BROWN COWBOYS ON FILM: RACE, HETERONORMATIVITY AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes minority-produced westerns as examples of *settler cinemas.* Though they are produced by subjects at the margins of settler society, I argue that settler colonialism is, nonetheless, a significant cultural context shaping these films. The dissertation intervenes into existing film studies scholarship, which has tended to frame settler colonialism as the historical context structuring the racial oppression of Native Americans, rather than as a constitutive feature of all forms of racial subjugation. As a result, the connections and investments of other racialized subjects within the dynamics of settler colonialism have received limited attention. Drawing on queer, race and Native American/Indigenous studies, the dissertation develops and deploys an intersectional framework for examining film that illuminates the fraught relationship between racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism.

To make its argument, the dissertation examines three sets of films: black westerns, South Asian diaspora films, and Jackie Chan's martial arts westerns. In each chapter, I consider how existing film scholarship has read these respective films before offering an alternative interpretation that draws attention to their settler colonial contexts. For example, black westerns have been interpreted in terms of anti-racist historical revisionism; South Asian diasporic films have been analyzed in terms of their liminal position between Hollywood and Bollywood film industries; and Jackie Chan's western parodies have been interpreted in terms of postmodern mimicry. My own analysis suggests that settler colonialism is exercised through cultural fantasies – which I term *heterocolonialities* – such as those of property ownership, heterosexual romance, family and "settling down". I demonstrate that representations of the racialized cowboy in the minority-produced western play an ambiguous function in relation to ongoing colonialism. On the one hand, these representations normalize colonial violence when the heteronormative fantasies underpinning the western genre are left intact. On the other hand, representations of the racialized cowboy pose challenges to colonial violence by drawing attention to the discourses of race and whiteness informing the western genre. This ambiguity highlights the complex ways in which racialized minorities negotiate their position in settler societies, simultaneously challenging and supporting the logics of colonial power.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

BROWN COWBOYS ON FILM

I recently stumbled across a photograph of my father and uncle, circa the 1970s, wearing plaid shirts, blue jeans and cowboy hats, posing for the camera with defiant faces. I imagine that this photograph was the result of my father and uncle's love of the western genre, Clint Eastwood, and the Italian westerns (referred to colloquially as "spaghetti westerns"), such as Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly,* which were in vogue at the time and popular in Pakistan, where they were growing up. Years after that photograph was taken, at a costume party with my cousins whom I was visiting in the early 90s, I chose to dress up as a cowboy. This story is certainly not unique; friends and colleagues have similarly shared other stories about dressing-up as cowboy when they were younger. In each case, "playing cowboy" could have been associated with a range of distinct meanings, intentions and pleasures; from the excitement of playing the part of a heroic figure, to the thrill of embodying a tough-guy masculinity. In his 1997 film, *Shooting Indians: A Journey with Jeffrey Thomas,* which is a profile of, and conversation with, Iroquois artist-photographer Jeff Thomas, Ali Kazimi reflects on similar experiences. Growing up in India, his primary reference point for Indigenous peoples in North America was Hollywood westerns; when he immigrated to Canada, he was eager to encounter these imaginary Indians face-to-face, only to discover a severe disjunct between reality and fiction.

The stories recounted above raise two related, important questions: what does the figure of the cowboy – and, specifically, the figure of the *racialized* cowboy – do? How

do we analyze a figure symbolically central to settler colonial cultures, when their constitutive whiteness is replaced by brown skins and histories[1]? Settler colonialism refers to the set of material and discursive practices through which the colonial violence against Indigenous inhabitants becomes erased, while settlers are indigenized. Much has been said about white settlers' representations of Indigeneity, nation and colonialism; scholars have argued that these representations have enabled the circulation of mythologies of the settler nation, while containing the threat posed by ongoing Indigenous resistance to colonialism (e.g. Aleiss; Huhndorf; Kilpatrick). However, it is relatively recently that intellectual inquiry has focused on diasporic or minority subjects' investments in settler colonialism (Lawrence and Dua; Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy"; Trask). Entering into this dialogue, this dissertation turns to the medium of film, and specifically to westerns featuring and produced, written and/or directed by racialized minorities. I turn to the western genre, and the figure of the cowboy, due to their central position in the American colonial canon. As Michael Yellow Bird succinctly states, cowboys and Indians are "part of the colonial canon asserting white supremacy and Indigenous inferiority" (33); as he describes in his essay, "Cowboys and Indians: Toys of Genocide, Icons of American Colonialism," the banal, everydayness of colonial violence is encapsulated in the popular game of "cowboys and Indians". This American colonial canon has transnational resonance due to the global circulation of Hollywood films, and of the global hegemonic position of the United States. There is

[1] I use "brown" in the dissertation not to collapse differences between racialized identity formations (individual chapters take up their specificities), but to point to some of their common positions in relation to white supremacy and to settler colonialism.

ample evidence linking the western genre to settler colonial expansion and politics in the United States. Stereotypes of Indigeneous peoples have been central to these political goals. Scholarship on representations of Native Americans on film has demonstrated that the form and content of Indigenous stereotypes – which have oscillated between the "noble" and "ignoble" savage,[2] mirroring representations in popular culture more generally – has been linked to shifts in public policies and mainstream perceptions of Indigenous peoples (Aleiss; Kilpatrick; Rollins and O'Connor). While popular constructions of Indigeneity have revealed little about Native people, they have said much more about the national-settler identities of which they are constitutive (e.g. Flint; Francis; Valaskakis). Daniel Francis observes that during the early years of Canadian nation-building, "Whites set themselves the task of inventing a new identity for themselves as Canadians. The image of the Other, the Indian, was integral to this process of self-identification. The Other came to stand for everything the Euro-Canadian was not" (Francis 8). Indeed, as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam remark, "[i]t is sometimes more revealing…to analyze the stereotyper than to deconstruct the stereotype" (21). Along these lines, representations of Indigeneity -- including its erasures – in minority-produced westerns reveal much more about the place of racialized subjects in North American colonialism than they do about Indigenous peoples themselves.

This dissertation analyzes minority-produced westerns as examples of *settler*

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[2] Early silent films such as Thomas Edison's *Sioux Ghost Dance* (1894) and William K. L. Dickson's *Buffalo Dance* (1894), for example, lamented the loss of the noble savage. Made at the turn of the century, following the 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre – in which 300 Lakota people were killed by the American army – these films presented Indigenous peoples as a dying race, who had been captured on screen before their demise. John Ford's films, including *Stagecoach* (1939), *The Searchers* (1956), and *Two Rode Together* (1961), are well known for their depiction of the ignoble, bloodthirsty savage; these films constructed settlers as modern and civilized in contrast to Native Others.

cinemas. This is a relatively small repertoire of films; unlike Hollywood westerns or Italian westerns, which have been widely circulated and distributed, relatively few people have heard of, or seen, the majority of films belonging to this sub-genre[3]. However, despite the fact that they are produced by minority subjects, these films remain significant to understanding the operations of settler colonial cultures. As demonstrated by recent scholarship, settler colonial power has been amalgamated into the logics of liberal, multicultural states, such that its ongoing violence is effaced, and the concerns of Indigenous peoples are reconfigured as the concerns of minority groups (Byrd, *Transit of Empire;* B. Lawrence). Settler colonial power circulates not only through dominant subjects and dominant structures of power, but also through marginal subjects, discourses and narratives (e.g. Lawrence and Dua; Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*; Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight*; Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy"). Moreover, cultural production, both popular and independent, is a significant means through which this circulation takes place.

I examine three sets of western-themed films produced, written, and/or directed by racialized minorities: black westerns, South Asian diaspora films, and Jackie Chan's martial arts westerns. Though they are produced by minority subjects at the margins of settler society, I argue that settler colonialism is, nonetheless, a significant cultural context shaping these films. Drawing on queer, race and Native American/Indigenous studies, I develop and deploy a method of film analysis that traces settler colonialism by paying attention to how the constitutive elements of settler colonial cultures, which I term

[3]Jackie Chan's *Shanghai* films, co-produced with Hollywood studios, are an exception.

heterocolonialities – the fantasies of "settling down", property ownership, family and heterosexual romance – are alternately repeated, transformed or challenged through the filmmakers' engagement with the western genre. This intersectional framework for film analysis illuminates the fraught relationship between racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism.

Film Studies, Race and Settler Colonialism

The dissertation places existing scholarship on film and race into conversation with settler colonial studies. Within film studies, there has been considerable work on race and representation. Although this is not a cohesive body of work – in contrast to feminist film theory, many of the authors writing on race and film are not necessarily in conversation with one another – there are commonalities across these works that are worth noting. Much of the race and film scholarship has focused on the representation of particular racialized groups. Beginning in the 1970s-80s, this literature has focused largely on the questions of negative stereotyping, and the inaccuracy of images of racialized people found on film. The work has been segmented by racialized identity formation; thus, there are studies on representations of blacks in cinema (Bogle; Cripps; Diawara; Leab); Latin@s (Berg; Garcia Berumen; Woll)[4]; Arabs/Muslims (Semmerling; Sheehan); Native Americans/Indigenous peoples (Aleiss; Bataille and Silet; Kilpatrick); and Asians (Bernstein and Studlar; Feng; Marchetti; E.F. Wong). An early exception to this body of work is Robert Stam and Louise Spence's essay, "Colonialism, Racism and Representation" published in special "race" issue of *Screen* in 1983. In it, Stam and

[4] "Latin@" is the gender neutral term for "Latino/as".

Spence critiqued the preoccupation with realism inflecting much film studies analyses of race at the time, and the foci of many of these analyses on singular dimensions of film, such as social portrayal, plot, and character (3). They instead propose analyzing racism and colonialism in film in terms of the cinematic dimensions of representation, including genre, spectatorship, composition, sound, editing and framing.

Towards the late 1980s and early 1990s, a greater number of scholars took up the inquiry on method initiated by Stam and Spence. Influenced, in part, by the increased presence of minority filmmakers in both mainstream and independent spaces, film studies theorists began to look beyond the question of positive and negative representations. They turned, instead, to the broader issue of centring race in film analysis (Bernardi, "The Birth of Whiteness"; Bernardi, "Classic Hollywood"; Bernardi, "The Persistence of Whiteness"; Julien and Mercer; Shohat and Stam). This work linked together conversations on how to theorize race – for example, as biological truth or social construction – to the medium of film. The issues of representation and minority production were contextualized by these authors in terms of debates on topics such as identity, essentialism and authenticity. Thus, in a second special "race" issue of *Screen* from 1988, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer's essay, "From De Margin to De Centre," argued that race should be central to all studies of film, rather than relegated to analyses of non-white subjects in film. In this same journal issue, Richard Dyer's essay, "White," exposed the simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility of representations of whiteness on film. Dyer's essay importantly suggested that a race analysis might expose the social construction of whiteness in film. Similarly, Daniel Bernardi, in his three consecutive

edited collections on race, film and whiteness ("The Birth of Whiteness"; "Classic Hollywood"; "The Persistence of Whiteness") takes a cue from Dyer in considering how American cinema constructs whiteness is normative, in relation to racial Otherness.

Later works on race and film have taken up these methodological concerns in a number of ways. Newer scholarship has framed filmic representations of race in terms of material and discursive conditions through which they are shaped (e.g. Marubbio; Marchetti, "Romance and the Yellow Peril"); other scholars have offered critical perspectives on minority filmmaking practices, taking into account conversations on diaspora, transnationality and identity (e.g. Desai; Ginsburg). As a whole, the scholarship on race and film has contributed to a critical understanding of how cinema informs social construction of race. Cinema does not merely reflect "real" social identities, but actively constitutes them (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 714). Film can, therefore, reveal much about how to theorize race. The work of this dissertation extends these conversations by considering how representations of race (and racial Otherness specifically) might be analyzed in terms of their settler colonial contexts. Of course, representations of Native Americans in film, and visual cultures more generally, have been contextualized in terms of the logics of settler colonialism, wherein Native peoples are relegated to the past, configured as dead, dying or disappeared, often erased altogether from the landscape (e.g. Rollins and O'Connor; Valaskakis). However, settler colonialism has not been substantively taken up by film scholars examining representations of blacks, Latin@s, Arabs/Muslims or Asians. Settler colonialism, in other words, is framed primarily as the historical context structuring the racial oppression of Native Americans, rather than as a

constitutive feature of all forms of racialization. As such, the connections and investments of other racialized identities within its dynamics have received limited attention.

There are a few exceptions to this rule. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, in *Unthinking Eurocentrism,* contribute towards de-exceptionalizing settler colonialism in film and cultural studies. They advance a comparative, transnational framework for analyzing polycentric media representations of race in their analysis[5]. Shohat and Stam frame the Hollywood western as an imperial film, demonstrating the continuities between the western and imperial adventure films such as *Around the World in 80 Days*. For instance, the frontier myth promulgated by the western shares with these films ideological roots in discourses such as Social Darwinism, race-sex hierarchies, and the idea of progress (Shohat and Stam 115). The conventions of the western genre have been absorbed, either implicitly or explicitly, by a number of films. To this extent, the western has served as a blueprint for the repetition of colonial discourse in film. In advancing a relational analysis of film and media, Shohat and Stam also point to the potential for racialized minorities to become complicit in racial violence. They write:

> [i]n a systemically racist society, no one is exempt from a hegemonic racist discourse, including the victims of racism. Racism thus "trickles down" and circulates laterally; oppressed people can perpetuate the hegemonic system by scapegoating one another "sideways," in a manner ultimately benefiting those at the top of the hierarchy. Since racism is a discourse as well as a praxis, a member of an oppressed community can also adopt an oppressive discourse… (Shohat and Stam 19).

