to morality is encapsulated in the debate between Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan.

<sup>2</sup> The philosophical idea of recognition is typically considered to have its roots in Hegelian phenomenology and has gained significant attention in the domain of political philosophy with the works of philosophers such as Axel Honneth and Charles Taylor. Kristína Bosáková (2023), however, argues that while modern theorists of intersubjectivity and recognition as Husserl, Levinas, Honneth and Taylor typically assign the roots of this theory to Hegel, there is actually another direct precursor in the works of Ludwig Feuerbach (103). Bosáková's work provides rich insight into the emergence of intersubjectivity and recognition theory in the Western intellectual tradition, and especially highlights its affective dimensions through Feuerbach's work. The concept of moral dispossession, as outlined in this paper has the potential in future to add on to the broader debate on recognition theory by outlining an altogether different register of recognition (and mis-recognition), that is, (mis)recognition as moral subjects. The misrecognized moral subject is one whose claim to moral goods goes unrecognized. The framework of moral dispossession in turn, as we will see in the course of analysis, brings a unique perspective to moral theory. The emphasis on moral dispossession challenges the idea that concerns about moral recognition can simply be added to ideas of moral obligation and moral entitlement as an afterthought.

worth, entitlement, and agency, we are left with the category of the *dispossessed moral subject*.<sup>3</sup>

Moral dispossession, as I define it, is not a matter of feeling dispossessed. It is a condition, which is both material and symbolic. Dispossessed moral subjects are those that are denied moral subjecthood on the basis of both structural inequalities and mis-recognition. A discriminatory spatial politics, I believe, plays a crucial role in such moral marginalization. Therefore, the standpoint of the dispossessed subject provides a unique opportunity for moral theory to define new trajectories for itself, especially when it comes to developing a spatial understanding of ethics. The paper centers the question of moral dispossession and also develops the link between spatial dispossession and moral dispossession. Subsequently, I develop the notion of an *emplaced moral self*. The concept of the emplaced self contributes to a positive reconstruction of moral theory since it offers us a way to think about our spatial bearings or, in other words, the entrenchment in space of a moral subject. This aspect cannot be overcome, and neither should it be neglected in considerations of moral entitlement and agency. The category of the emplaced moral self, I believe, provides moral theory with a much-needed vocabulary to name how spatial dimensions of one's embodiment deeply impact access to moral entitlement, and consequently, both moral possession and dispossession. Such framings are critical for envisioning moral theory in an inclusive mode, and especially one that begins from the point of view of marginalized moral subjects. In light of this, I argue that coming to a moral self is intimately tied to overcoming dispossession on the one hand, and finding an ideal space

to be on the other. I conceptualize ideal spaces as emancipatory spaces in which the dispossessed are able to find a home and cultivate a robust moral imagination.

In the context of my analysis, I interpret and develop resources from the works of two feminist thinkers from different parts of the world, but both writing in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. The first is Jane Addams, a feminist pragmatist philosopher from North America whose work I take up in section one, while the second section features the work of South Asian feminist thinker Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. Addams and Rokeya are not only continents but also life-worlds apart; yet a hermeneutical alliance between them can help in our project of thinking ethics from the standpoint of the morally dispossessed subject. Both belong to the early generation of women thinkers whose world views and writings emerge in the context of deep involvement with various social reform movements and, in Rokeya's case, in the context of British colonial rule in India. There are, however, several challenges in engaging with their works. Although Addams' work has gained philosophical attention over the past decades, it has not been read through the lens of moral dispossession. Moreover, potential contributions from an Addamsian lens for developing a uniquely spatial framework for ethics is only beginning to get attention (see, for instance, Banerjee 2023). By centralizing these themes, my interpretation thus provides a new entry-point into scholarship on Addams. On the other hand, Rokeya's work has not received attention from academic philosophers, nor has it been interpreted through the disciplinary tools of philosophy. Engagement has primarily been from the disciplinary perspectives of literary studies, women's and gender studies, and social history.<sup>4</sup> On my part, not only do I develop a new framework to interpret Rokeya's work, that is, through the lens

<sup>3</sup> I would like to clarify that the nexus between body and space is theorized in this paper only with respect to their implications for moral theory, especially with regard to what they entail for moral entitlement and moral agency. My attempt is to develop a framework of moral entitlement, which is based on a spatialized notion of the moral subject and, in doing so, to spatialize the concept of moral imagination. The emplaced moral self stipulates a radically new entry-point into moral theory, namely, from the lens of dispossession, which is not anticipated in the dominant White and male-stream traditions of Western moral theory.

<sup>4</sup> The volume, *A Feminist Foremother: Critical Essays on Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain* (2017), edited by Mohammad A. Quayum and Md. Mahmudul Hasan, for instance, brings together a rich collection of essays from scholars working within some of the disciplinary perspectives mentioned.

of moral philosophy, but my analysis of her work also establishes points of conceptual alliance with the feminist pragmatist tradition. Based on the dialogue between these two intellectual traditions, I generate a more global and anti-imperialist feminist approach to the concept of *moral imagination* for moral epistemology. The concept of moral imagination is spatialized for both pragmatist and feminist moral theory through this anti-imperialist feminist pragmatist approach, thus contributing to discussions on moral aesthetics in these traditions at the same time. Spaces such as Hull House in Addams' work or the fictional Tarini Bhavan in Rokeya's work can become blueprints for conceptualizing such spaces. These spaces become integral to the development of a relational and imaginative sense of moral self. My analysis contributes altogether new conceptual resources such as moral dispossession and an emplaced (not merely embodied) notion of the moral self to moral theory. It also links the fundamental question of claiming moral subjecthood to that of regaining a sense of space.

