

# Ontological Insecurity, Subjugation and Coercion: An Intersection of Power and Gender in Lisa Gardner's *Never Tell: A Novel* (2019)

**R. T. Samyuktha and S. Janaki**

## **Abstract**

Throughout history, women have been invariably objectified in art, literature and popular culture. The gendered power dynamics entrenched in the historical legacies of colonialism and imperialism have perpetuated entities of patriarchal power that subordinate women, which is reflected in the broader patterns of inequality and oppression of women in the contemporary society. Lisa Gardner's *Never Tell: A Novel* serves a medium for study on the threatened sense of self and identity, corresponding to the manifested patriarchal power exertions over women through violence and coercion. This article explores this complex interplay of power, dominance, oppression, violence and trauma. In that light, it also examines the colonial impacts on gender dynamics, contributing a better understanding of power plays and collective trauma. By employing trauma theory, we bring close attention to the victim's trauma after her abduction, to explore existing power dynamics, and validating a need for social change.

**Keywords:** colonialism, gender dynamics, ontological insecurity, oppression, subjugation, trauma studies, violence

## **Introduction**

R. D. Laing introduces the proposition of ontological security, describing it as manifesting in individuals who hold a stable and steadfast sense of self, to sustain them through trials in life including social, political, ethical, biological, and spiritual aspects. Laing argues that an ontologically insecure person would rather feel alienated, responding to their lack of self-identity that foreruns anxiety stating that "this study is concerned with the issues involved where there is the partial or almost complete absence of the assurances...consequent attempts to deal with such anxieties and dangers."<sup>1</sup> Ontological insecurity affiliates itself with intense existential disorientation and social precariousness, in which a shortfall in stability and cohesion generates deep anxieties, stemming from issues of inadequacy in identity, existential dilemma, societal upheaval, reality distortion, cultural dislocation, powerlessness, disempowerment, and destabilization of perception. Conceptualization of ontological insecurity has been progressively identified in diaspora literature, military fiction, existential literature, magical realism, and postcolonial fiction, bringing attention to the theme of alienation and loss of the sense of self. Lisa Gardner's *Never Tell* engages recurrent themes of oppression and subjugation, generating possible examination of prevalent gender bias in

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R. T. Samyuktha is a PhD research scholar at PG and Research Department of English, Vellalar College for Women. Email: samyuktarameshkumar@gmail.com.

S. Janaki is an Assistant Professor at PG & Research Department of English, Vellalar College for Women.

<sup>1</sup> R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 39.

society. By employing trauma theory, this article heeds to the silenced subjugation of an abduction survivor in the novel, to unearth the deep-seated patriarchal stances in society.

The representation of gendered power dynamics in literature has gained attention in recent years, yet, there is a research gap in understanding the nuances and implications of such portrayals in crime narratives drawing similarities to a colonial context. Interpretations connecting colonial impacts to gender violence in *Never Tell* will serve a medium to explore new perspectives of gendered power plays and subjugations relating to the contemporary society. By utilizing the subjective freedom to examine the novel from this perspective, we can explore the ontological insecurities experienced by victims, particularly women, who face oppression and subjugation in contemporary society under colonial sway. In response to the soaring crime statistics in contemporary society, we locate the submerged nuances of gendered power dynamics in society, which directly and indirectly contribute to crime against women.

### Trauma Studies and Postcolonial Perspectives

The inception of trauma studies that transpired in the 1990s, rested upon the underpinnings of Freudian theories in the field of psychoanalysis, providing the groundwork for its initial progression to highlight his chief assertions of emotional damages, the division of the psyche, traumatic repercussions, and repeated retention of adversity in consciousness. On account of the harrowing experiences of World War I, pioneering psychoanalysts including Sigmund Freud addressed the profound distress suffered by people, which contributed to the gradual transformation of the understanding of trauma, evolving it into a psychological phenomenon. This shift in perspective paved the way for the rapid evolution of literary trauma studies, recognizing trauma as a persistent psychological wound caused by an emotionally unsettling event that often defied easy recollection and representation. Trauma theory has expanded to encompass a broader range of historical and contemporary events, including genocide, the Holocaust, wars, the looming climate crisis, and the enduring consequences of colonialism.<sup>2</sup>