Shohat and Stam's analysis is important insofar as they recognize the multifarious ways

[5] Although *Unthinking Eurocentrism* looks at popular culture generally, it focuses to a large extent on film.

in which racist discourse flows. It is echoed by scholars such as Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack ("The Race to Innocence"), Andrea Smith ("Heteropatriarchy"), who similarly advance arguments demonstrating how one marginalized constituency may participate in the marginalization of other constituencies. My dissertation follows the line of inquiry instantiated by these scholars. My "lateral" reading of race doesn't assume that Indigenous peoples are subject to the same systems of marginalization as black or Asian subjects; though there may be commonalities across experiences of racial-colonial violence, there are also distinctive histories, as well as social and political processes, mediating cultural representations of each. Instead, I focus on settler colonialism as a discourse, constituted through race, gender and sexuality, which black, Asian or South Asian subjects may adopt, and as a structure that they may actively consolidate, whether or not they possess the authority to accrue the benefits of this structure. In other words, regardless of intentionality, power or privilege, racialized subjects may actively reconstitute (though not necessarily in equivalent ways) settler colonial discourse, and/or reproduce settler colonial structures.

Another example of a comparative framework to film analysis is the one advanced by Frank B. Wilderson in *Red, White and Black.* Wilderson contextualizes American cinema in terms of U.S. social relations that are framed through Native genocide and the theft of black subjectivity. The book ultimately focuses on the lack of corporeal integrity accorded to the black body – a constitutive lack that Wilderson argues has no parallel with any other form of socio-cultural marginalization. Along with other

Afro-pessimist[6] thinkers (among whom Wilderson names Saidiya Hartmann, Jared Sexton and Hortense Spillers) Wilderson argues that the violence of the Middle Passage, slavery, Jim Crow laws, police brutality, mass incarceration and segregation have relegated blackness to the exterior of ontology itself. It is not just that blackness is shaped through these structures of inequity, but that blackness itself is framed as an ontological void. As such, the experience of blackness is not analogous to any other form of social violence. Wilderson also suggests that black and Native subjects share a similarly antagonistic relationship to American socio-cultural structures due to their ontological positions as "slave" and "savage", respectively. However, he argues that the possibilities for alliance and connection are limited when Native culture and politics are framed through the rubrics of spirituality and sovereignty, rather than genocide. Wilderson critiques, for instance, Cheyenne-Arapaho filmmaker Chris Eyre's 2002 feature, *Skins*, for both framing the central conflict of the film in terms of loss of sovereignty, and for its reliance on the abjection of blackness. I agree with Wilderson that the disjuncture between sovereignty/genocide certainly constitutes an aporia between black and Native politics; I also take seriously his critique of Eyre's symbolic references to blackness in *Skins.* However, while Wilderson's primary concern is with the violence of anti-blackness, mine is with the violence of settler colonialism.

In contrast to Wilderson, Peter Limbrick's *Making Settler Cinemas* centralizes an analysis of settler colonialism. Limbrick places the settler films of United States,

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[6] Wilderson defines Afro-pessimism as intellectual inquiry that "explores the meaning of Blackness not – in the first instance – as a variously and unconsciously interpellated identity or as a conscious social actor, but as a structural position of noncommunicability in the face of all other positions; this meaning is noncommunicable because…Blackness is predicated on modalities of accumulation and fungibility, not exploitation and alienation" (58-59).

Australia and New Zealand in conversation with one another to demonstrate the transnational linkages between these cinemas not only in terms of representation, but also in terms of production, distribution and reception[7]. He characterizes settler cinemas in terms of the multiple forms of colonial encounter shaping these processes. Limbrick argues that these films not only constitute settler cultures through their representational politics, but actively engage with, and transform, settler society, through encounters between "industries, producers, studio personnel, actors, films, and the people with whom they come into contact" (Limbrick 2). However, an analysis of the racial differentiation constituting settler subjectivity is missing from Limbrick's study. Though he acknowledges that race and gender frame colonial narratives, producing settler cultures as *white* settler cultures, his study does not account for the place of non-white, non-Indigenous subjects within these cultures. While I share Limbrick's objective of revealing the construction of settler cultures through cinema, my project differs from his insofar as it is concerned with films produced by and about racialized subjects within settler societies, which engage in a distinct representational politics (and, often, politics of production and circulation) from those produced by, and primarily about, white settler subjects.

Settler Colonialism

The gaps within film studies outlined here are made intelligible in terms of broader conversations concerning studies of race, and settler colonialism. The question of

[7] My use of the term "settler cinema" is related to, but distinct from, Peter Limbrick's use of it. Limbrick discusses films which have been central to the nation-building projects of settler societies, I examine films that sit on the margins of the settler nation, even as they remain imbricated in it.

racially differentiated settler subjectivity has only recently begun to receive sustained intellectual attention (e.g. Fujikane and Okamura; Lawrence and Dua; Trask). More generally, settler colonialism is a relatively new site of inquiry. Its institutionalization is heralded by the *settler colonial studies journal* and accompanying blog; and Lorenzo Veracini's *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview,* which endeavours to consolidate the emergent field. In his introduction, Veracini outlines the evolution of settler colonial studies. Early conversations and debates (from approximately the 1970s-1990s) focused on identifying the particularities of settler colonialism (Denoon; Emmanuel; Lawson; Stasiulus and Yuval-Davis). However, Veracini suggests that the watershed moment of settler colonial studies arrived with Patrick Wolfe's 1996 intervention into the field, in *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology* (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* 8-9). Wolfe argues here that in contrast to other types of colonial circumstances, in the settler colonial context, it is the appropriation of land, and not only its exploitation, that is the ultimate goal. Thus, the labour of Indigenous peoples is not critical to settler colonial rule, and Indigenous peoples are deemed dispensable and replaceable. Veracini suggests that Wolfe's intervention has subsequently ushered in a wave of interpretive analyses on settler colonialism as a discrete site of study, including international academic conferences on the topic in 2007 and 2008, and a special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* in 2008 edited by Alyosha Goldstein and Alex Lubin (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* 9). This more recent work has also examined the comparative and transnational aspects of settler coloniality (Belich; Elkins & Pedersen; Lake; Lester).

The contributions of all of these conversations on settler coloniality are

significant; in public conversations about Indigenous peoples, for example, the system of settler colonialism is rarely scrutinized as integral to the maintenance of colonial violence. Instead, the social problems facing Indigenous peoples are pathologized, while settler structures are left untroubled. It is for this reason that, as Andrea Smith writes, scholars such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Sandy Grande, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, and Robert Warrior "have all called for the development of a field of Native/Indigenous studies that is distinct because of its methodologies and theoretical frameworks and not just because of its object of study [Native peoples]" (Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies" 43). Yet, curiously, Veracini makes no mention of these or other scholars within Native American and Indigenous studies, who have been calling attention to the violence of settler states for several decades, albeit with different conceptual language (e.g. Deloria; Gunn Allen; Vizenor). A distinguishing feature of this scholarship has been its centring of Indigenous lives, voices, experiences and struggles. For instance, Lee Maracle's *I Am Woman* (first published in 1983) and Howard Adams' *Prison of Grass* (first published in 1975) are early works that described the particularities of colonialism in North America from the perspective of the colonized, drawing attention to how colonial violence operates through ideologies and structures, and is experienced in body, mind and spirit. Moreover, whereas settler colonial studies has been concerned with outlining the contours of settler colonial power, Native American and Indigenous studies has been far more interested in the question of decolonization. Thus, even as Native American and Indigenous studies scholars have described the systemic nature of colonial violence in settler states such as Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Israel,

they have done so with attention to the broader goal of decolonizing (e.g. Monture-Angus; Moreton-Robinson).

By subjecting settler coloniality to scrutiny, this dissertation aims to destabilize and denaturalize the evacuation of colonial violence from settler narratives which facilitates, for example, the frequent circulation of the western genre. Still, in keeping this focus, I am weary of how I may re-centre settler subjects while again eclipsing the Indigenous subjects who are marginalized through settler colonialism. This critique is similar to that leveled against whiteness studies and masculinity studies, where the focus on these dominant discourses can easily reinforce their privileged position within theory, culture and politics, undermining the critical objective of disrupting their normalcy. Clearly, had I focused specifically on representations of Indigeneity, this project would look very different. However, I don't believe that *that* project would be entirely innocent or free from risk either. Crucially, given that the settler colonial imperative focuses on a project of erasure, such a project might miss how silences and absences themselves constitute, and are constituted by, colonial violence. I approach this research aware of the risks underlying the work. I am aware that while it may not be possible to speak from position of innocence, it is still possible to speak thoughtfully and ethically. Furthermore, taking direction from the work of Indigenous studies scholars noted above, my discussion of settler colonialism is ultimately informed by the larger project of decolonization. I undertake this exploration not merely to describe the minutiae of settler colonial power, in order to identify its multifarious pulse-points, so that its violence may be destabilized, disrupted and eradicated.

Andrea Smith writes that settler colonialism is a "key logic that governs the United States", as well as other white settler states (Smith, "Queer Theory" 44). Scholarship on settler colonialism has emphasized that colonial violence in these nation-states is not a *fait accompli*, but is an ongoing project; Indigenous peoples continue to be subject to laws, policies and institutions which disavow their relationship to the land and to their nations, languages, governance systems and cultural practices. For example, in Canada, the *Indian Act* determines Indigenous access to treaty rights through the regulation of Native and non-Native identity (B. Lawrence); in Australia, where no formal treaties were ever negotiated, Indigenous peoples are folded into the rubric of the multicultural state (Moreton-Robinson; Povinelli); in New Zealand, there are ongoing debates between Maori peoples and settler governments regarding the sovereignty and self-determination rights outlined in the Treaty of Waitangi, signed by Maori chiefs and the British Crown in 1840 (Walker).

In the U.S., a series of policies have undermined Indigenous knowledges and claims to land. These policies have both served to justify the expansionist goals of Euro-American settlers, and to legitimize and uphold ongoing occupation of the land. For instance, Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. William M'Intosh ruling in 1823 suggested that Indigenous peoples did not "own" their land in the European sense of the term, and could therefore only be recognized as occupants of the land (Browne-Marshall 224-225). The ruling determined that any pre-existing sovereignty rights were annulled at the moment of European "discovery" (Browne-Marshall 225). Meanwhile, the 1953 House Concurrent Resolution 108 terminated the official status of tribes in California, Florida, New York

and Texas, as well as parts of Montana, Oregon, Nebraska, Wisconson and North Dakota (L. French 107-108). This assimilationist policy limited the capacity of Indigenous nations to assert legal claims to land and resources. Since then, Indigenous nations have made some gains over the years, through the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Particular sections of the Act applied the Bill of Rights to Natives "in their relations with tribal governments, the authorizations of a moral code for courts of Indian offences, and the requirement that Indian consent be given to assumption by state of jurisdiction over Indian country" (Prucha, cited in Kilpatrick 70). Despite these modest gains, Indigenous nations remain in a colonial relationship vis-à-vis the United States, as their access to nationhood remains limited due to their status as "domestic dependent nations". According to the 1831 US Supreme Court Case *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia,* "[t]he Indians are acknowledged to have an unquestionable, and heretofore an unquestioned, right to the lands they occupy", but they are "domestic dependent nations" distinct from "foreign nations", in that "[t]heir relations to the United States resemble that of a ward to his guardian" (np). As domestic dependent nations, Indigenous nations remain locked in a state of limited authority with respect to the United States; colonial violence is ongoing.

These examples demonstrate the distinguishing features of settler colonialism as compared to other forms of colonialism, which are premised on exogenous domination, wherein colonial rule is exercised from a metropolitan colonial centre, with local administrators overseeing day-to-day operations (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism* 2-3). Settler colonies, by contrast, are characterized by the infiltration, absorption and assimilation of settler subjects into the local landscape. In the widely cited *Settler*

Colonialism: Anthropology of an Event, Patrick Wolfe has written that, "settler colonials come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event" (388). Wolfe importantly moves discussions of colonialism away from the moment of invasion, and shifts towards a discussion of the *process* of invasion. In this way, he invites more rigorous analysis of how settler colonialism is operationalized; how it is sustained through law, policy and culture. This also moves discussions of decolonization away from simply a question of getting colonizers to leave, to the question of dismantling the structures that perpetuate ongoing colonization.

Furthermore, settler-state violence is constituted through a politics of erasure – what Wolfe has termed a "logic of elimination" – an organizing principle through which colonial settlers are continually indigenized as the rightful and lawful inhabitants of the land. Indigenization describes the processes through which it appears natural and inconsequential that settlers belong to, and are legitimate occupants of, land that was acquired through deceptive treaty processes, and through policies of genocide and assimilation (Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*). Simultaneously, Indigenous peoples' presence and claims to land are minimized or made invisible (388). Elimination, according to Wolfe, can take many forms: it can include both outright genocide - for example, the American policy of extermination - as well as cultural assimilation – for example, boarding schools (in the US) and residential schools (in Canada), where Native children were removed from their families and sent away to school, in a state-church collaborative effort to "civilize" Indigenous peoples.

Critical race and postcolonial studies have not tended to engage substantively

with the realities of ongoing colonialism in the Americas (Fujikane and Okamura; Lawrence and Dua; Trask). In recent years, however, critical race scholars are increasingly taking up comparative frameworks that consider the interlinkages between differentially oppressed communities (e.g. Madden; Oikawa; Sehdev; R. Wong). In their essay, "Decolonizing Antiracism", Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua reflect on this absence of engagement. An implicit assumption of postcolonial scholarship, much of which has been based on the experiences of the independent nation-states emerging from anti-colonial struggles in Africa and Asia is that while formal colonialism is over, contemporary social, political, economic and cultural relationships are shaped by the enduring legacies of formal colonial relationships. However, this scholarship has not adequately addressed the colonial contexts of Indigenous peoples in the contemporary moment, and the consequences of this ongoing colonialism for social and cultural theory. Lawrence and Dua argue that in failing to centralize Indigenous presence and ongoing colonialism, this body of work is implicitly constructed through a colonizing framework that normalizes and reproduces ongoing colonialism (127). They demonstrate this argument with recourse to selected representative texts. For instance, they explain that Stuart Hall, in his essay, "The West and the Rest", presumes that formal colonialism is a thing of the past when he remarks on "the present, when much of the world is economically dependent on the West, even when formally independent and decolonized", without including those nations that remain under colonial governance (Hall, cited in Lawrence and Dua 128).