### **1. Moral imagination, Memory and Space: Interpreting Jane Addams's Work through the Lens of an *Emplaced Moral Self***

When experience, including moral experience is understood in a transactive mode of doing in situation, and not simply as knowing in the mode of the spectator, then moral engagement, as Dewey puts it, demands both intelligence and imagination.<sup>5</sup> Addams, while agreeing to many of these commitments, on her part, directly connects the enhancement of moral experience and the issue of moral maturity with living a life, engaging with others, and thereby facilitating reconstruction in one's values. In texts such as *Democracy and Social Ethics*, originally published in 1902, Addams also links the generation of the moral motive directly with the formation of a

social motive. She argues that moral experience is a catalyst for social change. Embodied care (Hamington, 2004), sympathetic understanding and collective action (Lake, 2014) are integral aspects of an Addamsian conception of moral imagination.<sup>6</sup> In Banerjee (2023), Addams is read as "... not only centralizing embodiment, but also lived dialogue between agents in their difference as a site of moral imagination and moral agency." (352) Moral imagination, in short, is framed as being essentially dialogic. A new model of reciprocity is proposed in Banerjee (2023), namely, "dialogic reciprocity," which "... emphasizes a certain responsive interplay between people across difference and calls for a framing of moral agency as interactive rather than individualistic." (345) Associated with dialogic reciprocity, the concept of "liminal spatiality" is developed, which moves forward from Addams' work and "... highlights the importance of blurred or in-between spaces within the framework of dialogic ethics" and, in turn, "... contributes to the formulation of a spatial ethics across difference" (Banerjee, 2023, 345). The fundamental premise of this framework is that the nature of the meeting place must be an essential consideration of dialogic ethics; that is, "The space also determines whether moral authority can be dispersed in a more egalitarian manner" (Banerjee, 2023, 359). In this paper, I offer an interpretation of Addams's work, *The Long Road of Woman's Memory*, originally published in 1916, to further build on this spatial understanding of ethics. I develop the link between moral imagination and space as well as moral subjecthood and space. Additionally, I argue for the axis of memory as an important constituent of moral experience, that is, as an interpretive resource for present experience and as contributing to the development of our voice as moral agents. It must be noted that this work by Addams is not usually interpreted as a text in moral philosophy or pragmatist ethics, but rather as a

<sup>5</sup> John Dewey develops his idea of imagination for moral theory in his work, *Human Nature and Conduct*, originally published in 1922. This paper, however, focuses on Addams' idea of moral imagination.

<sup>6</sup> For more on how Addams departs from and further develops the idea of moral imagination compared to Dewey, see Amrita Banerjee (2023) and Maurice Hamington (2004).

work that speaks to the epistemological dimensions of Addams' thought. Through my analysis, on the contrary, I argue that the text provides rich insight into developing the link between memory and moral imagination on the one hand, and moral imagination and space on the other. By doing so, it can contribute to the development of the notion of an emplaced moral self and an ethics of emancipatory space-making, which are points of focus in the paper.

### **1.1. Moral Imagination and Projections of the Self through Memory: Interpreting *The Long Road of Woman's Memory* through the Lens of *Moral Disposition***

*The Long Road of Woman's Memory* revolves around the story of a Devil Baby, with miniature horns and a forked tail, which was said to have appeared in retribution for a husband's vices, and was rumored to be sheltered in Hull House. There were different versions of the story as Addams comes to realize such as the Italian and Jewish versions. But in all versions, the Devil Baby is born as an effect of the Father's anger and his vices. Upon wide circulation of the story, a huge number of women, especially poor, working-class, and elderly women came to Hull House over the course of weeks to meet this alleged Devil Baby. Addams relates that one woman even came to visit from the poorhouse, having heard the story of the Devil Baby (2002, 12). During their visits, the elderly women reminisce into their past, reflect on the pain and hardships they have suffered, and share these memories with residents of Hull House including Addams. Addams recognizes the constituting power of experience, and her uniqueness lies in the fact that, rather than dismissing the story as a mark of superstition, she gives it an "epistemologically relevant status" (Haddock Seigfried, 2002, xxiv-xxv). On my part, I interpret this as an attempt to frame the discussion of epistemology and memory from the point of view of the dispossessed subject, although Addams herself does not offer such a concept. My inter-

est, however, is to develop the discussion of Addams' work for the purpose of outlining a moral epistemology from the margins.

The point I would like to highlight is that in the various stories of the women that Addams documents, memory seems to call out moral harm and, through an imaginative process, provides an insight into one's own specific suffering as well as suffering in general. The story of the Devil Baby appears to give voice to the wrongs of domestic violence, the death of virtue, etc. without explicitly being framed as lessons in morality. In turn, the story becomes a conduit for these women to delve deep into their own experiences of suffering and calls forth many affective responses, which propel imagination further. The story makes visible various moral injuries on their selves that the women have endured in isolation, and which they could not or did not previously communicate to the world. I think the relevance of such stories takes on immense significance when we attempt a moral epistemology from the standpoint of the dispossessed subject since, as Addams rightly points out, "They remind us that for thousands of years women had nothing to oppose against unthinkable brutality save "the charm of words," no other implement with which to subdue the fiercenesses of the world about them. Only through words could they hope to arouse the generosity of strength, to secure a measure of pity for themselves and their children, to so protect the life they had produced..." (2002, 18-19) Marilyn Fischer notes how the Devil Baby tales are interpreted by Addams "... as a form of moral instruction that had evolved and been refined through a long historical development." (2010, 83)

One way to interpret the story of the Devil Baby, I believe, is to view it as encapsulating a kind of practical moral wisdom of the dispossessed collective, which has been accumulated over centuries of suffering and marks itself as an outcome of moral imagination. The story is a performance of moral outrage and of precarity, and it ultimately calls out injustices from a standpoint of dispossession. In

imagining their selves in relation to the story and recalling their lives through the selective power of memory, unseen practical wisdom, which is encapsulated in these memories, along with moral insights gained in the course of living a life, become visible to those that bear witness to these acts. Through individual responses to the story of the Devil Baby that appear purely affect-driven, therefore, a larger social epistemology of moral imagination can potentially take root. In so far as one imagines oneself in and through the story, the imagining subject gains a sense of moral community with other dispossessed subjects, while also playing a positive role in growing the accumulated repository of moral intelligence. Doing so, provides a way to overcome dispossession and exert a claim to moral subjecthood in relational terms.