The interconnection between trauma and memory is indisputable, as trauma is inextricably bound with and grounded in memory, which, as a result, places great significance on memory in literary trauma studies. This convergence of memory and trauma has a profound impact on sculpting both individual and cultural identities. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, comment remark that trauma studies pose a fundamental problem concerning the connection between culture and trauma in literature.<sup>3</sup> Psychology directs its attention towards studying the repercussions of individual traumatic experiences. Conversely, literary approaches and theories often explore the cultural and social magnitudes of trauma. These approaches demand heterogeneous modalities to clarify the cultural influences on the comprehension and interpretation of traumatic experiences. In this regard, cultural influences majorly structure individual experiences of trauma. “With this insight psychoanalysis is no longer simply a statement about others, but is itself a complex act, and statement of survival.”<sup>4</sup> Cultural

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Balaev, “Trauma Studies”, in *A Companion to Literary Theory*, ed. David. H. Richter (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2018), pp. 360-371

<sup>3</sup> Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Cathy Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 9.

discourses and societal patterns that validate specific forms of violence, such as racial or gender violence, as well as serious illnesses, play a role in how individuals perceive their traumatic experiences and how this manifests in the cultural discourses surrounding trauma.

Considering the nuances of cultural implications on the psyche of an individual, we can establish a connection between psychology and colonial influences over multiple magnitudes. Attentive explorations of the ongoing colonial impacts on society, culture, and individual identity can affiliate with the psychological interpretations of trauma, which centres on human behaviour, thoughts, and emotions. The convergence of these two independent spheres can culminate in a distinct postulation to comprehend the colonial disruptions of culture that imprinted people's psyche. Colonial legacies, including persistent racial and gender inequalities, power hierarchies, cultural subjugations, and socioeconomic disparities, remain pervasive in today's cultural climate. Trauma studies unearths the hidden impacts of colonialism on communities, which directly contribute to the social ills present in society today.

This article examines Gardner's *Never Tell* with a specific focus on the trauma experienced by a victim who endured abduction and subsequent rescue. The objective of the paper is to explore the concealed colonial influences that perpetuate societal injustices in present society. By employing trauma theory to interpret the victim's experiences, this study aims to gain deeper insights into the offender's motivations and actions, which unveils the gendered power dynamics and androcentric influences in the present society. Furthermore, this examination enhances how the oppression of women contributes to their objectification, which consequently leads to their ontological insecurity and subjugation.

### **An Interpretation of Lisa Gardner's *Never Tell***

*Never Tell* (2019), written by Lisa Gardner, is a crime thriller which follows the lives of three women after a murder. The narrative opens with the murder of Conrad Carter, implicating his wife in the crime. Detective D. D. Warren is assigned to the case, and Flora Dane, who recognizes Conrad from her time in captivity under Jacob Ness, the kidnapper, joins the investigation. The plot revolves around the ongoing investigation of the murder, delving into the disciplines of trauma, violence, abuse, technological challenges, postmodern paranoia, and cybercrime. The novel also addresses the social maladies in contemporary society, providing a foundation to uncover the concealed patriarchal imprints and colonial cultural disruptions within the community. This study focuses on the character of Flora, who was abducted by Jacob and subjected to 472 days of captivity until Detective Warren rescued her. Flora's experience of trauma following her survival not only highlights the immense agony she endured during her captivity but also sheds light on the pervasive influence of masculine hegemony that imprinted on her, leading to a sense of ontological insecurity.

The progression in medical and psychiatric studies at the onset of the nineteenth century induced a shift in the implication of the word 'trauma', which alluded trauma as an emotional wound on the mind. Trauma can thus be evaluated as an individual's emotional response to an excruciating event or sundering experience in their past, which has derailed their acknowledgement of the self.<sup>5</sup> "But I'm further disoriented to be here, in this place, with this