Native American and Indigenous studies scholars have also documented and

demonstrated the persistence of Indigenous resistance to colonial violence (e.g. Adams; Ramirez; L. Simpson; Tuhiwai-Smith). This resistance is distinct, however, from the third world decolonization movements that characterized much of the 20th century. This reflects the differences between settler colonialism, and other kinds of colonialism, which are defined by exogenous domination; where most forms of colonialism emphasize the distinction between colony and metropole, settler colonialism actively suppresses and erases it (Veracini, "Introducing" 1; 3). Accordingly, Qwo-Li Driskill describes Indigenous decolonization as: "…ongoing, radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (69-70). Some of the kinds of anti-colonial resistance that Driskill gestures towards include organized efforts to resist encroachment, abrogation of treaty rights, and cultural assimilation – whether in the Battle of Little Bighorn, the occupation of Wounded Knee, or during the 1990 Oka Crisis - and the everyday agency exercised by Indigenous peoples contesting, navigating and negotiating colonial terrain[8]. Michelle Raheja's discussion of Native actors working in Hollywood, creatively negotiating and contesting that stereotype machine, is an excellent example of this everyday resistance. Taken together, these acts of resistance collectively constitute Indigenous-led movements for decolonization. Although this dissertation focuses on the position of non-Native racialized subjects in relation to settler colonization, rather than on

[8] The Battle of Little Bighorn took place near Little Bighorn River in Eastern Montana 1876, and was an armed battle in which the Lakota, Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes defeated the US army; Wounded Knee is a town on the Lakota Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota that was occupied by activists from the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1973 to protest the American government's failure to honour treaty obligations; the 1990 Oka Crisis was a ninety-day standoff between the Canadian military and Mohawk warriors at Kahnesatake (near Montreal, Quebec), over the decision of the local municipal government to construct a golf course on sacred burial grounds.

the project of decolonization itself, the potential and possibilities for supporting and forging alliances with Indigenous decolonization efforts undergirds the conversations of each chapter.

Studying the Racialized Cowboy

There have been numerous studies outlining the colonial, racial ideologies underpinning the western genre (e.g. Aleiss; Huhndorf; Kilpatrick). Research on racialized subjects and western films are fewer and far between – there are no book-length treatments of the topic, for instance – but not non-existent. Scholars writing on the topic have examined racialized spectatorship and audience (dis)identification (B. K. Alexander, "Writing/Righting Images of the West"; Callier; Eguchi; Leyda; Shively; Yellow Bird); the cultural politics of transnational and cross-racial translations of the western genre (Chung, Johnson, Jorgensen, Keller, Khoo, Langford, Oscherwitz); representations of the racialized cowboy (B. K. Alexander, "Morgan Freeman's Black Male Body"; K. Chan); and the erasure of multiracial histories from Hollywood western, and the marginalization of alternatives (Allmendinger; Hoffman). I build upon the important insights generated from these authors in terms of analyzing the construction of race in relation to the colonial ideologies of the western, and the translations of the genre undertaken by racialized-minority filmmakers. I contribute to this conversation by thinking systematically about representations of race in terms of the settler colonial discourses, ideologies and narratives framing these films.

To do so, the dissertation closely analyzes three sets of films, including black westerns; martial arts westerns, co-produced by Jackie Chan; and diasporic South Asian

films that parody the western genre. While there were also novels, television shows, plays and visual art that could have been included in the analysis, the dissertation focuses on film primarily because this is the medium through which the western genre has most widely circulated and become popularized. This is not a comprehensive survey; there were many more films that could have been included in the analysis. The films that have been included have been selected for the extent to which they enable a discussion of racialized subjects' connections to, and investments in, settler colonialism. I selected and categorized films based on distinct modes of racial representation (blackness, Asianness, South Asianness) structuring their production, distribution and circulation. Each set of films illustrates distinct social and historical relationships between particular racialized identity formations, and American colonialism. For example, black westerns speak to histories of blacks in the American West that are largely excluded in most historical and cultural representations of this period. Jackie Chan's films reference a similar kind of amnesia around Chinese labourers in the West, intertwined with a politics of representation that constructs Asian subjects as perpetually foreign to the American nation. In the case of South Asian diasporic films, there is little documentation indicating that South Asians played a significant role in the settlement of the American frontier; diasporic South Asian filmmakers do, however, have a relationship with the western genre that is reflected in these films. Through this comparative approach, the dissertation illuminates how filmic representations of race are imbricated within settler colonial cultures.

Summary of Chapters

The remainder of this dissertation consists of four chapters, and a brief conclusion. In chapter two, I outline a method of interpreting diasporic cinema that makes settler colonialism visible. This method is an intersectional framework that draws on theoretical insights from queer, race and Native American/Indigenous studies. I outline a means of tracing heterocolonialities – wherein settler colonialism is exercised through cultural nationalist fantasies, such as those of property ownership, heterosexual romance, family and "settling down". My analysis of these films as colonial events considers how the colonial ideologies encoded in western genre are decoded and recoded by diasporic filmmakers; the chapter thus discusses familiar elements of the genre, as well as how it gets reworked through the strategy of parody, which draws upon audiences' familiarity with, and knowledge of, the conventions of the western by both repeating and mocking them.

Across the next three chapters, I consider how existing film scholarship has respectively read three sets of films – black westerns, South Asian diasporic films, and Jackie Chan's martial arts westerns – before offering an alternative interpretation that draws attention to their settler colonial contexts. In chapter three, I look at the figure of the black cowboy in three black westerns: *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939), a black musical western; *Thomasine and Bushrod* (1974), a Blaxploitation western loosely based on a Bonnie-and-Clyde storyline; and *Posse* (1993), a revisionist western that is more explicitly didactic than *Harlem* and *Thomasine.* Film scholars have primarily interpreted these films in terms of anti-racist revisionism (Allmendinger; Hoffman; Keller; Leyda). My analysis of the films considers the extent to which the films participate in

indigenizing narratives which assert black entitlements to land (particularly as reparations for slavery) while erasing or minimizing Indigenous presence and claims. To do so, I draw upon the transnational frameworks of queer and feminist black diaspora studies; although this literature has paid limited attention to the concerns of Indigenous or Native American studies, it nonetheless provides a useful basis from which to imagine non-nationalist alliances between black and Indigenous subjects.

In chapter four, I turn to Jackie Chan's martial arts westerns, *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Shanghai Knights* (2003), two co-productions between Chan and Hollywood studios. The films centre on the odd-couple duo consisting of Chon Wang (played by Jackie Chan), and Roy O'Bannon (played by Owen Wilson). Chan's films, and his body of work more generally, have been interpreted in terms of multiculturalism, postmodernism and mimicry (e.g. K. Chan). This chapter examines how popular constructions of Asian masculinities as failed masculinities (in relation to white masculinities) may ironically consolidate narratives of white settler hetero-nationalism. In the films, Chan's character Chon Wang serves as symbolic intermediary between Roy O'Bannon and Indigenous or racialized women, whose bodies are conflated with colonial conquest. The trajectory of the films gestures to a continuity between distinct forms of colonialism; the American colonial context of the first film serves as a sort of blueprint for the continued colonial-imperial adventures of the sequel, set in the context of British empire.

Chapter five looks at the example of South Asian diasporic films. I analyze two films: *Wild West* (1993), a British independent film following the exploits of an aspiring

British South Asian country band; and *Indian Cowboy* (2004), an American independent romantic comedy in which a western fantasy film sequence buttresses the central romantic plot. South Asian diaspora films have been analyzed in terms of their liminal position between Hollywood and Bollywood film industries (Desai; Gopinath). My analysis of *Wild West* and *Indian Cowboy* considers their engagement with narratives of failure and success, respectively, in terms of their postmodern reworking of themes such as mobility, migration and romance.

Ultimately, the dissertation provides a method through which to analyze settler colonialism in film. By linking existing scholarship on film and race with emergent conversations on race, Indigeneity and settler colonialism, the dissertation complicates understandings of race and visual representation. The work across the chapters demonstrates that representations of the racialized cowboy in the minority-produced western play an ambiguous function in relation to ongoing colonialism. On the one hand, these representations normalize colonial violence when the racial, heteronormative fantasies underpinning the western genre are left intact. On the other hand, representations of the racialized cowboy pose challenges to colonial violence by drawing attention to the discourses of race and whiteness informing the western genre. This ambiguity highlights the complex ways in which racialized minorities are positioned in settler societies, simultaneously challenging and supporting the logics of colonial power.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERPRETING THE DIASPORIC WESTERN

As I discussed in the introduction, this dissertation draws on queer, race and Native American/Indigenous studies. Through these theoretical frameworks, I develop and deploy a method of film analysis that traces settler colonialism by paying attention to how the constitutive elements of settler colonial cultures, which I term *heterocolonialities* – the fantasies of "settling down", property ownership, family and heterosexual romance – are alternately (and often, unevenly or ambiguously) repeated, transformed or challenged through the filmmakers' engagement with the western genre. I focus on heterocolonialities because, as discussed earlier, settler colonial power relies on the erasure of Native claims to land through the indigenization of settlers. Because settler colonialism's presence is structured through its presumed absence, the excavation of this absent presence is a critical means through which it may be dismantled. Tracing heterocolonialities is a method for making visible the processes through which settler power appears to disappear. Its salience is particularly acute within film, where the hyper-visibility of racialized difference easily eclipses the in-visibility of settler colonial contexts and discourses. The intersectional framework for film analysis deployed here thus illuminates the fraught relationship between racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism.

More specifically, the dissertation draws on analytical frameworks developed in queer studies to interrogate the naturalization of settler colonialism within diasporic

westerns. Queer theory refers to a body of critical scholarship concerned with interrogating the normalization of heterosexuality within Western cultures. The term "queer", an appropriation a pejorative slang for homosexual, is often used as an umbrella term representing a number of different sexual minority identifications (Jagose 1). However, it is also an anti-identity, in that it is resistant to fixation, always in flux and in the process of becoming (Jagose 1).

Queer theory was, and continues to be, subject to contestation and questioning. Its development is contextualized in terms of a number of conversations that were taking place within lesbian and gay studies and politics from the 1970s-1990s. Much of these conversations revolved around the problems associated with imagining (or, attempting to imagine) a unified subject at the centre of lesbian and gay studies or politics. For example, as discussed by Teresa de Lauretis in her 1991 essay, "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," distinct political concerns and goals framed the disjunctures between lesbian and gay theorizing and organizing. Anti-racist analyses, like those articulated in the 1981 women of color anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back* and by groups such as the Combahee River Collective, similarly challenged the centring of white and Eurocentric subjects within feminist, lesbian and gay activism and scholarship. Teresa de Lauretis articulated the project of queer theory as one that might begin to self-reflexively deconstruct these silences and marginalizations, while critically imagining other kinds of political projects (iv).

The theoretical challenges posed by post-structural theories to studies of identity,

including lesbian and gay studies, provided critical conceptual frameworks through which to think about these questions of identity and political organizing. Poststructural theory posits that cultural meanings are not fixed or determined, but unstable, arbitrary, open to meaning and subject to interpretation. Poststructural theories provoked scholars to question the assumption that identity categories such as male, female, gay, lesbian, black, white, and so on, are fixed, natural or essential. The work of Michel Foucault has widely influenced the work of a number of queer theorists. Foucault most notably argues that early modern sexual identities were constructed through a nexus of power and knowledge. Specifically, Foucault suggests that it was through the production of knowledge about sex – within the discourses of institutions such as medical science, education and the law – that sexuality came to be produced and regulated. These modern categories, which delineated the homosexual subject as abnormal, had the effect of constituting heterosexuality and the heterosexual subject as normal.

Taking a cue from Foucault (and other critical theorists), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Judith Butler lay much of the groundwork for the deconstructive critical inquiry taken up within queer studies. Both have examined, in their respective works, how constructions of heterosexuality constitute other forms of knowledge production. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Sedgwick deconstructs the binary categories of homosexual and heterosexual. She exposes two contradictions plaguing the definitions of the two. The first, is the contradiction between seeing the homosexual/heterosexual binary as significant only for sexual minorities, versus seeing this as significant for a

broader spectrum of people. The second, is the contradiction between seeing same-sex relations as an expression of liminality between genders, versus an expression of gender-based separatism (1-2). Sedgwick argues that these definitional issues structure the construction of other forms of knowledge within contemporary Western cultures (1-2). For example, binary formations such as secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, public/private and masculine/feminine are constituted through the homosexual/heterosexual binary (11).

In her texts, *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler examines how discourses of heterosexuality regulate constructions of gender. In *Gender Trouble,* Butler destabilizes the presumed essentialism of gender categories by demonstrating how they are underwritten by what she terms the "heterosexual matrix" (Butler, "Gender Trouble" 9). She argues that gender authenticity is constructed through presumed proximities to heterosexuality, such that the regulation of gender operates through the regulation of sexuality. Butler's work has also opened up conversations on forms of politics, political organizing and political futures. In *Bodies That Matter,* Butler suggests that destabilizing normative assumptions regarding the construction of gender and sexuality may be a productive project for queer politics. This suggestion, in turn, reflects Butler's argument that gender is performative. Performativity refers to the way that the reiteration and citation of gender themselves consolidate its discursive legibility (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 2). She thus gestures towards the possibilities of cultural-

political practices that index the performative, textual or citational construction of gender and sexuality.