Through the stories that the women tell, memory seems to call out moral harm. It does so through performing two functions. Memory plays a role in “interpreting and appeasing life for the individual,” and acts “as a selective agency in social reorganization” (Addams, 2002, 5). Upon listening to the women, one understands how their moral subjecthood was routinely denied. A key aspect of the idea of moral dispossession, which I emphasize is the way in which it curtails one’s moral self. The dispossessed subject is the morally injured subject and, being so, may become an incomplete and inhibited subject. Moreover, curtailment of subjecthood is a marker of moral dispossession and moral dispossession, in turn, further perpetuates and normalizes such curtailment. The story of the Devil Baby provides hope for a moral restoration of the self from this state of dispossession. It does so, “because for once a man responsible for an ill-begotten child had been “met up with” and had received his deserts.” (Addams 2002, 21).

As the women come to terms with their own dispossession and the ability to make this visible to others in relation to the story of the Devil Baby, memory also plays a role in imagining the self and the self’s ethical relation to others differently. Addams notes how time and memory

play a role in burning out resentments and hatreds, and even cherished sorrows (2002, 11). When the most “hideous sorrows ... had apparently subsided into the paler emotion of ineffectual regret,” she writes, “Memory had long done her work upon them; the old people seemed, in some unaccountable way, to lose all bitterness and resentment against life, or rather to be so completely without it that they must have lost it long since.” (Addams, 2002, 11) Moreover, remembering as an act of moral imagination allows the women to imagine their relations to others differently — anger makes way to forgiveness and bitterness gives way to hope. Such powers of memory, especially the “sifting and reconciling power inherent in Memory itself,” (2002, 16) should be understood as key aspects of moral intelligence. Although moral imagination is a key aspect of moral epistemology for pragmatists, I suggest that moral imagination plays an even greater role when we begin to think of moral epistemology from the standpoint of the dispossessed subject. Dispossessed subjects are neither treated as objects of moral entitlement, nor are they able to engage as equals in the distribution of moral goods. For them, moral imagination promises a limited, yet powerful, phenomenology of hope although this is not a substitute for material change. Memory allows one to see the moral wrongs one has suffered in relation to larger social injustices. Addams recounts the reminiscences of a woman who was left by herself to raise her son after her husband was found dead in a “disreputable quarter of Paris” (Addams, 2002, 30), and she resolves to raise him in a righteous environment. However, once the son goes to college, he gets a girl pregnant and dies by suicide. The woman raises her grandson while the mother of the newborn ends up living a disreputable life. As she remembers the past, the woman is awakened to a striking realization that the social ostracism of the so-called “un-chaste women” (Addams, 2002, 33) is often an effect of repressive social conventions. She realizes that “such hardness of heart on the part of “respectable” women towards the so-called

fallen ones," is a matter of injustice and often the result of satiating a "spiritual pride" in their own superiority (Addams, 2002, 33). In this way, memory exposes larger social injustices that frame discourses around moral villainy and transgressions to which dispossessed subjects may be subjected to, and it also plays a positive role in envisioning new norms to challenge the old ones.

### 1.2 Gaining Space, Gaining Self: Conceptualizing Space as an Ordering Relation for Dialogic Ethics

Moral injuries are disclosed not through the giving and taking of reasons in the public sphere, nor in the language of denial of rights, but in a language that is saturated with affect. As discussed above, the agent here is subjectively guided by memory and objectively by the story of the Devil Baby. The language of suffering and endurance takes on an ethical tone through the witnessing of this remembering by another in the context of a dialogic act within the intimate space of Hull House. A peculiar form of "aesthetic sociability," to use Addams' terms (2002, 9) is in play, and I add that specific kinds of spaces become conditions for the possibility of the emergence of such sociability. I believe that the self, the other, and the space of intimacy and trust that connects the self to the other in this unique relation of telling and witnessing must be construed as a triad. Within the triad, exerting a moral claim in the sense of visibilizing harms and injuries to the self becomes possible for dispossessed subjects. I would like to highlight that the peculiarity of emplacement appears to have a bearing on what the women can imagine, what possibilities are available to them for recognizing themselves as imaginative agents, and how far their imagination can be propelled into gaining both a self-understanding and an understanding of the world when they find themselves placed in a space of trust such as Hull House.

Epistemic and moral self-assuredness is conferred as the women's memories are recognized as conveying moral insight, and not dismissed as a passive record of a bygone life. To understand the role of the spatial con-

figuration, we must note that the same voice was being heard differently or not being heard at all in the women's own domestic spaces. The difference in response they receive within Hull House makes a difference to the projective powers of imagination and their ability to claim themselves as moral subjects. Powers of memory are accentuated many-fold when exercised by dispossessed subjects, but only when these subjects find a voice within the right kinds of spaces. The issue concerning the voice of the marginalized has received considerable attention in postcolonial theory in the context of discussions of representing these voices in historical and political analysis. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) for instance, highlights a grave problem in the self-presentation of subaltern voices due to their insertion into public discourse, which is mediated by dominant colonial structures. When uptake is constrained by dominant narrative possibilities, then even though the 'subaltern woman' may literally speak, the possibility of hearing her voice is severely restricted by these structural obstacles. Consequently, the linguistic exchange cannot translate into a dialogic utterance. While recognizing these difficulties in the process of representation in the context of socio-political discourse, my analysis moves on to the terrain of moral theory, where dominant frameworks neither offer a notion of dispossession, nor any conception of moral subjecthood that recognizes its dependence on a prior claim and, therefore, raises the question of moral recognition. On my part, I develop the nexus between body, space and moral imagination to foreground how spatial dispossession may be a primary factor in obstructing one's claim to moral subjecthood. In this sense, the notion of an emplaced moral self, which is developed in the paper signals toward both constraint and possibility due to spatialization of the moral subject, and foregrounds the implications of space for the expression of a moral voice. I want to highlight that space confers socio-political power and, if the lack of such power is a constituent factor in moral dispos-

session, then the inequality of positioning of agents can translate into an unequal access to exercise one's moral powers. Part of building a model for a dialogic ethics of reciprocity across differences, therefore, would rely on attending seriously to the ethics of space-making or, in other words, developing a spatial ethics. When a space is fashioned in a dialogic mode, it allows one to become visible on one's own terms as a moral subject to others who, in turn, must recognize them as such, whether it is as sufferers of moral injury or as epistemic agents with unique moral standpoints. My argument that a dialogic ethics of reciprocity across differences must attend seriously to the ethics of space-making can contribute to existing discussions on representation in this respect.