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<sup>5</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

man. Somewhere in the back of my mind, I get it. In this room, the two Floras collide.”<sup>6</sup> Flora often finds herself in a state of disorientation after her rescue. When she is back in her own surroundings after her rescue, in spite of being physically safe, she still feels unconvinced that she is truly home. Her past torments have left an indelible mark on her psyche, making her question her identity and sense of self. “I smile; I can’t help myself. But I know it’s a sad expression, because both my mother and brother will tell you that I didn’t come home at all. They just got a shell that looks like their beloved daughter and sister, except there’s nothing left on the inside.”<sup>7</sup> She undergoes inner turmoil, conflicting emotions and mental imbalance, which convinces her that she is not the same person anymore, who she was before the abduction. She experiences no despair when she recognizes her transformation into a whole new persona but a profound sense of emptiness and void. The trauma has thus created a distinct divide between her two personalities. “I don’t want to be me anymore. Not today. Not seven years ago. Never every single moment of the four hundred and seventy-two days Jacob kept me his prisoner. I hate to think of him. I loathe remembering what it was like to feel so helpless, so weak.”<sup>8</sup> Traumatized, Flora is plagued by anxiety, mistrust, and a constant sense of vulnerability, which contrasts to her carefree and spirited persona before abduction. She struggles to reconcile these two versions of herself, longing for the happiness and innocence of her past. “Memory. Such a fickle tool. And for better or worse, the best option I have left.”<sup>9</sup>

In line with Jean Laplanche’s statement, trauma is delineated by two critical junctures. A psychic trauma does not manifest from a single isolated moment. In the event of an unfortunate occurrence, an implantation is made in the psyche from an external source, which affects the person emotionally.<sup>10</sup> The subsequent recollection of the memory, when resurfaced later, leads to an intense emotional distress or psychological turmoil and thus becomes traumatic. Therefore, it is not the initial event itself that is traumatic but rather the intense revisiting of that moment and the memories and emotions associated with that incident. “Jacob, on the other hand, the man who kidnapped me, raped me, tortured me... six years later I still dream about him three or four nights a week.”<sup>11</sup> Flora is questioned about her past sporadically, and this periodical reminder of her torment past accelerates the intensity of her trauma. The trauma’s development is not limited to her past experiences but rather connected to the ongoing reliving of those distressing moments in the present. When Flora returned home after her rescue, she found herself inundated with letters that probed her past. Some contained heartfelt donations driven by sympathy for her ordeal, and some carried judgments blaming her for the mishap. Amidst the barrage of letters, there were even fan mails, filled with romantic promises and proposals. These letters, however, in either way, acted as triggers, regardless of their intent. “Samuel returns with a bag of microwave popcorn. He opens the bag, the smell hits, and for the first time I feel it. Like a door opening in my mind. I can smell the bar, the beer, popcorn,

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<sup>6</sup> Lisa Gardner, *Never Tell* (London: Century, 2019), p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 181.

<sup>10</sup> Cathy Caruth and Jean Laplanche, “An Interview with Jean Laplanche”, *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>11</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 56.

melted cheese.”<sup>12</sup> A plethora of such incidents stands as a cruel reminder of the traumas she endured, which reopens the wounds and reignites the tormenting past memories.

It is crucial to recognize, acknowledge and address the actuality of violence in an aggressive and violent experience, given that trauma in contemporary approaches may be minimized to a mere fantasy or a bitter childhood experience. In light of this aspect, there is a higher possibility to overlook Freud’s key understanding of trauma, where he advocates that a trauma’s impact stems from its delayed effects and its denial to confine to a particular moment or location.<sup>13</sup> By transcending singular moments and locations, trauma continues to affect the individual in unanticipated ways disrupting their life and emotions even years later. “Some survivors do. They figure out how to compartmentalize, that was the, this is now. I can’t. I live in a state of lockdown. I spent so long separating my mind from my body in order to survive another day, I can’t get it back. My body is merely a tool. Jacob used it for sex. I use it for revenge. Neither of us respects the package.”<sup>14</sup> Consequently, it develops a substitution for the repressed emotions, leading to the occurrence of recurring nightmares, overwhelming anxiety, intrusive thoughts or loss of sense of self. “She understood bad nights. How the brain could spin for days, weeks, months at time, an endless cycle of remembered traumas from falling off your bike at seven to being attacked by a knife-wielding maniac at twenty. Trying to sort out the experiences, Samuel had explained to me once.”<sup>15</sup>