Social institutions are another important site through which heterosexuality is naturalized. This institutional normalization is referred to as *heteronormativity*, a term popularized by Michael Warner in his essay "Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet" (1991). It is elaborated by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in their essay, "Sex in Public." Their description of heteronormativity includes "the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent-that is, organized as a sexuality-but also privileged" (Berlant and Warner 548F2). Berlant and Warner argue that heterosexuality's insidiousness is sustained institutionally through the spatial regulation of sex. Specifically, the consignment of sex to the realm of the private – to primarily sex acts - obscures the extent to which heterosexual cultures permeates the public realm. Berlant and Warner outline a number of ways in which heterosexual cultures are supported. These include cultural references to "love plots," which normalize heterosexual intimacy and familialism (554), and the institutions of marriage and family law, domestic architectures, and the zoning of work and politics (562). The discursive and material sustenance of heterosexuality creates "national heterosexuality," which, Berlant and Warner note, "is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship" (549). Heterosexuality, in other words, produces the nation. For instance, both structurally and symbolically, the family has

consolidated constructions of nation in the United States since the eighteenth century (Berlant and Warner 549). By configuring the nation as a family, systemic inequities, including racism and colonialism are easily forgotten or obscured (549).

Heteronormativity does not just enable the erasure of racial and colonial violence, however; it is constituted through them (Eng, *Racial Castration*; Ferguson; Gopinath; Muñoz, *Disidentifications*). For example, Cathy Cohen develops the linkages between heteronormativity and white supremacy in her essay, "Punks, Bulldaggers and Welfare Queens." She notes that "…many of the roots of heteronormativity are in white supremacist ideologies which sought (and continue) to use the state and its regulation of sexuality, in particular through the institution of heterosexual marriage, to designate which individuals were truly 'fit' for full rights and privileges of citizenship" (453). In other words, heteronormativity secures its foothold by operating through existing matrices of power centred on racialized difference.

Scholars of race and postcolonial studies have similarly developed intersectional analyses that demonstrate that discourses of race and colonialism produce normative sexualities (Stoler; Young). For example, the work of Ann Laura Stoler has been instructive in its insistence that the construction of bourgeois European subjects was mutually constituted through the construction of the subjectivity of the colonized. In *Race and the Education of Desire,* Stoler critiques Foucault's inattention to discourses of race and empire in his inquiry of bourgeois sexualities in Europe (4-5). Stoler both engages, and extends, Foucault's interrogation of subject constitution in *History of Sexuality*.

Referencing the colonial context of the Dutch East Indies in the 19th-20th centuries, Stoler argues that the bourgeois European self could not be understood outside of the historical context of Empire (5). Re-reading *History of Sexuality,* she suggests that 18th-19th century European discourses on sexuality were mutually entangled with colonial discourses about racialized bodies. Racialized bodies served as the "other" to normative European bourgeois sexualities (7). Stoler contends that discourses of race and sexuality were entangled not only in the colonies, but also in the metropole. Discourses of sexuality "mapped the moral parameters of the European nation", and they accomplished this task with recourse to boundaries of race (7). In the colonies, the "laboratories of modernity" (15), bourgeois identities were demarcated by features such as "civility, self-control, self-discipline and self-determination", which both produced and affirmed racialized difference (8). Discourses of race were thus constitutive of, and not external to, European bourgeois sexualities.

As important as this scholarship on race and colonialism has been, however, it has been premised on contexts of exogenous colonial domination. As I discussed in the introduction, within these contexts, colonial rule is exercised from a metropolitan centre, with local administrators overseeing day-to-day operations (Veracini, "Settler Colonialism" 2-3). Settler colonies, by contrast, are characterized by the infiltration, absorption and assimilation of settler subjects into the local landscape. Recent scholarship on Indigeneity, settler colonialism and sexuality has pointed to the ways that the ongoing scene of colonialism in settler states – where settlers are indigenized as the original and

rightful inhabitants of the land, rather than as colonial invaders - remains under-theorized in much of the scholarship on sexuality and colonialism (Driskill et. al, *Queer Indigenous Studies;* Morgensen, "Theorising Gender, Sexuality and Colonialism"; Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies"). For instance, in *When Did Indians Become Straight?* Mark Rifkin describes how US policies aimed at dismantling Native social formations were part of an effort to make heterosexuality compulsory, which in turn was part of a colonial strategy to deterritorialize, "detribalize" and assimilate Native social, political and economic structures (Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight* 5-6). The links between heteronormativity and settler colonialism are also emphasized by Scott Morgensen, who argues that the repudiation of Indigenous sexualities co-produced what he terms "settler sexuality." Morgensen defines settler sexuality as "a white national heteronormativity that regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects" (Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism" 106). Settler sexuality, suggests Morgensen, eventually became hegemonic for all non-Native subjects (Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism" 106).

The work of these scholars suggests that in the settler colonial context, the question of indigenization frames any analysis of the construction of sexualities. Indigenization describes the processes through which it appears natural and inconsequential that settlers belong to, and are legitimate occupants of, land that was acquired through deceptive treaty processes, and through policies of genocide and assimilation (Veracini, "Settler Colonialism"). This may take place in a number of ways.

For example, in his research on queer settler subjectivities in *Spaces Between Us*, Scott Morgensen describes how non-Native queers may identify themselves as belonging to the same lineage as queer Indigenous and two-spirit peoples (or, may fetishize two-spirit people as belonging to LGBTQ communities) without at the same time supporting Indigenous-led decolonization movements. This is an indigenizing move insofar as it naturalizes non-Native queer claims to lend through a presumed alliance with queer Indigenous or two-spirit peoples. In a similar vein, Shari Huhndorf discusses the indigenizing imperatives of the "going native" phenomenon, where for example, non-Natives claim Indigenous ancestry, or some other sort of identification with Indigenous communities. "[T]hroughout the twentieth century", writes Huhndorf, "going native has served as an essential means of defining and regenerating racial whiteness and a racially inflected vision of Americanness. It also reflects on the national history by providing self-justifying fantasies that conceal the violence marking European America's origins" (Huhndorf, "Going Native" 5).

Indigenization also takes place through sites of cultural production such as the western film. In these films, narratives of heteronormativity enable settler claims to land to appear natural, inevitable and innate. The legal-material processes of establishing and maintaining settler strongholds on Indigenous territories are thus ideologically and discursively supported – made banal, normal and everyday – through the realms of film and culture. More specifically, in the western, settler claims to land may be normalized by erasing the historical processes through which heteronormativity and patriarchy have

become linked to land and property ownership.

Tracing Heterocolonialities in the Western

In order to trace how heterocolonialities are embedded in the western genre, this dissertation highlights aspects of the genre which, in their reiteration of colonial discourses, naturalize settler entitlements to Indigenous land: the centrality of landscape; narratives about westward expansion and settlement; and the figures of the cowboy and the Indian. The western genre has, on the one hand, always been subject to change and transformation (P. French 13; Kitses, "Post-modernism and the Western" 17). The variability of filmic elements such as structure, narrative and characters even within "classic" westerns by directors such as John Ford and Sam Peckinpah makes it difficult to resolutely identify what constitutes a "pure" western. At the same time, filmmakers who engage with the genre do so by making reference to tropes, characters, settings and plotlines recognizable to audiences as belonging to the western genre. It is these recognizable elements that diasporic filmmakers reference, shift and transform in order to bring to life the figure of the racialized cowboy.

Landscape and Setting

Visually, the landscape of the American frontier – epitomized through the dry, empty, Southwestern arid deserts and vast canyons, popularized by the films of John Ford – has become synonymous with the Western, and by extension, with America itself (Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley"). The centrality of this landscape in the western reflects the role of the genre in (re)constructing the mythology of American

nationhood (Cawelti; O'Connors and Rollins; Slotkin; Wright). Set in the mid-late nineteenth century (as reflected in costumes, which include Stetson hats, riding boots, spurs, buckskin leather and chaps), westerns, from "classics" such as *My Darling Clementine* (1946) to contemporary revisionist films such as *Unforgiven* (1992), depict a moment of American history concerned with westward expansion, settlement, and the material and discursive fortification of nationhood. Because of its specific link to American frontier expansion and Manifest Destiny – the idea that Euro-American settlers were meant to control and dominate North America (R. Miller 115) – the American West setting is also a means of signifying a principle theme of settlement mythologies, that of the struggle between civilization and savagery; or, between social order and lawlessness (Cawelti; Slotkin). In particular, John Cawelti notes that "its openness, its aridity, *its general inhospitability to human life*, its great extremes of life and climate and, paradoxically, its grandeur and beauty" have made the American West an ideal setting for communicating these themes (23; emphasis added). In their emphasis on the vast, engulfing grandeur of the rocky desert landscape, westerns, like the landscape paintings and photographs that preceded them (Buscombe, "Inventing Monument Valley"), visually reinforce the idea that Indigenous lands are empty. This negation of Indigenous histories, presences and ways of life (or, the conflation indigeneity with the wild, untamed character of the land) suggests that indigenous land is open to settlement by Euro-Americans, thereby providing legitimacy to the settler colonial project (Crosby; Simmon). Indeed, as stories about land and space, westerns are integral to settler

colonialism, because they serve a key function in displacing or erasing Indigenous claims to land, while naturalizing the position of settlers as rightful and original inhabitants of the land (Razack, "Introduction: When Place Becomes Race").

Especially significant for the western is the establishment of a relationship between land and settlers. In the western, settlers establish their identity as entrepreneurial, hardworking pioneers with the capacity to both survive in, and manage the land. This is suggested by the juxtaposition of western settlements and the harsh landscape. For example, David Pierson notes that in 1990s productions, the genre "[came] to be centered on the isolated town, ranch, or fort surrounded by a great expanse of open prairie or desert with weak ties back to civilization. The territory is a rough place, with a harsh terrain and climate, where an individual must possess and master skills to survive" (Pierson 287). These geographical elements intensify the thematic conflicts of the plots, as well as conflicts between characters (Cawelti 24). For instance, "the vast openness and vistas of snowcovered peaks, great sunrises and sunsets suggest the epic courage and regenerative power of the hero", while "the rocky aridity and climatic extremes of the Great Plains complement the hostile savagery of outlaws and Indians" (Cawelti 24). Another classical shot is that of the cowboy riding towards the audience across an empty landscape, visible at first only as a mere fleck, and then gradually becoming clearer (Kolker 234). This shot indigenizes the cowboy hero as a figure who emerges from the landscape, and is intimately connected to it, while simultaneously

remaining connected to civilization (in contrast to Indigenous peoples, who are wholly conflated with land).

Narratives About Westward Expansion and Settlement

Themes of westward expansion and struggles around establishing settler towns are common within the western genre. Pulp western writer Frank Gruber has identified seven plots in the classic western. As David Lusted suggests, though Gruber's plots may be "reductive and arbitrary", his framework does "suggest a potential variety of plot situations the western makes available" to those engaging with the genre (Lusted 24). These seven plots include the *journey*, which involves the interruption of a railroad/stagecoach/wagon train by a group of raiders or angry Indians; the *ranch*, in which ranchers are pit against rustlers (cattle stealers), or cattlemen are pitted against homesteaders or sheepmen; the *empire*, in which small-time ranchers or cowboys are in conflict with larger ranchers, bankers or railroad developers; the *revenge*, which features a wronged man vs. a truly guilty one; *the cavalry*, which features a conflict between the cavalry and Indians; the *outlaw*, where Southern outlaws fight Northern lawmen; and the *marshal*, featuring a lawman vs. outlaws (Gruber, via Lusted 24). This is not an exhaustive list, but provides a sense of the range of potential scenarios of western films. In general, the western features a basic conflict between settler society/civilization and some outside threat – whether that threat is savagery, or corruption from within society itself. The conflict provides an entry point for the hero –"who possesses some of the urges towards violence as well as the skills, heroism and personal honor ascribed to the

wilderness way of life"– and then steps in to defend civilization/society against the threat (Cawelti 45). Often, the conflict manifests itself through a formula of chase and pursuit (Cawelti 45).

The Cowboy and the Indian

The history of Hollywood is rife with stereotypical representations of Native Americans (Aleiss; Bataille and Silet; Churchill; Friar & Friar; Kilpatrick). Not every western includes "Indians." However, the pairing of cowboys and Indians is ubiquitous; from children's games, to Halloween costumes, to plastic figurines, cowboys are associated with Indians. Jacqueline Kilpatrick suggests that it was largely due to Buffalo Bill's late 19th Century Wild West Show that "cowboys and Indians" became so closely intertwined (13). William "Buffalo Bill" Cody was an army scout and Pony Express rider whose real-life exploits on the American frontier were later popularized in dime novels; he drew on this popularity to launch his Wild West Show. The travelling show, which was a precursor for Hollywood westerns, included a combination of circus, theatrical and radio acts, and was promoted as a "real" representation of life on the frontier that featured actual cowboys and Indians (as opposed to actors), including Native leaders such as Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse (Kilpatrick 13).

The figure of the Indian – whether constructed as evil or noble – precedes the western genre; it has been central to the mythology of American nationhood itself (Deloria). As numerous scholars point out, in both its noble and ignoble configurations, the Indian within American popular culture is always subject to invisibility and erasure

(Driars; Dippie; Lyman; Romero). This echoes Patrick Wolfe's assertion that settler colonialism is constituted through the logic of elimination, wherein the erasure and displacement of Indigenous peoples enables the indigenization of settlers.