Memory's social role is best visible in conversation with the other. The intimate but yet public nature of the space of Hull House allows the women who tell and those who listen to understand how diverse experiences often connect and find a shared human basis in suffering, loss, violation, and precarity. The space reflects how collective wisdom to guide conduct may sediment through the recalling, and affective responses from the empathetic other. Addams herself admits this, as she listens and writes, "... I found myself almost agreeing with her whole-hearted acceptance of the past as of much more importance than the mere present...." (2002, 13) It is interesting when Addams notes how some men visiting Hull House answer in response to her query about whether they believed that Hull House would exhibit a poor little deformed baby. "... they replied: "Sure, why not?" and "it teaches a good lesson, too" ...." (2002, 18). Addams interprets the men's comments as acknowledgement of "the strange moral standards of a place like Hull-House" (2002, 18). The point to note here is that, without stating as much, a certain kind of moral orientation appears to be attributed to the space of Hull House that is neither reducible to the moral orientation of its inhabitants nor its visitors. The space seems to act as an interpretive horizon for the men to articulate their moral position with respect to

the Devil Baby, and for Addams to interpret the men's responses. In this respect, space constitutes a key third element of the triad in the sense of functioning as a sign against which moral responses between the self and the other are envisioned and interpreted.

## 2. A Philosophical Interpretation of the Moral Universe of Rokeya's *Padmarag*: The Centering of the Space-derived Moral Subject

In this section, I interpret Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's work of utopian fiction titled, *Padmarag* from the lens of moral philosophy, with a focus on its implications for moral epistemology and moral aesthetics. This work was originally written in Bengali in 1924, and the translation by Barnita Bagchi was published in 2005.<sup>7</sup> *Padmarag* is a work of utopian fiction, but has autobiographical undertones. Bagchi notes in her "Introduction," "... *Padmarag*, is no dream vision .... It belongs to Rokeya's own time and place, and the problems it lays bare are clearly contemporary." (2005, xviii) The world of the text gives voice to many spaces created and inhabited by Rokeya herself in colonial Bengal such as the school she ran for Muslim girls, the slums where she did much of her work, and the women's organizations she founded. My aim is to draw out the work's potential for contributing to a feminist pragmatist approach to moral theory. I further develop the connection among memory, narration, and moral imagination on the one hand, and between narration and truth on the other. In light of these, I outline a definition of dialogic spaces as relational loops and as polyphonic. I rely on the insight from feminist moral theory that the boundary between the moral and the social is not as neatly drawn as classical moral theory takes it

<sup>7</sup> Rokeya, like some other contemporaries of her time such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, uses fiction (including in the form of utopia) as a way to subvert gender norms and call out various social and political injustices of her time. Her writings range from fiction to essays to letters. Some of these are in Bengali and a few are in English. *Padmarag*, which is a work of utopian fiction, has autobiographical undertones, but Rokeya here takes recourse to fiction unlike Addams' direct autobiographical narration.

to be. I am also guided by the pragmatist insight that ethics is social, both in the sense that moral values have a social basis, and that moral reconstruction and social reconstruction are intertwined. I try to situate and read Rokeya's text within these hermeneutical possibilities in order to evolve specific insights for a moral epistemology from the standpoint of the dispossessed subject. Again, the point to note is that the text has neither been interpreted as a text in moral theory, nor as a work in epistemology. I believe, however, that my analysis of the text contributes to the development of an anti-imperialist feminist pragmatist conception of moral imagination as a part of a dialogic feminist ethics. It also contributes to the notion of ideal spaces where one can stake a claim to moral subjecthood from a position of dispossession.

### 2.1 Dispossession as Displacement and Misplacement: Reclaiming the Epistemic and Moral Self

At the center of *Padmarag* is Tarini Bhavan, a space which is inhabited by many women who are displaced or misplaced, and come from various walks of life. "Bhavan" means residence or house, so this can be translated as Tarini House. It is set up by a Brahmo<sup>8</sup> widow named Dina-Tarini as a home for widows (2005, 27). At the time, the plight of the widow was one the worst; she was a figure who was often relegated to the margins of the household and to society. Dina-Tarini eventually adds a school for girls, forms a Society for the Upliftment of Down-trodden Women, and a Home for the Ailing and the Needy. The Tarini Workshop teaches women skills for earning an income (Rokeya, 2005, 28). As Ben Baer and Smaran Dayal put it, "*Padmarag* both solicits and subverts the arc of the so-called "marriage plot" and fictively documents the work of an all-female group's maintenance of a multi-faceted institution (school, sanctuary, workshop)." (2024, xxviii) The characters inhabiting the space

range from people who are dispossessed in their own homes, to ones that have lost their home, to ones that face social ostracism. One finds Charubala Datta, a Hindu spinster, Saudamini, a Hindu married woman who had to leave her husband's home, Helen Horace, a Christian Englishwoman who is unable to get a divorce from her abusive husband who was later put in a lunatic asylum due to dictates of English law (Rokeya, 2005, 32), Koresha-bi, a Muslim woman who has left her husband's home, Siddika (who is named Padmarag by Dina-Tarini) and who is left in the care of Tarini Bhavan, and many others. In the terms being developed so far, we see a picture of dispossession emerging as an effect of displacement of the subject in the sense of being uprooted from spaces, or misplacement in the sense of the subject not fitting into a space. Dispossession manifests through spatial confinement, being space-choked and space-discriminated. This kind of material in the text provides the ground for eventually interpreting Tarini Bhavan as a material and symbolic site for resisting both moral and epistemic dispossession.