Freud’s classic case studies illustrate essential components frequently associated with trauma in contemporary interpretations. An unforeseen and unpleasant incident delivers a jolt in the psyche, often involving the threat of death or the imposition of sexuality. The absence of adequate channelization of this adverse psychic energy manifests the repressed in repetitive symptomatic forms of recurring nightmares, heightened arousal, and extreme avoidance behaviours, supporting Freud’s concept of belated nature of trauma. The traumatic event, which is not processed immediately, awaits future events to give it significance and definition, which Freud calls “symbolic cathexis.”<sup>16</sup> Flora’s long sleepless nights, nightmares, anxieties, and fear demand constant revisiting of her past, which justifies Jacob’s omnipresence in her present life. “It felt like my brain was racing wildly, but really, it was searching for patterns, matches, order...Except some experiences defied definition. So our brains kept spinning long after the horror had ended.”<sup>17</sup> Flora’s restlessness becomes exclusively evident only after her survival, indicating that her vulnerability is a recent outcome. Despite not being startled by a man’s presence during her captivity, it is apparent that she harboured anxiety and mistrust following her rescue, as proposed by Freud’s notion of belated impacts, stating “then there’s the woman I am. Who looks at a handsome, charming man and thinks instantly of Ted Bundy. Who is too skinny and too hard and too tired after seven years without a single good night’s sleep. Who doesn’t think about dating, or men, or kissing...anyone.”<sup>18</sup> Flora’s deep disgust and anger

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<sup>12</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Sefa Bulut, “Freud’s Approach to Trauma”, *Psychology and Psychotherapy: Research Study*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2019).

<sup>14</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, pp. 131-132.

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 181.

<sup>16</sup> Colin Wright, “Lacan on Trauma and Causality: A Psychoanalytic Critique of Post-Traumatic Stress/Growth”, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2020), pp. 235–244.

<sup>17</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 181.

<sup>18</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 131.

towards men during her captivity contrasts her vulnerability when she suspects every man as a potential threat after her rescue, further backing the idea of the delayed effects of trauma claiming that “I’m a survivor. Survivors are tough. If I could endure the real thing, then I can handle the memories.”<sup>19</sup> Flora adeptly adapted to the environment during her captivity to ensure her survival. She acknowledged Jacob’s patriarchal insights and accustomed herself accordingly so despite gaining freedom from him, she struggled to let go of his omnipresence in her life, “this historical conception of trauma can also be understood as conveying the urgent centrality for psychoanalytic thinking of the relation between crisis and survival.”<sup>20</sup>

Traumatic experiences and their bleak impacts can profoundly dislocate an individual’s sense of self, safety, trust and coherence, leading to existential insecurity. Ontological insecurity thus stems from trauma when one’s core beliefs about others and oneself are called into question, resulting in apprehension. Existential-threatening episodes thus source the maturation of self-doubt and uncertainty. Flora’s abduction disrupted the cohesiveness of her life, altered her integrated sense of self, and severed her from the world, culminating in a split between mind and body. Laing’s identification of four key concepts related to ontological insecurity, precisely, engulfment, implosion, depersonalization, and being and nothingness, dovetails with Flora’s traumatic ordeals. This proves that the radical disruption of Flora’s sense of identity is solely the result of her trauma from assault and abduction.

An understanding of Flora’s trauma reveals multiple facets contributing to her ontological insecurity, with gendered power dynamics being a significant aspect that intensified her disorientation. Analysis of Jacob and Flora’s relationship exposes the colonizer-colonized paradigm, highlighting the prevailing power imbalances. The roots of Flora’s trauma can be traced back to Jacob’s oppressive control, and taking a colonial stance on their relationship unveils the patriarchal oppression embedded in contemporary society, which is a chief catalyst for Flora’s trauma. Moreover, Flora’s torments exemplify the broader societal setbacks confronted by women, as they are collectively susceptible to ontological insecurity. It becomes crucial to bring attention to the precise events during her captivity, which contributed to her profound disorientation. Historical residues of colonialism and imperialism have conceptualized cultural and literary representations of power plays, which can be directly bound to the pervasive objectification of genders in the contemporary world. Subjugation and dehumanization of women, reduced to their physical appearance and sexual availability has persisted throughout history, which was further perpetuated during the colonial period. Jacob’s character symbolizes patriarchal reverberations and their profound influence on contemporary crimes in society. Flora’s frequent recollections of her past make it evident that Jacob holds sway over her when she mentions that “predator one-oh-one, no level of murder or assault is ever enough for them. They all have to feed their appetites in between, even the ones who travel around the country with their own girls stashed in coffin-sized boxes.”<sup>21</sup>