While the ignoble savage has often represented a threat to civilization, to be exterminated through violence, the noble savage has tended to be romanticized as the dying remainder of a lost race unable to coexist with western civilization. These two extremes – of evil and noble savage – were popularized by James Fenimore Cooper's *The Leatherstocking Tales,* a series of novels published between 1823-1841, including *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) (Kilpatrick 2). The protagonist of *Leatherstocking,* Natty Bumppo, is a white man raised by Native Americans. Though Cooper is often held up as sympathetic to Indigenous peoples, his construction of the noble savage in fact helped to consolidate American settler mythology (Kilpatrick 3). As argued by Kilpatrick:

> Cooper [built] an American nationalist mythology through identification with the natural landscape and its original inhabitants. If we think of Cooper as a settler colonist striving to separate the American from the British while simultaneously occupying a position as an imperialist in the new land, his work becomes a type of imperialist discourse that draws the differences from the native Other…while at the same time maintaining a connection or even identifying with that Other, thereby gaining (from the settler's point of view, at least) psychic as well as physical control (3).

In other words, while the noble savage might be a more "positive" construction of Indigeneity than the ignoble savage, this is a false binary that ultimately functions to bolster the settler colonial identifications with Indigenous land. Moreover, while fetishizing the virtue, morality and close relationship to nature of Indigenous peoples, the noble savage stereotype continues to disavow the violence of colonial settlement, and to

consign Indigenous claims and relationships to land to an unrecoverable past, one that cannot coexist with settler presents or futures.

Constructions of savagery are also always already about gender. The noble/ignoble savage is implicitly male – but represents a perverted masculinity that stands in contrast to idealized white masculinity. His masculinity is configured as perverse to the extent that he is, as Chris Finley has suggested, unavailable as a sexual object choice to Native women, due to his presumed inability to fulfill the role of patriarch (36). His unavailability consequently makes Native women open to subjection under white heteropatriarchy. By contrast, the figure of the Indian princess/maiden is presumed to be heterosexual and thus sexually available to the colonizer. Her sexual availability is bolstered by the presumed inability of Native men to be patriarchs. The positioning of Native men and women as respectively outside and inside heteropatriachal relations thus work together to undermine Indigenous claims to land. As discussed by Rayna Green in her essay "The Pocahontas Perplex", because female bodies are conflated with land, the sexual availability of Native women within popular culture provides symbolic legitimacy to colonial penetration of land. Indeed, representations of the ignoble/noble savage and Indian princess/maiden say much more about settler national identities than they do about Indigenous people themselves. As M. Elise Marubbio has asserted in relation to the figure of the Indian princess (in her words, the Celluloid Maiden), "the figure works as a colonial rhetorical strategy to promote a national American identity defined against a raced and "savage" Other" (5).

The cowboy has been represented in ambiguous and contradictory ways within American popular culture, and within the western genre specifically. While the cowboy is the protector of civilization, and stands in contrast to the presumed savagery of the Indian, this requires that he engage in violence. Two of the more recognizable manifestations of the cowboy hero include the stoic, virtuous bastion of morality who is always victorious – for example, the cowboys portrayed by Gene Autry, Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy in films from the 1930s-1950s (Tucker)– and the rebel/outlaw who is caught between his violent lifestyle and his commitment to civilization, as represented by the characters portrayed by John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. In the latter configuration, the hero embodies the contradictions of American settler culture, where "civilization" is purportedly held up through violence; a culture of "regeneration through violence", to quote Slotkin again.

Despite this rationalization of violence, however, due to his imbrication in gruesome violence, the cowboy often remains a nomadic loner figure, frequently on the go, facilitating the settlement of Euro-Americans, but unable to settle down himself (Biderman; Uyl). In this respect – that is, to the extent that he does not "fit in" to dominant society or subscribe to its patterns of social interactions – the cowboy is a queer figure (McGillis; Packard). In his analysis of B western cowboy masculinities, Roderick McGillis draws attention to the cowboy's queerness, observing that:

> …cowboys function as preservers, even nurturers, of community, and at the same time they remain outside community, uninterested in economic gain and political power. Often they interact with children, and when they do they are clearly role models for these children. Yet they do not marry, they do not hold jobs, they

> appear not to work. They exist on horseback, forever riding from one endangered community to another to set things right…these films construct a male figure who is "queer"…a person who does not fit comfortably into our binary categories heterosexual/homosexual, insider/outsider, masculine/feminine (McGillis 13).

Moreover, while the cowboy would be unlikely to sustain a long-term relationship with a female partner, Chris Packard notes that he might be more likely to form deep homoerotic bonds with his sidekick, or with other cowboys. At the same time, while the cowboy himself may be queer to the extent that he stands on the outside of settler society, he remains a key figure in the installation of white heteropatriarchal order. His "queer" characteristics, in other words, are precisely what enables the consolidation of this structure.

Western Parodies and the (Re)Encoding of Colonial Ideologies

By foregrounding heterocolonialities in its analysis of diasporic westerns, this dissertation draws attention to the ways that colonial discourses are promulgated through the aesthetic and narrative elements of the western genre. The western genre – stories of cowboys and Indians, violent outlaws and the harsh experience of living in the American West –has been linked directly to the colonial histories from which they emerged (Drinnon; Kilpatrick; Slotkin; Yellow Bird). It is not only this direct link to histories of settlement, however, which implicate the western in American colonialism. More significant, perhaps, is the narrative function of the western, a function which is explained through Richard Slotkin's notion of the "frontier myth". The frontier myth, argues Slotkin, which is told again and again through the traditional western, is represented as the "redemption of the American spirit or fortune as something to be

achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or "natural" state, and *regeneration through violence* (Slotkin 12, original emphasis).

Postmodernism and the Western

The western genre's imbrication within colonial ideologies, and the extent to which it traffics in stereotypes about race and gender are well known to the mainstream public in the contemporary moment, as indicated by pronouncements of the western's decline and death (Campbell; Kitses). For instance, in contemporary westerns, such as Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles,* or Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained,* the use of humour is common; these films also often contain a critique of the past, even as they remain subject to criticism for their promulgation of stereotypes. More specifically, reflecting an awareness of the representational politics of traditional or classic westerns, contemporary filmmakers engaged with the genre have drawn widely on postmodern strategies. According to Linda Hutcheon, postmodern strategies of representation involve the use and repetition of existing artistic forms, styles and genres in often self-conscious, self-reflexive, ironic and contradictory ways. With reference to postmodernism and the western genre, Phillip French defines "post-westerns" as "films about the West today that draw upon the western itself or more generally on 'the cowboy cult'" (84). Post-westerns, writes French, reflect on the way that "characters are influenced by, or victims of the cowboy cult" (85). To do so, "they intensify and play on the audience's feelings about, and knowledge of, western movies" (85).

Postmodernism more broadly emerged as an aesthetic movement within architecture, and was a response to modernist presumptions of ahistoricity, faith in technical innovation and purity of form (Hutcheon 11). Without rejecting the oppositional tendencies of modernist movements and practices (which, in turn, were responses to the hierarchies and rigid structures of classical forms of art and representation), postmodern representations throw into question how we come to know reality, and what it means (Hutcheon 32). They are self-reflexive to the extent that they continually draw attention to the forms and conventions through which they acquire the status of representational reality or truth (Hutcheon 34). Correspondingly, they question notions of the centre, subjective wholeness and mastery of form. Instead, they reference, comment on and critique histories of form and aesthetics, drawing attention to the way in which all cultural forms are constituted through previous representations (Hutcheon 55).

A central strategy of postmodern representation, and one that has been used extensively in western films, is parody (Turner 218). Parody refers to "ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation or intertextuality" (Hutcheon 89). Parody deploys the very forms and conventions it seeks to critique, in order to draw attention to the ways that they have been socially constructed, undoing presumptions of their stability and continuity. For instance, parodies of the western emphasize their constitutive elements, and in so doing, may call into question some of the racialized and gendered stereotypes prominent in western films. However, one effect of postmodern strategies such as parody, as Hutcheon points out, is that they "[manage] to install and reinforce as much as undermine and

subvert the conventions and presuppositions [they appear] to challenge" (Hutcheon 1-2). This effect is what Hutcheon calls *complicitous critique*. In their repetition and referencing of existing forms, styles and genres, postmodern strategies reinscribe their primacy, and – I would add – the discourses through which they are constituted, and of which they are constitutive. As Matthew Turner notes with respect to the western parody, "[w]hile [it] mocks established formulas of the genre, it ultimately reinforces them through its acceptance of a shared set of codes" (218). In *Post-Westerns,* Neil Campbell similarly argues that the "post" of post-westerns does not mark so much a break from the conventions of the classic westerns, but a dialectical engagement with them.

This process of dialectical engagement is illuminated with recourse to Stuart Hall's essay "Encoding/Decoding," which provides a framework through which to think about how to track the transformations of the western genre from its (cinematic) "origins" in Hollywood to minority, independent and/or transnational cinematic contexts. Hall's analysis is useful in terms of thinking about how this transmission is not a straightforward appropriation. There is an "originary" colonial narrative which is encoded into the conventions of the western genre that is then decoded by racialized minority writers, producers and directors and repeated, negotiated and transformed in films involving the figure of the racialized cowboy.

Hall's framework, while speaking specifically to television media, has been helpful for film and cultural criticism more broadly, as he challenges the sender-message-

receiver loop through which communication is sometimes imagined[1]. In this reading, the producer of a television news broadcast (for example), transmits a message through the broadcast which is then received and essentially "downloaded" by the audience. Hall complicated this simplistic model of transmission by drawing upon a Marxian analysis to think about cultural communication as a circuit of production and reception that is contested and negotiated. Within the circuit, Hall argues that the "discursive form of message has privileged position in communicative exchange – and moments of encoding/decoding are determinate moments" (128). Indeed, it is at the site of discourse that cultural meanings are negotiated. Rather than focusing on the intentions or agency of media producers, the encoding/decoding model emphasizes the work accomplished by the text itself, and the tensions and contestations engendered by it.

Hall further argues that discourse must be "encoded" and "decoded" for it to be meaningful. However the "codes" through which the producers and receivers of discourses respectively encode and decode are not always congruent, and this is where misinterpretation or "misunderstanding" arises. At the same time, he argues, there exist dominant or preferred means of interpreting media discourse, which producers rely upon in order to effectively relay messages. In the case of the western, the conventions of the genre, and their attendant promulgation of discourses of savagery/civilization are recognizable to audiences. Because these dominant modes of coding are available, there are a set of common terms through which audience is able to respond. As a result, Hall

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[1] For example, Hall's essay is included in *Critical Visions in Film Theory: Classical and Contemporary Readings,* an edited volume of classical and contemporary film studies scholarship.

suggests, there are three general positions from which media can be read: the dominant position; the negotiated position; and the oppositional position. In the dominant position, the viewer draws upon the dominant/preferred codes, and the message is decoded exactly as it has been intended by the encoder. In the negotiated position, the viewer is aware of the dominant codes through which they are expected to decipher the message, but adapts this meaning on a situational basis, based on, for example, life experiences which contest hegemonic meanings. Finally, in the oppositional position, the viewer recognizes the dominant/hegemonic code but rejects this in favour of an alternative reading. From the oppositional position, "the viewer detotalizes the message in preferred code, in order to retotalize message in some alternative framework of reference" (Hall 138). Most audience readings fall into the negotiated category. For instance, a contemporary viewer of a classic western like *Stagecoach* might be aware that Native Americans in the film are meant to signify a lack of civility, while also recognizing that this is an inherently problematic representation and perhaps appreciating other aspects of the film production.

In creating diasporic westerns, racialized minority filmmakers engage in a negotiated reading of the western genre. While they are aware of the dominant meanings ascribed to western genre conventions and to the figure of the cowboy, they adapt these meanings so that the racial identity and cultural context of the non-white cowboy may intermingle with the genre's conventions. This re-interpretation may contest the exclusive entitlement of white subjects to "play cowboy", and to embody the qualities associated with the cowboy. At the same time, these filmmakers rely on audiences' previous

knowledge of western films, and representations of the cowboy and American West more generally, in order to make their films legible. This attention to film production as a site of negotiation and contestation emphasizes the ways in which meanings are made and interpreted. In the chapters that follow, I emphasize this dialectical process by highlighting the way that racialized minority filmmakers both transform and reinscribe the conventions of the western genre. In so doing, I demonstrate how they also participate in a conversation about race and settler colonialism, emphasizing the fraught and ambiguous complicities of racialized subjects within settler colonial regimes.

CHAPTER THREE

INDIGENIZING AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITIES IN THE "BLACK WESTERN"

The "black western" (Hoffman; Leyda) or "black-cast western" (Johnson) refers to a sub-genre of black independent and commercial films belonging to the western genre, both of which feature a primarily black cast, and involve black writers, directors and/or producers. Included within the relatively small number of films belonging to this sub-genre are black musical westerns (produced in the 1930s, featuring actor-singer Herb Jeffries); blaxploitation westerns (1970s); and black revisionist westerns (1990s). These films engage with the western genre in complicated ways. To return to the discussion of Stuart Hall's three reading positions from the previous chapter, the films are examples of "negotiated" readings of the genre, insofar as they recognize and remedy some of its historical omissions without discounting wholesale hegemonic readings of the western. Their alteration of the conventions of the genre both offer a critique of its blind spots with regards to race, while simultaneously repeating those conventions; in this respect, black westerns partake in what Linda Hutcheon calls "complicitous critique". The effect of this engagement with the western genre is the assertion and indigenization an African American identity. Film historian Julia Leyda suggests as much, when she writes in her discussion of black musical westerns from the 1930s that:

> [I]magining oneself as a real American is not the same as imagining oneself as a white American; on the contrary, [black musical westerns] assert the rightful place of African Americans at the moment and the location of the nation's most heroic embodiments, the western frontier. The constructions of black masculinity in these films do not simply echo Hollywood's images of American national identity but actively participate in the formation of an identity that is

uniquely African American (66).