I think that Rokeya's work reflects a nuanced discussion concerning the multiplicity in social positioning and a complex interweaving between oppression and privilege, which is way ahead of the contemporary feminist discussions on intersectionality. The predicament of women as forces of patriarchy, religion, colonialism, and nationalism collide, and the oppositional agency displayed by them are highlighted. Dina-Tarini herself is a Brahmo widow and one who is privileged in terms of class and education, but she is ostracized by her relatives who believe she works with "disreputable" people.<sup>9</sup> Saudamini is marginalized as a second wife and step-mother. Many of the women who find a home in Tarini Bhavan are utterly destitute. The text, therefore, provides a textured understanding of social dispossession. If social dispossession is understood as graded,

<sup>8</sup> Brahmoism was a socio-religious reform movement, which emerged in Bengal in the nineteenth century and was pioneered by Raja Rammohan Roy.

<sup>9</sup> Dina-Tarini is a widow, who spends the inheritance from her husband to build Tarini Bhavan, and faces disapproval from her kin and family. Dina-Tarini's life's trajectory reflects that of Rokeya's own and may be read as a testimony to Rokeya's world.

then moral dispossession too must be taken to manifest in varied and graded modalities.

The residents of Tarini Bhavan discuss virtues, vices, agency, and responsibility, thus generating an entire moral universe. Many concepts with heavy moral connotations emerge in the text such as responsibility, generosity, service, empathy as ways of framing both purposes and people. Various negotiations happen as the women live together, share stories, and work together to realize the moral and social purposes of Tarini Bhavan. When one reads carefully and tries to excavate the layered ethical contours of the text, we are able to see how the moral self is reclaimed anew in and through establishing a relationship with others on the one hand, and imagining a relation with a space where one is at home on the other. Moreover, this relation is not imagined in the dry rationalistic language of rights, but rather in terms of a reason-feeling complex, which is encapsulated in terms such as responsibility, generosity, and service. Dina-Tarini herself overcomes the curtailment of her social self (a mark of dispossession as discussed above) through the imagination of a new moral self that is imbued with a sense of generosity, empathy, and a deep sense of responsibility toward others. The moral self is not solipsistic, but extends into the world, and it is able to take shape through Tarini Bhavan where this moral goal and social change can be achieved in unison. Rokeya writes, "Tarini's relatives would remark, 'Where will Tarini find people? Will any wife or daughter from a respectable family go anywhere near her? Every prostitute, every leper and every worthless orphan is now a member of Tarini's extended family!'" (2005, 28). To this, Tarini "... would retort, 'Is everyone given the honour of serving others?'" (Rokeya, 2005, 28) Dina-Tarini appears to find her moral agency precisely at the site where it is dismissed — she refashions her idea of the family to extend it to whom she owes responsibility in Tarini Bhavan, and through this space, into the world. Rokeya's choice of the name is interesting. While "Dina-Tarini," refers to someone

who saves others in distress, Bagchi notes how the name "means one who, like a boatman, rows the distressed and deprived away from their suffering." (2005, 195) I believe the name can yield a vision for feminist moral epistemology, which is predicated on the imagination of a self that is attuned to the suffering of others, and is both relational and affective. In this sense, the figure of Dina-Tarini may become a model for conceiving of an ethical self, which is dialogic and is engaged in acts of care.<sup>10</sup>

The residents get a foothold in the world through the work they do, which stipulates new ethical modes of relating to others, whether as teachers to young girls, nurses to the needy, or working in the slums with the poor. Sakina Khanum becomes a civil surgeon, Rafiya Begum a typist, and Siddika eventually becomes good at nursing. (Rokeya, 2005, 111-112). From an individualistic understanding of moral responsibility, they are able to transition into a larger moral and social vision of healing the world and combating its injustices, thereby tying the project of moral reconstruction directly with social reconstruction. Relationality is not just imagined, but it is lived. Siddika ends up fashioning solidarity with Saudamini, as they work together. An epistemology of trust, fashioned on both the affective and the un-said is established, which eventually pushes Saudamini to reveal her sufferings to Siddika. In fact, in reply to Saudamini's question to Siddika about whether Siddika is really keen to know about Saudamini's story and what she will offer in return, Siddika says, " 'A few tears' ", to which Saudamini immediately responds, " 'That is precisely what I want. Alas! The cruel world ... has not deigned to shed a single tear for me. How miserly has the world been towards me!' " (Rokeya, 2005, 71) Moral recognition here works on the basis of the perception of a relation, and it assumes an underlying epistemology of

<sup>10</sup> An interpretation of Jane Addams in relation to care ethics care can be found in Banerjee (2023) and Hamington (2004). My reading of Dina-Tarini as embodying aspects of an ethic of care can further help in conceptually relating the ideal of the ethical self in the works of Addams and Rokeya.

trust without saying much or assuming any sharedness of beliefs.

Saudamini's story highlights how social dispossession within one's home space may result in moral dispossession. She was married to a widower with two children. Right from the time she entered her marital home, her identity was framed through the lens of a stepmother. As Saudamini tries to care for her step-children, she is constantly set up by Shyama (the maternal aunt of the children). Shyama would cause harm to the children and frame Saudamini as the moral villain, that is, as a vicious person who wasn't capable of maternal affection and care for the children. Social and spatial dispossession directly result in mis-recognition.<sup>11</sup> The attribution of moral villainy here is a mark of moral dispossession rather than being a ground of being dispossessed. There are of course, epistemic underpinnings of moral dispossession, which an understanding of epistemic injustice may capture. For instance, if social experience is central to both self and social understanding, and these are also domains of epistemic practice, then, when this sphere is prejudiced by unequal relations of power, the result is a distinctive kind of epistemic injustice, according to Miranda Fricker (2006, 2008). Fricker designates this as "hermeneutical injustice" (2006, 96) and defines it as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization." (2006, 102) This occurs when one lacks the interpretive resources to make sense of their experience and this gap is generally due to the systemic marginalization of the group to which the individual belongs. Hermeneutical injustice manifests

in a "cognitive disadvantage" (Fricker, 2006, 103) and issues forth in many epistemic wrongs, for instance, a kind of "situated hermeneutical inequality" (2006, 103), loss of epistemic confidence (2006, 104), and preventing epistemic agents from developing intellectual virtues (2006, 104). Bringing this lens to bear on the current analysis, we may see that Saudamini's epistemic possibilities are pre-determined as she is perceived to be a *step*-mother even before she steps into the role. While Fricker's work brings focus to harms that we may suffer as epistemic agents, my analysis seeks to uncover the specific harms and injustices that we may suffer as moral agents.