Imperialism and colonialism have not only conceptualized the normalization of gendered subjugation but also perpetuated and handed it down to successive generations through practical means, with Kathleen M. Brown stating that “from the time they were little,

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<sup>19</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 155.

<sup>20</sup> Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 153.

white girls of all backgrounds in eighteenth-century Virginia learned gender-specific tasks ... would probably learn a more specialized trade like rope or barrel making, and, in addition, be taught to cipher, a skill no apprenticed girl in the colony is recorded as being taught.”<sup>22</sup>

The education and apprenticeship of young girls revolved around gender-specific tasks associated with housewifery, aligning with the prevailing societal expectations and assigned roles for women during that era. The primary objective of their education focused on acquiring practical skills necessary for managing domestic responsibilities, which confined them to the household. In contrast, boys were taught technical knowledge and expertise to contribute to the family's income, establishing a power dynamic that entitled men. The following excerpt from *Never Tell* meticulously symbolizes the assumed gendered duties and the nuances of societal expectations regarding womanhood:

If everything had stayed on track, I would have attended Radcliffe, married some up-and-coming genius, maybe one of my father's own research students, and gotten a string of pearls of my own to wear in a neighboring Cambridge home, where I would teach piano, or something equally respectable.<sup>23</sup>

This distinction over responsibilities reinforced the notion that women are innately subjected to masculine subjectivity, which conceptualized women's subordination by idealising their traditional gender roles as wives, mothers, and home-makers as their chief roles. Jacob reflected the same conventions in his relationship with Flora, reducing her as a mere object of sexual desire stating that she will “do what I'm told, retreating to the dingy bath, where I stare at my reflection in the mirror. My orders are to look like something worth coming home to.”<sup>24</sup>

The novel offers a glimpse into Jacob's family background, disclosing an abusive household where his father, an alcoholic, displayed no concern for his family and was only present to inflict harm upon his child and mother. The cultural acceptance of domestic violence varied across multiple regions and time periods within the colonial era. Patriarchal norms and legal strategies of colonial societies repeatedly allowed for the mistreatment of women within the community and the household. On that note, the tumultuous relationship between Jacob's parents and his troubled upbringing left a substantial imprint, potentially contributing to his monstrous behaviour. Quotes such as “a father he referred to only as Dickhead or Asshole. The father had been a trucker as well, but Jacob implied that he only came home long enough to smack his kid around,”<sup>25</sup> consequently show Jacob carrying forward his father's destructive legacy, escalating it to even greater levels through his misdeeds, which included rape and murder of young girls. Jacob even tarnished his marital life by subjecting his spouse to physical abuse, “he was married once. He told me about that. He tried to do the traditional thing.... That went so well he beat the crap out of the woman and ended up arrested for domestic abuse after the docs in the ER called it in.”<sup>26</sup> These sequential incidents showcase his behavioural pattern of normalizing his patriarchal power exertion within society.

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<sup>22</sup> Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 295.

<sup>23</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>26</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 89.

The propagation of women's innateness to subjugation was pervasive throughout various facets of colonization. One elementary factor that perpetuated gender inequality during the colonial period was slavery stating that "in the early years of colonial slavery, male slaves far outnumbered females because masters believed that their greater strength made them superior agricultural workers."<sup>27</sup> Even within the context of slavery, this led to hierarchical segregation where men seized higher positions on their privilege, whilst women were treated inferior. Jacob treated Flora solely as his slave, an object he possessed writing that "my stomach growls again. I press a hand to it self-consciously, but Jacob just laughs."<sup>28</sup> He expressed no remorse for her suffering and was consumed by his insatiable desire to exploit her further. Jacob's sadistic nature and inhumane conduct became explicit when he callously left her confined in his room without any sustenance for an entire week. During the colonial period, people were subjected to various forms of abuse, coercion, and violence to establish control and enforce submission. Psychological manipulation and isolation are fundamental in intimidating and controlling colonial subjects. Flora's confinement reflects similar patterns of abuse, contributing to her ontological insecurity as she is "still weak from hunger and definitely not firing on all cylinders, but when it comes to Jacob's demands, failure is not an option."<sup>29</sup>