What Leyda neglects to consider, however, is the significance of this identity formation in relation to the colonial discourses promulgated by the western. This chapter examines the indigenizing moves of three films: *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939), a black musical western; *Thomasine and Bushrod* (1974); a "blaxploitation" western; and *Posse* (1993), a black revisionist western. In the previous two chapters, I argued that diasporic westerns are examples of settler cinemas, and outlined a method for tracing settler colonial violence in these films. This method considers how settler colonialism is exercised through cultural nationalist fantasies – which I refer to as heterocoloniality – such as those of respectable masculinity, property ownership, heterosexual romance, family and "settling down". In this chapter I develop that argument by interpreting the aforementioned black westerns in terms of their investments in (or divestments from) heterocoloniality. The chapter introduces a comparative framework for interpreting *Harlem Rides the Range, Thomasine and Bushrod,* and *Posse* that considers both anti-black racism and settler colonialism; in doing so, it challenges existing film analyses that privilege anti-black racism (Hoffman; Johnson; Keller; Leyda). The chapter emphasizes the significance of historicizing racialized identities in terms of settler colonialism *as well as* white supremacy. By examining the indigenizing work accomplished by *Harlem Rides the Range, Thomasine & Bushrod,* and *Posse*, I argue that heterocolonial representations of black identities participate in the erasure of Indigenous presence and claims to land.

INTERPRETING THE BLACK WESTERN: ANTI-BLACK RACISM VERSUS SETTLER COLONIALISM

Film scholarship has tended to interpret black westerns through a black/white

binary that sees them as films concerned primarily with race, to be understood in opposition to mainstream, white-cast films (Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance;* Cripps, *Slow Fade;* Hoffman; Keller; Leyda). Donald Hoffman and Alexandra Keller, for example, evaluate *Posse* as a counter-history about African-Americans in the American West, in their respective essays. Though both authors discuss *Posse* as a revisionist western, neither makes even a passing reference to settler colonialism. In both cases, the revisionism associated with *Posse* – which re-writes blacks into the Old West - is (explicitly or implicitly) identified as distinct from the revisionism accomplished by other revisionist westerns – which re-imagine white settler/Indigenous relations. For example, in his comparative analysis of *Posse, Dances With Wolves,* and *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* (1982), Hoffman comments that *Posse* is a more "authentic" project than *Dances With Wolves* because "Van Peebles refuses to insert a white voice to mediate between the film and a middle American audience" (Hoffman 48). While this may be an important observation that links issues of voice and representation, Hoffman reinforces the idea that black westerns like *Posse* be read primarily as films about black/white relations.

Popular critics have similarly supported a singular focus on race when reviewing black westerns (Lowry; McCarthy; Miller; Schwartz). Whether reviewed favourably or heavily critiqued, these films have been interpreted through the lens of race, racism and white supremacy, rather than the lens of American colonialism. Of *Thomasine & Bushrod,* for example, critic Katherine Lowry remarked in *Texas Monthly* magazine that "[a]s a take-off on *Bonnie and Clyde, Thomasine and Bushrod* never gets off the ground…it's a bit too obvious to be derivative" (31). Similarly, of *Harlem Rides the*

Range, Ozus' World Movie Reviews' Dennis Schwartz comments "[t]hat it apes a white B western and carries over the same disgusting black stereotypes from the white mainstream films and is far removed from black interests, makes it worth seeing only as a curio" (np); while Frank Miller of *Turner Classic Movies* asserts that "the film was a clear imitation of the low-budget westerns of the time" (np). Meanwhile, Todd McCarthy of *Variety* magazine characterizes *Posse* as a mish-mash of popular westerns that have been "painted black": "Begin with a reliable pursuit-and-revenge plotline, lay on a Sergio Leone look and flashback structure, stir in some John Ford community values and Sam Peckinpah violence, tag "The Magnificent Seven" on at the end and paint it black, and you've got "Posse."".

Black filmmakers have, likewise, located their films primarily in terms of anti-black racism. *Posse* (1993) director Mario Van Peebles, for instance, explicitly situates his film alongside earlier black musical westerns, like Herb Jeffries' *Harlem Rides the Range* (1939) and *Bronze Buckaroo* (1939). Both of Jeffries' films referenced the historical presence of black cowboys in the American West, featured all-black casts, and were targetted at black audiences. Van Peebles' linking of Jeffries' films with *Posse* can be observed in the end credits of *Posse,* which juxtapose scenes from *Posse* with black and white photographs from the African-American West, as well as film footage of *Harlem* and *Buckaroo*– highlighting aesthetic similarities between the films and melding together cinematic - and actual - past and present. Yet, *Posse's* didactic historical revisionism arguably align it more closely with *Dances With Wolves* (1990), than with *Harlem*. *Harlem,* like all of Herb Jeffries' black westerns, was intended primarily for

black audiences in the late 1930s. Historical revisionism was not Jeffries' aim; he was not interested in re-telling the story of the West. He was, however, interested in addressing the lack of representation of black actors in western movies. In an interview with Mary A. Dempsey for *American Visions* magazine, Jeffries recalls seeing black cinemagoers lining up to see white-cast Hollywood westerns in the segregated South during the 1930s; also around this time, he recounts a story about seeing a young black boy crying because his friends are not allowing him to play cowboy (Dempsey 24). These observations, combined with his knowledge that there were actually black cowboys in the American West, were the impetus for Jeffries' decision to propose a black western (Dempsey 24). Unlike *Posse,* however, *Harlem* does not directly tackle the question of re-telling history. Instead, the film constructs an alternative, all-black world that incidentally excludes Indigenous people, along with white people.

It is curious that the settler colonial context of even the imagery in black western films, of the cowboy and the Wild West, has received scant attention. To be sure, Indigenous people are often absent from the plotlines of black westerns, and when they have appeared, have been portrayed in more nuanced or "positive" terms than in many mainstream westerns. Towards this end, in *Darkening Mirrors,* Stephanie Leigh Batiste offers brief but insightful commentary on how to think about the relationship between black representations of the West, and Indigenous absence. Batiste frames the missing representations of Native Americans in 1930s black-cast westerns as a strategy through which black filmmakers navigated a fraught field of racialized representation:

> The crucial effect of [Indigenous absence] was a mitigation of savagery in the wilderness for blacks. If the role of savage was already occupied ideologically

> and spatially by stereotyped Native Americans, then the cultural and biological savagery of African Americans could become secondary as they entered a space and symbolic system inhabited by an entrenched and absent "primitive" (43).

Yet the colonial context of Westerns extends beyond the issue of Indigenous (mis)representation. It is colonial violence which produces these representations, and which is sustained through them. As Michael Yellow Bird argues, "[n]o matter how they have been portrayed in the past or present, cowboys and Indians are the consummate example of American colonialism" (Yellow Bird 43). Whether or not Yellow Bird's assertion is universally true, there are certainly colonial discourses framing representations of cowboys/Indians that require closer investigation. By considering black westerns primarily through a black/white binary, it becomes impossible to read these films as anything other than (at worst) copies of, or (at best), responses to mainstream "white" westerns. This sort of interpretation implicitly suggests that black western films do not belong to the same "colonial canon" (Yellow Bird 33) as traditional western films, and are thus not subject to the same kinds of critique that most westerns have. The exemption of black westerns from a critique of colonial representation implies that the primary context for understanding black westerns is the marginalization of black people within Hollywood and within American society more broadly (e.g. Johnson, "Cowboys, Cooks, and Comics"; Leab; Reid; Robinson). For instance, Michael Johnson's analysis of black-cast westerns from the 1930s acknowledges their role in both countering the marginalization of blacks in Hollywood westerns, and in repeating many of the stereotypical images found during that era (Johnson, "Cowboys, Cooks, and Comics" 225). His analysis makes mention of neither Indigeneity nor settler colonialism.

This omission suggests that the settler/native relation is not a central concern in these films. From this perspective, the central issue in black westerns is that of anti-black racism. At the same time, there is undeniably a context of race politics framing the production, distribution and circulation of black westerns which needs to be considered; one can't ignore the systemic racism which both materially and discursively shapes black films, including black westerns. Black filmmakers contend with a long legacy misrepresentation, appropriation and fetishization on the screen, in addition to systemic marginalization within Hollywood production processes (Diawara; Guerrero; Reid). Despite this, a singular focus on race is complicated when one considers the significance of settler colonial relations to understanding these films. There is not an a-priori relationship between settler colonialism and representations of the Wild West that can easily be overlaid on our analyses of black western films; however, settler colonial relations do matter, and they offer an intellectually and politically significant dimension to interpretations of the films.

THEORIZING BLACKNESS AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

An analysis of black westerns that takes into account the intersections of race, heteronormativity and settler colonialism, is contextualized in terms of the literature on anti-black racism, and its conversations with settler colonial studies. As demonstrated by the work of scholars such as Saidiya Hartman and Hortense Spillers, the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade has rendered blackness as fundamentally abject; as the constitutive outside of subjectivity. Some critical race scholars have argued that the implications of anti-black discourse reach toward conversations about multiculturalism

and multi-raciality. These conversations, in turn have critiqued the black/white binary that has been the dominant paradigm of American racial politics. Some scholars have critiqued the simplicity of this paradigm, according to which the US fundamentally consists of two races, black and white, with Asian Americans, Latin@s, Native Americans, and those of multi-racial ancestry positioned in relation to this binary (e.g. Alcoff; Perea). Also complicating the binary formation of American racial politics is the historical research on black-Indigenous connections, alliances and relationships (Coleman; Forbes; hooks; Katz; Miles and Holland). In *Black Indians,* William Loren Katz reveals that there were Indigenous nations that practiced slavery, for example, while some blacks fought alongside white settlers in the "Indian Wars". At the same time, there is also strong evidence to suggest that black soldiers often broke ranks and formed alliances with Indigenous nations, who tended to be more welcoming than white settler communities. Intermarriage between blacks and Natives further fortified the bonds between the two. Moreover, as noted by historian Jack Forbes in *Black Africans and Native Americans*, these bonds can be traced beyond the American continents to pre-Columbus interactions between African and Native American peoples. As a result, the racial-national divisions between the two are also blurry and intertwined.

Criticisms of the black-white binary are countered, however, by scholars such as Joe Feagin and Jared Sexton, who posit that a black-white binary does, in fact, structure the politics of race in the US, and that attempts to find equivalencies between blackness and other forms of racialization only serve to further anti-black racism. Joe Feagin, for instance, suggests that anti-black racism is not comparable to any other form of social

marginalization, writing that no other racial group has so fundamentally shaped the "internal economic, political, and cultural structure and evolution of the North American society" (xii). Indeed, the pervasiveness of anti-black racism is certainly observable among non-black communities of colour, and Indigenous communities. For example, in contemporary Native communities, the existence of anti-black racism has weakened the possibilities for maintaining historical alliances between the two. This was evidenced by the 2007 decision by the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma to disenfranchise Cherokee freedmen (whose African-Cherokee ancestry is traceable to slaves previously held by the Cherokee Nation) (e.g. Amadahy and Lawrence; Byrd, "Been to the Nation").

Simultaneously, civil rights claims and discourses, intended to redress anti-black racism, may reinforce settler colonial violence. As outlined in the introduction, settler colonialism erases and displaces Indigenous claims to land (Veracini; Wolfe). The logic of elimination, identified by Patrick Wolfe as central to settler colonial violence, actively seeks to suppress these claims in order to transform settlers into de-facto indigenous subjects who can then assert their authority to occupy and inhabit Native land. The black-white paradigm of US racial politics can support such suppression. As Lisa Kahaleole Hall writes,

> In the absence of an understanding of colonialism, the U.S. self-construction as a "nation of immigrants" symbolically reconfigures slavery as involuntary immigration and as such, the original racial sin of the nation. African Americans become symbolically indigenous, while all other people of color are seen as potentially illegitimate and/or illegal "aliens" (275).

Indigenous peoples, within the black-white paradigm, are conflated with "all other people of color"; their histories and presences easily erased or forgotten. As demonstrated

by recent critiques of anti-black racism and settler colonialism, while the significance of discourses of anti-blackness cannot be overlooked within comparative race studies or Indigenous studies, neither can the significance of settler colonialism be overlooked within critiques of anti-blackness (Amadahy and Lawrence; Madden; Smith, "Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, White Supremacy"). Furthermore, the historical alliances between black and Indigenous communities do render neither black people nor Indigenous people immune to participation in discourses of settler colonialism or anti-black racism. For example, Amadahy and Lawrence, in "Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?" suggest that while the acknowledgement of settler colonial contexts and celebration of Indigenous roots by black communities by some authors has been important, "[t]he next step…is for Black people to begin to interrogate how "stolen people on stolen land" can situate themselves in relation to today's existing Native peoples who are still struggling to reclaim stolen lands" (Amadahy and Lawrence 124-125).

Amadahy and Lawrence locate the potential for alliance formation in Indigenous-led decolonization movements that take into account the realities of forced migration, the legacies of slavery, and racialized oppression more generally (130-131). They call for the formation of these alliances under the auspices of Indigenous frameworks – as opposed to frameworks structured by the demands of the colonial state – that privilege Indigenous "histories, stories, and spiritual tenets" (131). However, they acknowledge that, given the everyday racial and colonial violence facing black and Indigenous peoples across North America, there is "limited capacity" to engage in such alliance work (131).

The question of studying filmic representations of blackness in relation to settler colonialism, is a different task than envisioning the formation of alliances within social movements, as discussed by Amadahy and Lawrence. As a cultural medium, film provides a space in which to represent blackness; to reflect on how it has been socially constructed, and to imagine how it could be constructed. The task of film analysis here is to consider how blackness has been represented in black westerns, not only in relation to whiteness, but in relation to settler colonialism.