I emphasize how moral dispossession harms Saudamini in the sense that she begins to perceive herself as operating with a diminished moral self. She says, " 'I admit that some lack in me must have been responsible for my failure.' " (Rokeya, 2005, 75) This is a poignant instance of how moral injury may curtail moral subjecthood such that one doubts and shames oneself to the point where one eventually isolates oneself from others and the world. As the self-assuredness of the moral self collapses, and dialogue with others (including her husband) breaks down, the possibility of imagining herself as a moral agent also diminishes for Saudamini. The traditional domestic space, from the standpoint of the morally dispossessed subject, comes to symbolize an "abode of demons," a "prison" in Saudamini's words, which seems to designate a space where, as she puts it, "there is no soothing shade, no sympathy for others' pain..." (Rokeya, 2005, 78). The process of remembering in the presence of Siddika allows Saudamini to give voice to the moral hurt she has suffered. In the presence of the empathetic other, bound together in the space of trust that is Tarini Bhavan, Saudamini is able to give voice to how the moral injury she has suffered is a manifestation of a larger moral dispossession that stepmothers face. The dispossession threatens to stiffen one's moral possibilities even before one can realize these. Saudamini also learns to recognize that the curtailment to herself is an outcome

<sup>11</sup> Mis-recognition appears to issue forth in many forms. First, it is in the form of psychological violence from the other. It eventually manifests in the "silent gaze" from Saudamini's husband (Rokeya 2005, 76), and finally indifference from him. In the face of mis-recognition, Saudamini even stops saying that she is not morally blameworthy, and begins curtailing herself to the point that she stops objecting to being the vicious mother for which she was being held morally responsible. This instance is poignant in establishing the conceptual link between mis-recognition and moral dispossession.

of moral wrongs inflicted on her rather than the manifestation of personal vice on her part. Only in Tarini Bhavan, which creates an impromptu community, and where she sees herself in the presence of fellow sufferers who are willing to shed a tear for her, does Saudamini hope for recognition and restoration of her moral self.

Listening to Saudamini's story, Siddika responds, "I do not think it was your fault, since Koresha-bi has endured similar suffering." (Rokeya, 2005, 80) The relation to Koresha-bi in Tarini Bhavan makes materially concrete the imagined reciprocity with others who have suffered similar violations. Saudamini's narration, her speaking the truth, not only enables her to gain clarity about her own dispossession, but helps her to imagine a social basis of the moral dispossession that she, Koresha-bi and others like them suffer. Intrinsic to the dialogic process, and indeed to its success, is the condition of being free from the threat of violence (including space-related violence), which manifests in curtailment to the moral self. The self is able to envision itself as the truthful self in the course of the narrative process. While Addams exposes the selective power of memory, here we see distinct connections emerging among memory, narration, imagination and truth. As the self remembers in the presence of empathetic others, and in overcoming the threat of mis-recognition, the self comes to see itself as morally empowered to speak the truth. As one dares to speak the truth, the self gets further connected with others and thus overcomes its moral isolation. The ability to be able to tell the truth about one's dispossession without fear is critical to releasing the full powers of moral imagination for dispossessed subjects. Helen too insists "I am narrating the truth - not fiction...." (Rokeya, 2005, 93) as she tells her story in the presence of others. Telling the truth in the presence of empathetic others, that is those who agree to bear testimony, enables the self to see how the coming out of the truth about one's dispossession and the ability to be able to tell it without fear are necessary for overcoming dispossession and releasing the full

powers of one's moral imagination for the future. In the context of truthful narration within the dialogic network that is Tarini Bhavan, both Helen and Sakina who are divided on the basis of religion, nationality, and political status within the British colonial government, are collectively able to name the dispossession that patriarchy and nation may inflict on women.<sup>12</sup> The dual focus on the emplaced moral self and a spatialized understanding of moral imagination can contribute to the development of a larger social epistemology of dispossession. In this way, my analysis highlights that we must recognize there are significant epistemic implications of the idea of moral dispossession just as Fricker's work shows there are ethical implications of epistemic injustice.

In pragmatist ethics, the failure of moral imagination is considered to be a mark of moral failure. However, the analysis in the paper introduces further qualitative distinctions within this perspective. I urge that if limitations to moral imagination are self-imposed, then it ought to be considered as a moral failure. However, if limitations are imposed due to the peculiarity of the agent's emplacement, as we see in Saudamini's case, then this ought to be taken as an indicator of moral dispossession rather than as an instance of moral failure. Saudamini's inhibited moral selfhood is not a manifestation of personal vice; it actually marks moral dispossession. Characterizing the situation thus, allows us to name the failure of moral imagination in such cases as an instance of moral harm, which is endured by dispossessed subjects. It is critical for a feminist pragmatist dialogic ethics to interrogate whether the conditions for moral imagination to exercise itself exists for a moral agent, just as much as it is important to emphasize the role of moral imagina-

<sup>12</sup> As Helen realizes how she is dispossessed by the laws of her land, England that binds her to her abusive husband who is now in a lunatic asylum for life, she connects with Sakina's true telling of the story of her life, where the latter suffers similar dispossession on another continent. Helen understands Sakina's hurt upon listening to her story and remarks, "Why does this hurt you so, Sakina? You too, were sacrificed in the interest of your country's laws and customs!" (Rokeya, 2005, 96)

tion for moral epistemology. Only when we do so, can we hope to evolve an anti-imperialist conception of moral imagination, that is, one which allows us to analytically capture and normatively question moral dispossession.