It is crucial to acknowledge that the disadvantages encountered by the colonized people are directly proportional to the advantages enjoyed by the colonizers. Though the motive behind colonization was purely economic driven, it is evident that their intentions were not limited to yield. The colonizers enjoyed their privilege from the humiliation and objective subjugation of the colonized. The imposed subjugations on the colonized went beyond economic disparities, undermining their dignity and sense of self-worth, which gratified the colonizers, providing them the privilege of ruling the roost. "Popcorn. Delivered in a red-and-white-checked container. My whole body clenches but I don't make a single move; I glance at Jacob, knowing the rules by now,"<sup>30</sup> this excerpt proves that even Flora's essentialities were met at Jacob's liberty, reflecting the colonizer's authorization over the subject's fundamentals. The colonizers derived their sense of supremacy by virtue of their position in the colonial structure. The status of superiority and entitlement embedded in the power dynamics of colonialism constitutes an integral part of colonial privilege, as reflected in Jacob's unwarranted entitlement in Flora's life. The demeaning behaviour displayed by Jacob is a manifestation of his desperate desire to exert control to validate his power and supremacy over women, "Jacob digs his fingers into my bony arm, giving me a stare that promises further pain if I don't knock it off. Right now."<sup>31</sup> Thus, Jacob's cruelty ignited Flora's disorientation and anxiety, shattering her identity. Flora's battle with blurred reality and illusion, her post-rescue struggle to embrace a harsh reality, and her lingering dread of confronting Jacob's inner thoughts collectively underscore the distortion of her self-identity, ultimately manifesting as ontological insecurity. Gardner's consecutive delineation of such events represents Flora's threatened sense of self.

Flora's experience of gender-based degradation in *Never Tell* is not an isolated occurrence. During an interrogation, the town's Mayor astutely observes that the victims are

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<sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Women and Slavery in America: A Documentary History*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>28</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 30.



disproportionately women, unveiling the pervasive mistreatment of women within the community. Additionally, the girl children employed as servants at the Mayor's home and their maltreatment proves the prevalent colonial attitudes in the contemporary society despite the advancement of various feminist movements. Likewise, when the killer's mother Franny, becomes impregnated, she crafts a false narrative to the people of her town about the loss of her baby, fearing societal backlash. The societal prejudices influencing a woman's personal choice questions her existence, thereby innately subordinating her to androcentric structures in the society. Gardner's delineation of crimes such as organ trafficking and human trafficking in the novel accentuates the entitlement of masculine hegemony in contemporary criminal activities, which widely subjugates women to collective trauma.

There is a wide sweep of traumatic disorders, encompassing the victimization from a single intense event to more tangled effects of prolonged and repeated abuse, such as rape, which has broadly failed to perceive the impact of victimization. It is vital to apprehend that sexual coercion is not a biological imperative, and evolutionary influences and historical perceptions have conventionalized certain gendered injustices, which endorsed sexual violence against women in the contemporary society further, proving that it is a wild goose chase to remove male power and patriarchy from the picture. The historically crafted workplace rules and gendered duties influenced the societal norms that overlooked sexual harassment writing that "it seems eminently sensible to hypothesize that man's violent capture and rape of the female led first to the establishment of a rudimentary mate-protectorate ... and could only be predicated upon, the initial subjugation of woman."<sup>32</sup>