Transnational approaches to black studies, which trouble the racialized assumptions of dominant geographies, provide a methodological means of navigating some of the tensions between blackness, white supremacy and settler colonialism in film and visual cultures, even if only partially (Boyce Davies; Brand; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Hall, "Cultural Identity"; McKittrick; Walcott)[1]. Much of this work has been inaugurated by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic,* which invites readers to think about the production of blackness, as both discursive and material formation, outside of a purely cultural nationalist frame (1). Gilroy argues that such a singular focus on the national asks readers to instead consider blackness as transnational, formed not only through the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade, but through the multiple connections, flows and exchanges across all sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, he suggests, diasporic black experience is not an experience of being "authentically" black or African-descended, but one that is inherently hybrid/creolized/mestisized; the inevitable result of "mutations"

[1] Though many of the authors listed here reference specific geographies (British, Canadian, Caribbean) that may be distinct from American ones, the conceptual arguments concerning de-essentializing blackness remain applicable for theorizing black identities, and racialized identities more generally.

between the racial/cultural/national assemblages of blackness and Europeanness/whiteness (1). Drawing on the image of the ship to anchor his analysis, Gilroy's influential text is important for its emphasis on the interplay between "roots" and "routes"; through its consideration of racialized identity as formed through discursive and material processes of mobility and rootedness. His transnational approach to race and blackness is shared by scholars such as Dionne Brand, Carol Boyce Davies, Stuart Hall, Rinaldo Walcott and Katherine McKittrick, all of whom contribute towards contextualizing blackness in de-nationalized, de-essentialized terms. These authors trouble what McKittrick calls the "dominant geographies" that frame hegemonic interpretations of race, culture and identity, while disavowing alternative geographies imagined by black subjects that extend beyond colonial national borders.

Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, in their essay, "Decolonizing Antiracism", critique a number of critical race and anti-racism scholars, including Gilroy, for their failure to reference Indigenous peoples of the Americas, or Indigenous nationhood (Lawrence and Dua 129). They note the following passage from *The Black Atlantic,* which consigns Indigenous peoples to the past: "striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness...If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the 'Indians' they slaughtered, and the Asians that they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed hermeneutically from each other, then so be it" (2-3). Lawrence and Dua also critique Gilroy's emphasis on the transatlantic slave trade as definitive of modernity

(Lawrence and Dua 130). They argue that this singular focus on the transatlantic slave trade obscures how modernity has also been shaped through genocide and colonization in the Americas (130). In terms of content, I share Lawrence and Dua's important critique of Gilroy. For instance, in his discussions of hybridity, creolisation, mestizaje and metissage, Gilroy neglects any substantive analysis of the early exchanges between Indigenous nations and black communities in the Americas. Similarly, most theorists of transnational black studies have not taken up a comparative approach addressing settler colonialism in their work. While some of these scholars, unlike Gilroy, do mention North American colonialism and genocide in their work (e.g. Boyce Davies; Brand; Walcott), this has not translated into a substantive engagement with, for instance, Indigenous studies scholarship.

Despite these limitations, in their emphasis on a de-essentialized understanding of blackness, transnational black approaches potentially open, rather than foreclose, possibilities for alliances with Indigenous decolonization projects. Specifically, transnational black studies' call to think about black identities outside of the terms of cultural authenticity, and outside of the singular framework of the nation, arguably supports decolonial constructions of blackness. Transnational black studies scholarship, when placed in conversation with literature on space and settler colonialism, provides a means through which to interpret black westerns. Scholarship on settler colonialism and space has drawn attention to the way that cultural narratives continually imagine Indigenous lands as settler space, thereby legitimating settler presence (Baldwin, Cameron and Kobayashi; Banivanua-Mar and Edmonds; Razack, "Gendered Racial

Violence"; Shaw). Moreover, as demonstrated by recent work on queer and racialized subjects' complicity with settler colonialism (Amadahy and Lawrence; Lawrence and Dua; Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us;* Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?*), it is not only dominant cultural narratives that participate in this reinscription of settler spatiality. For example, with respect to queer subjects, Scott Morgensen's account of Radical Faerie culture in the US and Canada is instructive. Morgensen describes Radical Faeries as one example of a queer culture that "make[s] the land [its] medium for liberating sexuality and gender" ("Spaces Between Us" 127). Of Radical Faerie gatherings, Morgensen notes that participants (both white and non-white) "were promised a global and transhistorical gay nature by addressing non-Natives as inheritors of Native culture on Native land. By making rural space invoke Native Americans and, by extension, all Indigenous peoples through the world and time, gatherings created queers as non-Native seekers of Indigenous truth, while sanctuaries grounded their desires in negotiating non-native occupation of settled land" ("Spaces Between Us" 128). As I argued in the last chapter, settler colonial violence is made invisible when settler identifications are re-imagined as national identifications. This indigenization takes place through the naturalization of, for instance, normative constructions of gender, heterosexual romance, property ownership, the nuclear family and "settling down". In *Harlem Rides the Range, Thomasine and Bushrod,* and *Posse*, it is through representational strategies that indigenize black identities and form distinctly African-*American* ones that Indigenous presence and claims to land become disavowed, deferred or erased.

EXCLUSION, INCLUSION AND ERASURE: HERB JEFFRIES' BLACK MUSICAL WESTERNS

Herb Jeffries' series of black musical westerns, made in the late 1930s, include *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937)*, Bronze Buckaroo* (1938)*, Harlem Rides the Range* (1939) and *Two-Gun Man from Harlem* (1939). All of these were low-budget films, with low production value; Jeffries himself referred to them as "C minus westerns" (Dempsey 24). In making these films, Jeffries' explicit objective was to address the lack of black representation in the western films that were popular at the time. Recalling the presence of black cowboys in the American West, Jeffries mused to the *San Diego Union-Tribune* that "my driving force was being a hero to children who didn't have any heroes to identify with…I thought with dark-skinned children, they could identify with me and have a hero" (Griffin np). Jeffries persuaded (white) independent producer Jed Buell to support a black musical western, and recruited Spencer Williams (who later played Andy in the TV series *Amos 'n' Andy*) to co-star, and, eventually, to co-write the script for *Harlem Rides the Range.*

The films themselves are mainly lighthearted adventure-mysteries, presumably set in the late 1800s (as indicated by the costumes and technologies represented on screen)[2]. As musicals, their plot, narratives and characters are simple in scope, involving bad villains, damsels in distress, and upstanding heroes to save the day. In this regard, black musical westerns were inspired by the white musical westerns that were popular during this time period, and featured singing cowboy Gene Autry, whom Jeffries admired

[2] Most westerns are set in this time period.

(Griffin np). Jeffries told the *San Diego Union-Tribune* that "Gene Autry was a big hero of mine and the morality of our pictures was based on Gene Autry films…The hero wouldn't shoot anyone unless it was in self-defense. And he'd never smoke, or drink."

However, though the films may have been following the conventions of genre (Blake Allmendinger (78) calls *Harlem Rides the Range* formulaic, for instance), they were also actively engaged in the cultural politics of representation. Unlike Autry's films, Jeffries' movies feature all-black casts, playing all-black characters - there is no white-facing or red-facing in Jeffries' westerns. Indeed, in contrast to westerns like John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), none of Jeffries' films directly engage with histories of Euro-American settlement in the American west, and, consequently, also avoid addressing the colonial violence that has been constitutive of this history. Julia Leyda has suggested that the exclusion of this context, as signaled by the absence of Mexican or Native American characters in the film, may have been strategic. She writes:

> Historically and generically, the raced identity of a Mexican or Native American character in the context of a black-cowboy movie would…necessarily (if unintentionally) signify their oppression at the hands of white America, represented by the cowboys, who are all played by African Americans (61).

Further, she speculates:

> The incongruity of African American actors portraying American imperialists and oppressors of other people of color may have struck the filmmakers as too difficult to negotiate. Cowboy roles were important vehicles for imagining black men as serious, masculine American heroes, but that could only work in an all-black milieu (Leyda 61).

Regardless of the intentions behind this lack of historical engagement, given that the films are essentially about cowboys *without* "Indians", it might be tempting to assume that colonialism is simply absent from Jeffries' westerns. Yet the silence on colonialism

in Jeffries' films does not necessarily imply that colonialism is absent, but invites one to consider both how this silence is constituted, and how the silence itself is constitutive of settler colonial power[3]. While *Harlem* does not impart to its viewers an explicit message about colonialism, its representational politics certainly tell audiences much about blackness and American colonialism. Specifically, through its construction of an idealized black masculinity that is moral, virtuous and heteronormative, the film reiterates the dichotomy of savagery/civilization central to colonial discourses.

Central to the film's construction of black masculinity are discourses of land and spatiality. As demonstrated by work on critical geographies of race and gender (e.g. Jackson; McKittrick; Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence"), race, gender and space are mutually constitutive. Not only are processes of racialization gendered, but processes of gendering are racialized; they are also are constituted through spatial practices. Conversely, space is not merely filled by social relations, but constituted through them. The material practices through which legalized segregation racialized space in the US in the 1930s were supported through discursive practices that allowed for these spaces to be attached to Othered bodies. Discourses of race, operating in conjunction with discourses of gender, equated blackness with savagery, a lack of civility, and racially inferiority; black people were thus deemed unworthy of sharing space with whites. At the same time, though the stakes were clearly distinct, colonial arguments about Native people also

[3] In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault argues that Victorian Europe was marked not by a silencing or repression of sex – as suggested by Sigmund Freud, for example - but by a proliferation of discourses about sex. It was through the multitude of expert knowledge produced about sex that sexual desire, and sex-talk more generally, could be regulated. Rather than assuming silence implies absence, Foucault's theorization invites one to think about how silences are constituted, and how they are constitutive of power.

suggested they were less entitled to land than white settlers. Colonial expansion was justified through the construction of Indigenous people as savage and as incapable of cultivating the land; this was reflected in western films. For instance, Jacqueline Kilpatrick describes how in *Allegheny Uprising* (1939), starring John Wayne, settler appropriation of land is justified by the labour invested by Wayne's character, who successfully tames the wilderness and assumes the position of "natural" proprietor. The construction of the hardworking settler is contrasted to villainous Indians in the film, who appear to harbour a vehement hatred of settlers.

Jeffries' black westerns arguably make a statement about supposed entitlement to land as well. However, in contrast to John Wayne-westerns – which provided justification for colonial settlement – Jeffries' westerns can be read as making an argument for black entitlement to space, through the construction of an idealized black masculinity. The construction of respectable masculinity and femininity is one means through which proximity to civilization is established (McClintock; Smith, *Conquest*; Stoler); the construction of normative gender reinforces the savage/civilized binary endemic to settler colonial discourses. This can be observed in *Harlem Rides the Range.* The plotline of the film follows a similar formula as Jeffries' other films. This formula includes a corrupt outlaw stealing resources, a damsel in distress, and heroes Bob (and sometimes sidekick Dusty) saving the day. The action is accompanied by light-hearted musical interludes provided by Herb Jeffries' singing troupe, the Four Tones. *Harlem Rides the Range* begins with the presumed murder of homesteader Jim Denison, the owner of a secret radium mine. When Jim refuses to give up the location of the mine to two strangers

(Bradley and Connors), they have a scuffle. Jim is knocked unconscious, and Bradley and Connors flee the scene, presuming him dead. Bob Blake and Dusty, newcomers to town, notice Bradley and Connors making their exit, and eventually get involved with the investigation of Jim's murder through their work with the Sheriff. In the process, Bob also falls in love Jim's daughter, "Miss Denison". Some sleuthing by Bob and Dusty is followed by a climactic shootout. In the end, Jim is discovered to in fact be alive, Bradley and Connors are caught, and Bob wins over Miss Denison.

In *Harlem Rides the Range,* as in his other westerns, Jeffries does not engage in a conversation about colonialism in historical-material terms. The historical question of settlement itself is taken for granted by Jeffries – the presence of black cowboys in the American West seems merely incidental in the film. However, underlying the film is the question of how entitlement to land is determined through colonial discourses. This link between respectability and entitlement to land/settlement is made through the contrast between the hero figure of Jeffries' films, cowboy Bob Blake (portrayed by Jeffries himself), and the villains. Bob's sense of goodness, rationality and virtue in relation to women, children, and land are contrasted to the villains' greed, selfishness and irresponsibility. As iterated by scholars in Indigenous, postcolonial and critical geography studies, civility is determined, in part, through one's mastery of nature or land (Braun; McClintock; Tuhiwai-Smith). Racialized-colonized bodies' constructed proximity to savagery is linked to the notion that they are capable only of "working" land (as labourers), and incapable of mastering or transforming land. The contrast between Bob's goodness and civility, and the villains' lack thereof, thus reaffirms the dichotomy of

savagery/civilization through which racialized bodies are deemed unruly (and less entitled to land) in the first place.

This is further confirmed through Bob's relationship with Miss Denison, which, in turn, is contrasted with the Connor's scheme to kill Miss Denison in order to acquire Jim's property. The contrast between good and evil in the film's narrative suggests that virtues such as justice and morality should determine entitlement to land, rather than racial identity. In other words, the suggestion is that blacks are entitled to be on the land due to their demonstrated sense of justice and morality. While providing a counterpoint to the negative stereotypes about black masculinities that otherwise circulate across popular cultures, however, this construction operates through the very discursive means through which racialized-colonized bodies are made abject. As David Eng observes, "[t]he struggle to recompose the psychic and material body of the racialized masculine subject can result in the ascribing of conservative norms to emancipatory political projects" (136). Settler national mythologies in both the US and Canada are narratives about heroic white men and their capacity to domesticate, manage and/or conserve land, in contrast to "uncivilized" Indigenous men (Allister; Aguiar and Martin). Though the issue of colonial settlement is not a central conflict in the film, and though there are no "Indians" represented in the films, the construction of black masculinities in *Harlem* relies upon the same civilized/savage binary used by white settlers to lay claim to the American West. The construction of blacks as good and virtuous provides a counter-narrative to the construction of Native people, who are perceived as "savage", lacking civility, and therefore less entitled to the land. Of course, in the context of segregation laws, it is easy

to see why such a narrative would be attractive to Jeffries, and to black filmgoers. By implying that blacks are as entitled to American land as whites, Jeffries' films suggest that all respectable individuals are entitled to space, regardless of race. Normalizing the position of blacks as settlers essentially normalizes blacks as *humans,* given that the alternative – to be native – is to be non-human. Given these stakes, it is not surprising that in this context, one might want to imagine that blacks had the same moral entitlement to land as white settlers. This is a particularly relevant strategy given that American national identity is framed through ideals of liberal democracy, wherein the notion of meritocracy – in which access to the privileges of citizenship are determined through the colour-blind virtues of industry, hard work and sacrifice – prevails. Indeed, working class whites (Roedigger), "ethnic" whites (Ignatiev) and Asian American men (A. Chen) have certainly accessed (or attempted to access) white privilege by valuing these virtues.