### **2.2 Relational Loops and the Emergence of a Polyphonic Model of Space for Dialogic Ethics**

The displaced, misplaced, or disoriented subject, in the sense of being spatially confined, spatially surveilled, space-choked, and space-discriminated, finds a home in Tarini Bhavan. We see moral subjects evolving, that is, coming to be in new ways as they begin to imagine themselves as morally empowered and develop larger visions of social critique and reform within the space of Tarini Bhavan. Tarini Bhavan in this sense can be interpreted as a third space, which is more extended than home but is fashioned through bonds of intimacy, care, and generosity. The space is imbued with a moral and social purpose to mitigate suffering. Writes Rokeya, "... training was imparted to those who would become teachers ... and to nurses ... They would ... distribute rice, clothes and medicine and provide nursing care to people suffering the aftermath of famine, floods, and epidemics." (2005, 31-32) The dispossessed self eventually learns to project itself into the world with a new hope and a heart full of compassion, and is supported by her sisters in the right kind of space. As Saudamini arrives at an enlarged and emboldened sense of self, for instance, this spirit is transmitted to Siddika through her connection to Saudamini. Again, the moral self and the space are both imbued with a sense of purpose in relation to each other, which then constitutes a relational loop where each feeds into the other. Tarini Bhavan, therefore, can be conceptualized as a dynamic and multi-layered network of relations. The ideal space as an emancipatory space makes it possible to envision oneself in the dual mode of both receiving and feeling-with others while respecting the other's difference from the self rather than projecting oneself onto the other.

On the one hand, Tarini Bhavan functions as a home where dispossessed selves can come to be, that is, it functions as a space for overcoming moral dispossession, which is the outcome of various orders of socio-political dispossessions. It does so by acting as a counter-space to the domestic home space of violence and dispossession. On the other hand, Tarini Bhavan also functions as a counter-space, where one could hope to gain respite from the regressive force of colonial dominance as well as masculinist nationalism. For instance, the school did not run with funding from the British colonial government, and so it was under no obligation to follow the "government-approved syllabus" (Rokeya, 2005, 30), neither did it accept donations from the ruling aristocracy of native Indian states that had declared their allegiance to the British Empire. Therefore, in Rokeya's words, "The students were not forced to memorize misleading versions of history and end up despising themselves and their fellow Indians. Greater emphasis was laid on ethics, religious studies and the inclusion of sound moral values." (2005, 30-31) They were taught science, literature, mathematics, geography, history and astronomy (2005, 30)." Moreover, Tarini Bhavan appears to function as an interpretive horizon through which the women come to define themselves and their purposes and, in fact, come to see themselves as contributors to nation-building. Towards the end of the text, Dina-Tarini remarks, " 'Of course, God is neither blind nor deaf — the kind of life Sakina has lived or the way Siddika is sacrificing hers will never be in vain. Mother India! Who says that you are a poor beggar? When you have such gems for daughters, in what way are you impoverished?' " (Rokeya, 2005, 177) The women find a way to relate to the nation through care and nurturance rather than through violence or domination.

Coming from many different ends of the social spectrum, the women give voice to a unique kind of anti-imperialist feminism, which learns to see patterns among social injustices without resorting to the second-wave

Western liberal feminist framework of common oppression. In fact, Tarini Bhavan's purpose is not defined through an assumed common and/or pre-given conception of the feminine condition, but it is made subservient to a larger purpose; and Dina-Tarini's figure, as Bagchi notes, "... is an ideal, imaged in religious-spiritual terms." (2005, xviii) Saudamini declares, "'Come, all you abandoned, destitute, neglected, helpless, oppressed women — come together. ... Tarini Bhavan will serve as our fortress.'" Rafiya adds, "We must smash the core of this custom of seclusion. ... No more putting up with abuse to preserve the dignity of seclusion!" to which Helen who has suffered at the hands of regressive divorce laws in England adds, "I, too, shall move heaven and earth to ensure that these despicable English laws are abolished." (Rokeya, 2005, 104-105) In all this, very distinct and context-specific, yet common purposes for improving women's condition emerge. Equality is not understood in terms of a common essence, but rather through a care-based language, when Rokeya writes, "Muslims, Christians, Brahmos and Hindus — all working in harmony, as though born from the same womb." (2005, 30) In Tarini Bhavan, doing, both in terms of the moral vision of service and effecting social change, becomes key to constituting the moral self.

I believe that an ideal space from the point of view of dialogic ethics must be polyphonic, so that difference is not reduced to sameness. Women in Tarini Bhavan belonged to different religions, classes, regions, castes, and linguistic communities and, in this sense, the text can be read, as Baer and Dayal put it from a literary studies perspective, "a dramatization of an unconditional ethics of hospitality" (2024, xxviii). While in principle agreeing to this, I would like to introduce complications from the lens of moral epistemology, especially in terms of how embodied transactions between the self and the other also create incommensurability. To illustrate, consider one of several interesting exchanges in the text. Koresha-bi, who is not a native speaker of Bengali, mispronounces

Padmarag's name as Padma-raj. (Rokeya, 2005, 35) Most of the other characters (Hindus and Muslims) are Bengali-speaking. Bibha responds, "'Koresha-bi! You really degrade our Bengali names. ... that's very unfair of you.'" In response to this, Usharani Chatterjee, another Hindu woman calls out Bibha, "'You should hardly lament over this! Don't you remember how initially, you would distort the pronunciation of Muslim names? You'd call Rasekha 'Rasika', Saukat Ara 'Suktara'?"' (Rokeya, 2005, 35) Bibha admits, "'I also remember that I nearly came to blows with Jafri Khanum on that subject. Well, our Koresha-bi speaks Bengali quite fluently'" to which Usha then makes a funny comment, "'She certainly does! She just invited me for tea with the words, 'The tea will drink you!''" Koresha turns towards Tarini and asks, "'Isn't that correct Bengali?"' and Tarini reassures her, "'That's quite all right; don't let these Bengali women bother you.'" (Rokeya, 2005, 36)