During the entirety of her captivity, Flora was perceived as a mere vessel for fulfilling Jacob's sexual desires, making her unaware of her individuality and identity. She was treated as his possession, more like a slave, and expected only her obedience, albeit Jacob was inhumane towards her mental and physical pains. From time to time, he even attempted to trade her to other fellow predators online, which establishes her objectification, "a bar. Honky-tonk. He sat down right beside us. After a bit ... I had the impression Conrad was there for me. Like, maybe Jacob had made a deal with him."<sup>33</sup> Additionally, violence against women is another vital aspect to be taken into consideration while addressing patriarchal influences. In English society, the general population actively participated in public displays of punishment, which advocated their commonly held beliefs for the establishment of patriarchal households. Various forms of punishment, which included the accusation of witches, the dunking of scolds, the public humiliation of prostitutes, and the public shaming of adulterous women, were all manifestations of the community's conceptualization of womanhood. Pertaining to this insight, if women were not tamed, subjugated, and controlled, they were seen as inclined towards promiscuity and evil, whose consequences were believed to undermine the stability of marriages, households, and communities as a whole. Jacob's embodiment of male supremacy and privilege is vividly portrayed in multiple instances from Flora's haunting recollections of her past, additionally exposing the commonly concealed attitude of men regarding women and the significance they place on female virginity, "Jacob had tried getting me to pick up random

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<sup>32</sup> Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (London: Vintage Publishing, 1975), pp. 17-18.

<sup>33</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 151.

men in bars before; testing the level of my obedience ... And not because he's big, bad Jacob Ness. But because he's a man. And no man wants used goods."<sup>34</sup>

Flora's abduction, rape, and torments align with her notion of trauma as an unassimilated event disrupting her identity. The endured traumatic ordeals that led to her fragmentation and dissociation, mirrors the challenges faced by individuals who have undergone similar traumatic events in contemporary society. Moreover, the concept of transhistorical trauma renders us to relate and identify Flora's experience to the broader experiences of women in society, giving attention to the lasting androcentric colonial influences in the current society. It additionally advocates the universal effects of trauma, connecting individual experiences to the collective experiences of trauma within a community. Flora's confrontations can also be identified as a microcosm of the larger traumas endured by women in the present, particularly in the context of colonial perspectives, inviting the examination of interconnectedness between individual and collective trauma. The colonial legacies and patriarchal power entities contribute to the vulnerability of women like Flora, intensifying the impact of their traumatic experiences. The acknowledgement of the shared effects of trauma cultivates collective understanding and empathy towards survivors like Flora, further propagating the importance of dismantling the existing tyrannical structures to foster a more inclusive and equitable society.<sup>35</sup> Despite the growth of feminist protests and progress, the remnants of patriarchal society still persist in the contemporary era. It is crucial to address that media occupies an undeniable role in objectifying women, perpetuating patriarchal insights. For instance, the commercial advertisements serve the finest in endorsing women as mere sexual identities. Their portrayal of "flawless woman" not only perpetuates women to give in for the pressure of looking in a certain conceptualized perfect way but also enhances the objectification of whole women community as the objects of desire.

## Conclusion

The contemplation of trauma in crime fiction has emerged as a growing sphere for scholarly inquisition, to examine the pervasive psychological and emotional repercussions of colonial impacts relating to gendered subjugation in modern cultural climate. The convergence of trauma, memory, identity, and power in such contexts highlights the complexities of trauma representation, resilience, and resistance. However, it is worth mentioning that trauma is periodically employed loosely to describe minor setbacks, thereby diluting its true meaning and significance. Hence it is significant to address the complex nature of trauma and its widespread usage in contemporary discourse considering the present cultural climate. The trivialization of trauma acknowledgment undermines the experiences of individuals who have genuinely endured traumatic events, and by dismissing and downplaying trauma, society risks perpetuating its effects and damage. This article has explored the traumatic endurance of an abducted victim to locate the widely prevailing hidden motives that consequently led to the augmentation of societal injustices and crimes against women in the contemporary world. We verify the fact that traumatic legacies and acts of violence have repercussions beyond those

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<sup>34</sup> Gardner, *Never Tell*, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup> Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, passim.

directly affected, raising concerns about collective responsibility in preventing the recurrence of past torments in the present and the future. The argument underscores the significance of recognizing and addressing trauma while acknowledging its intricate nature and broader societal implications and influences, simultaneously unveiling the prevailing patriarchal residues in society. The novel also provides enough room for exploring the interplay between techno-cultural influences and literature, as well as delving into the connections between cybercrime, paranoia, and the postmodern world for further research scopes.