From the perspective of a feminist moral epistemology, I consider this exchange to have several striking implications. In all these interactions, epistemic ignorance is accepted, called out, and negotiated. However, this is not done in the language of shame or lack, but with sensitivity that both knowledge and ignorance emanate from a perspective. There is an awareness that separate linguistic worlds may entail distinct epistemic worlds, ultimately paving the way for a multi-layered understanding of moral worlds. Therefore, managing ignorance demands specific ethical orientations, first of which is the ability to register what is not being heard, or rather what may not be heard. Second, as the linguistic exchanges reveal points of incommensurability and potential conflict, the affective nature of the space and the ethical orientation of the agents involved transform potentially negative nodes into positive meanings. When the space is one of trust, Bibha does not fear coming to terms with her own ignorance and acknowledges Koresha-bi's efforts, while Koresha-bi finds understanding in Tarini. When Usharani calls out Bibha, she not only stands with but assumes the

ethical modality of, what I term, as *standing in* for Kore-sha-bi. Standing in happens when one bears testimony, and without claiming to absolutely understand the other's suffering, nevertheless assumes moral responsibility to respond to it. Through these multiple loops of relationality, agents and communities expand their powers of moral imagination, understand their own limitations, and come to a coherent sense of linguistic, epistemic and moral community, which is plural, inclusive and ethically keeps itself open to ever-expanding frames of meaning and knowing. The powers of moral imagination are activated manifold by emplacing agents within emancipatory spaces. Therefore, epistemic and moral limitations are overcome, not by moral agents detaching themselves from the place or de-emphasizing their spatial bearing, but by finding themselves in the right kinds of spaces to be. In this sense, moral imagination becomes a form of, what I term, *moral gathering*, where one's moral point of view can be said to be an outcome of multiple negotiations involving various relational loops of dialogue. The framework of moral gathering emphasizes that my relation to others is already sedimented into my point of view even though I may not be conscious of this. An anti-imperialist understanding of moral imagination can be evolved when one comes to terms with these points of connection. Moral gathering demands both ethical solidarities and the proper kinds of dialogic spaces, which can uphold such bonds of solidarity. The phenomenon of moral gathering also highlights our responsibilities as moral subjects to both stand with and stand in for the other whenever required. Such orientation is possible when one envisions oneself as a part of a network of moral relations that recognizes our entrenchment in space, and actively works to build dialogic spaces which can propel moral imagination in creative and unanticipated ways. The raw-material for a polyphonal, but non-cacophonous version of dialogic ethics relies on moral theory recognizing its spatial basis and the importance of ethical forms of space-making.

### Epilogue

I have argued that the embodied moral agent of feminist and pragmatist moral theory should be conceptualized as being emplaced at the same time, with the emphasis being on the spatialized dimensions of the moral self. The nexus between the moral self and space, that is, the moral self as a self that is situated in space, along with the nature of this positioning are important to theorize, if we aim to restore moral agency to the dispossessed subjects of moral philosophy. The myth of the self-assured, detached, and universal moral agent can be dispelled when we are able to see that moral agency (both the experience of moral agency as well as a perception of such agency from a third person point of view) is predicated upon a prior claim to moral subjecthood, which has to be acknowledged by others. Implicit within the claim to moral subjecthood, I have argued, is a claim to space. While hegemonic moral agents could take their subjecthood for granted such that their moral agency is never in question, gaining recognition for their claim to subjecthood, especially in the form of a claim to space (or particular spaces) has typically been the ontological burden of those on the margins of moral subjectivity. For peoples whose moral subjecthood itself is in question, the denial of status as a moral agent is often entangled with denial of spatial access or, at best, only partial or mediated access to certain spaces.

The concept of the emplaced moral self, in turn, conceives of the moral subject not in self-referential terms, but as a being who needs to be recognized by others and also has an assurance to space/s. A lens which is developed from the perspective of the dispossessed subject, therefore, can offer a more inclusive frame for understanding moral subjecthood and agency. This is because we can now conceptualize the nature of the privileged subjects of moral philosophy, not in terms of self-referential capacities such as reason, but in relational and dialogic terms, that is, as beings who have both recognition

from others as well as an assurance to space/s. I have argued that liminal spaces such as Hull House (in Addams' work) or Tarini Bhavan (in Rokeya's work) can become blueprints for conceptualizing ideal spaces. These spaces highlight the importance of the space-world for the development of a relational and imaginative sense of moral subjectivity. Assurance in one's emplacement, and finally, the nature of the space, therefore, become critical factors for the expression of moral agency as well as developing confidence in oneself as a moral agent.<sup>13</sup>

Discriminatory and regulatory spaces can play an active role in moral mis-recognition, thus fueling moral dispossession of some at the expense of others. On the other hand, spaces fashioned to mitigate such differences are capable of playing the opposite role of furnishing a moral community, which allows one to overcome dispossession and establish a claim to moral subjecthood. Remembering in the presence of others in a dialogic mode as defined above, creates an inter-subjective basis for moral imagination. On the other hand, the space where such experience is made possible may be characterized as constituting an objective-in-between. Various subjective experiences may come to see themselves as a part of a larger collective wisdom within ideal spaces, where different and often incommensurable experiences may come to find shared moral ground in terms of suffering, loss, and violation. A collective understanding of practical wisdom as an aspect of moral imagination can find an anchor in such spaces. A critical step in overcoming dispossession is imagining oneself as a part of a moral community who, although wronged, is nevertheless morally worthy.

<sup>13</sup> The importance of conscious-raising activities, especially in the context of abuse and sexual violence has been an important theme in much of feminist activism and theory from the mid to late twentieth century. In this sense, our feminist foremothers such as Rokeya and Addams may be said to pre-empt the impetus behind coming together to establish bonds of intimacy and trust for the marginalized. On my part, I emphasize how dialogic spaces can help in anchoring a claim to moral entitlement, gaining moral recognition and developing moral assuredness. Such spaces would allow moral imagination to flourish at both the individual and collective levels, thus propelling the growth of moral intelligence in new directions.

Space gives a material body to this collective memory, and the right kinds of spaces institute relational loops to form resilient moral communities. In other words, dialogic spaces are the unspoken background conditions for founding or materializing moral and epistemological communities of belonging, hope and resistance. Overcoming moral dispossession, therefore, must be considered to be space-dependent, with ideal spaces playing a direct role as much as the presence of empathetic others in the healing process and restoration of subjecthood to the curtailed moral self. The concept of the dispossessed subject, in turn, functions as a counter-category to mark the ideological limits of a coherent, self-sufficient and self-assured notion of the self in moral theory.

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