In addition to entitlement to land, the construction of land as commodity remains an unproblematized goal in *Harlem Rides*. The primary conflict in the film, for example, is over land and natural resources; Jim is harassed by Bradley and Connors because of the value of his land. This construction of land as a commodity obscures possibilities for alternative relationships with land. Though on the one hand, Bob Blake's character does not have the same socio-historical interests as John Wayne's hero characters - who is willing to take whatever means necessary to facilitate Euro-American settlement needed to kick-start the mythology of America – blacks are still imagined in relation to American history as de facto settlers and proprietors (rather than as ambiguously positioned between settlers and natives).

The imagined relationship to land, when contrasted to the much more complex and nuanced relationship that is suggested by historical evidence, is surprising, particularly given Jeffries' purported goal of addressing the historical inaccuracy of mainstream westerns. Indeed, this goal is somewhat puzzling given that none of Jeffries' films actually take up the question of historical accuracy. With their all-black casts, the films are more like utopias of all-black worlds in which history stands still. The films are filled with anachronisms. The "Harlem" referenced in many of the titles alone suggests a black identity informed by an East-Coast, rather than a South-West presence (Leyda). Ironically, the addition of "Harlem" to these titles reinforces the distance between the American West and African-American identity, implying that African-American identity is intrinsic to urban, East Coast cultures. In relation to the 1970s show *The Good Times,* Rinaldo Walcott has argued that the show casts blackness "in a particular mould to represent and validate blackness and thus black people as legitimate in the context of Euro-American politics and culture" (93). Similarly, Jeffries' construction of blackness through the lens of Harlem offers an easily digestible sort of blackness that fulfills a desire for nationalist legitimacy (i.e. African Americans were cowboys too) without posing any critical challenge to the historical erasures that leave blacks out of the American West. In other words, rather than providing the context for the historical presence of blacks in the American West, the signifiers of the "Wild West" in Jeffries' films tell a story about the virtues of blackness. The landscape of the West, with its readily available tropes about land, gender and heroism, becomes a metonym for the birthplace of the American hero (who may also be black), eliding thornier questions

about colonial settlement and injustice. When Bob and Dusty's make their first appearance in *Harlem Rides the Range,* for example, they are barely visible, small specks riding through a vast, empty landscape. The appearance of the film's heroes through the landscape places them inside it, suggesting that they also emerge from the history of this particular idea of land.

Such a reading of the West in Jeffries' film reflects Susan Kollin's observation "that the West is a multiply inflected terrain whose identity is always in flux and revision" (Kollin xi). Yet, this reading also risks eliding the ongoing colonial violence that is normalized through representations of the Wild West. As Michael Yellow Bird argues, there is a "master narrative" associated with games of cowboys and Indians. He notes that "[c]owboys have remained, in the hearts of most Americans, an evocative representation of American values: love of freedom, fairness, individualism, toughness, enterprise, forward- looking attitude, and whiteness." Meanwhile, their counterparts, "Indians", "have remained the savage, primitive, losing, dark-skinned, evil, antagonistic enemy" (Yellow Bird 43). While the meaning of the "West", and of associated figures of "cowboys and Indians", may never be fixed, there are hegemonic meanings encoded in these representations, which cannot be ignored. As Stuart Hall argues, dominant or preferred meanings of cultural representations are supported through structures and institutions, which also place limits on our possibilities for interpreting meaning (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"). Jeffries may not have had any particular opinion about colonization, or about Indigenous peoples (or may even have felt affinities with them). Yet, his romanticization of the Western landscape, and of the cowboy-as-quintessential

hero, also support the normalization of a sanitized reading of the Wild West in which colonial violence is erased.

DE/RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIES: *THOMASINE AND BUSHROD*

There were few black westerns produced in the 1950s-1960s. However, they make an appearance again in the 1970s in the form of the "blaxploitation" western. The blaxploitation genre itself developed in the context of civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1950s and 1960s (Lawrence 17). Ed Guerrero suggests that:

> These films were made possible by the rising political and social consciousness of black people, which translated into a large black audience thirsting to see their full humanity depicted on the commercial cinema screen (cited in Lawrence 17).

In their reworking of the western genre, blaxploitation westerns were also influenced by the Italian ("spaghetti[4]") westerns that emerged in the 1960s (Fisher 6)[5]. The Italian western removed from the American western its ideological context, reinscribing it with new meanings corresponding to the concerns of the Italian and European left (Fisher 3). Thus Italian westerns often feature elements of the American western – such as the rugged, solitary, masculine hero, and empty landscape – but are notable for the absence of others. There are few "Indians" to be found in spaghetti westerns, for example.

This reworking of the American western appealed to filmmakers across a number

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[4] The term "spaghetti western" was popularized by Christopher Frayling's book, *Spaghetti Westerns: Cowboys and Europeans From Karl May to Sergio Leone* (New York: I.B Taurus, 2006, XI).

[5] There were hundreds of western films produced by Italian studios from 1962 to 1980 (Fisher 1). The Italian western was popularized by directors such as Sergio Leone, who directed films such as *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964) and *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), both starring Clint Eastwood. Austin Fisher locates the Italian western in terms of Italy's revolutionary New Left movements, arguing that Italian filmmakers resonated with the western genre's emphasis on redemptive violence (Fisher 3).

of different local-national contexts[6], including blaxploitation filmmakers. Like Italian westerns, blaxploitation westerns like *Thomasine and Bushrod* (1974), *Boss* (1975), and *Adios Amigo* (1976) focus on hardened, detached heroes. Most also include an emphasis on redemptive violence, with black outlaws fighting corrupt and racist laws. And, like the Italian western, there are few "Indians" in blaxploitation westerns. However, while a settler colonial context is not necessarily explored in these films, the American historical context of slavery and black oppression is central. In addition, the films also often feature a Mexican community that the black heroes protect from white villains[7].

One of the few blaxploitation westerns to include "Indians" in some way is *Thomasine and Bushrod.* The film is loosely based on *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967). The eponymous protagonists play a pair of lovers and outlaws in Texas in 1911, who are on the run from the law, as represented through the villainous Marshall. The Marshall, who is shown to be a man of the law in name only, is especially intent on capturing Thomasine and Bushrod because they have evaded capture on more than one occasion (humiliating him in the process). Though the film may be thin in terms of character and plot development, it is significant for the way in which it imagines blackness as de-essentialized and transnational. It does so through a self-conscious critique of the construction of historical memory, and through an emphasis on alternative forms of social bonds and relationality suggested by both cross-national and black-Indigenous

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[6] For example, Bombay filmmakers have paid homage to Italian westerns, through films such as *Sholay* (1974).

[7] This could have been a response to the differential representations of blacks, Native people and Latinos in Hollywood westerns. Donald Hoffman writes that "[t]he Hollywood that ignores African Americans and glamorizes and demonizes Native Americans, seems to treat Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to an unusually vindictive program of degradation and defamation" (52).

alliances. The film's implicit critique of identity distinguishes *Thomasine* from other blaxploitation westerns (and from many other blaxploitation films in general), which have been far more essentialist in their approach towards history and identity, and also from Herb Jeffries' musical westerns. However, the film's ambiguous representation of capitalism, settlement and heterosexual romance also interrupt or "contain" this radical construction of blackness.

Thomasine's critique of historical remembrance is gestured to in several moments of the film. One notable moment is when the pair poses in a photography studio before robbing the town bank. Thomasine demands that she be on the left side of the photograph. Though her motivations are not clear, the photographer later speculates to the police that Thomasine must have anticipated the eventual seizure of the photograph by authorities: "I guess she wanted to be on the left side, so that her name would be first [in the newspaper and ransom posters]!". Upon hearing this, Marshall and another officer agree that Thomasine must be the one "running the show". The scene reveals that Thomasine, who is highly conscious of the gendered dynamics structuring her relationship with Bushrod (resulting in frequent arguments about gender roles), is also aware of how the visual construction of photographs reproduces power relations.

At another moment in the film, Thomasine reads out the newspaper coverage of their exploits. Laughing at the media's portrayal of their crimes, she ponders, "I wonder what history is gonna say about us?". Bushrod wisely replies that it "Just depends how we write it." Similarly, film and photo montages of Thomasine and Bushrod's bank heists break the narrative of the film at various points. By interrupting the fantasy world of the

film, these montages disrupt its wholeness and give the audience the opportunity to reflect on they hyper-reality of the film is constructed[8]. In the montages, Thomasine and Bushrod's many bank heists are showcased through newspaper headlines and photographs. They act as evidence of Bushrod's observation that the truth of history depends on how it is written; that stories become truthful based on how they are told. The montages also step outside the narrative of the film in another way: interspersed with the images of Thomasine and Bushrod are photographs of blacks in the American West. The mixture of historical and fictive photographs places the film in its spatial and temporal context. Though the story may be of a fictional West, filled with perhaps as many anachronisms as Jeffries' films (including 1970s music and hairstyles), its reference point lies in the documented histories of blacks in the West.

Alliances between Thomasine and Bushrod and other marginalized people are another unique feature of the film. At various points in the film, Thomasine and Bushrod visit multi-racial communities and distribute their wealth among the townspeople. Their reputation as "Robin Hood" outlaws is confirmed in a ransom ad, which doubles as the film poster, that states that they are "known to have many friends among the Indians, Mexicans, poor Whites, and other coloured people" (referencing an alliance among these differentially positioned groups based on marginalization through race and class)[9]. Though, as I discuss shortly, the alliances explored in the film may have limitations, they

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[8] The break from the film narrative through the use of montage mirrors Madhava Prasad's observations about the ""fragmented and episodic" structure of the Hindi film", which "demotes the status of the narrative to being simply one out of many components that make up the cinematic texts" (Gopinath 98).
[9] Paul Buhle suggests that the character of Robin Hood is the basis for the cowboy outlaw hero of the western genre, as well as for other popular representations of resistance and rebellion (Buhle 10). Jeremy Agnew similarly comments that the cowboy of western genre is closer to the mythic figure of Robin Hood, than to the cattle-herding cowboys that populated the American West in the 19th century (229)s.

are significant as they disrupt the black/white binary that often characterizes American race politics.

Two forms of alliances in the film receive particularly strong emphasis. The first is trans-Atlantic black alliance; the second is black-Indigenous alliance. Trans-Atlantic black alliance is emphasized in particular through the character of Jomo, who, we are told, is a black Jamaican man and friend to Thomasine and Bushrod. His presence in the film alone raises the question of the multiple erasures of American history as well –in this case, of black Jamaican indentured workers who were brought to the US to carry out agricultural labour. The inclusion of Jomo in *Thomasine* stands in stark contrast to the deliberate exclusion of any non-African American presence in Herb Jeffries' films. Where this exclusion forecloses the possibility for critical conversations about constructions of history, the inclusions of these nuances in *Thomasine* does the opposite.

The audience first meets Jomo when he saves the Thomasine and Bushrod in a shootout. His role and presence in the film speaks not only to the de-essentialized, transnational understanding of blackness discussed earlier in the chapter, but to the possibilities for alternative forms of kinship debated by queer scholars (Butler, *Antigones' Claim;* Eng, *Feeling Kinship;* Halberstam, *Queer Art;* Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia;* Weston). Pointing to the way in which kinship structures regulate political subjectivity and structure modes of power, queer scholars have argued for imagining new conceptualizations of the "family," by taking into account the social bonds of friendship and chosen family, for instance[10]. In *Thomasine,* Jomo, Thomasine and Bushrod live

[10] Halberstam goes further and suggests rejecting or deemphasizing family as a mode of social organization

together for a short time and begin to refer to one another as family. Their intimacy extends so far that Jomo refuses to give up information about Thomasine and Bushrod's whereabouts to the Marshall – choosing instead to be tortured and eventually killed. Meanwhile, Thomasine, who has just revealed that she is pregnant, proclaims just minutes before she is shot that they should name the baby after Jomo. This is particularly significant as Thomasine expresses a desire, early in the film, for the family that she never had. Their decision to form familial bonds outside of the institutions of marriage and the nuclear family displaces the heteronormativity of those institutions and gestures to the possibilities of love and relationships that may proliferate outside of the regulatory confines of the state.

Thomasine's longing for family also gestures to the erasure of black genealogies due to the transatlantic slave trade (e.g. Hartman). In a broader sense, the camaraderie and strong affinity between the three makes reference to a black identity that is transatlantic rather than nationally based, particularly when one considers the deliberate decision to have a Jamaican character (with an atrocious accent) in this role, rather than, say, another African-American character, or another racialized American character. This "failed" attempt at mimicry is analogous to J. Halberstam's concept of "layering", which Halbertam discusses in relation to drag king performances, wherein the theatricality of drag performances "reveals their multiple ambiguities because in both cases the role playing reveals the permeable boundaries between acting and being; the drag actors are all performing their own queerness and simultaneously exposing the artificiality of

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(*Queer Art* 72).

conventional gender roles" (261). Similarly, the choice to write this character as Jamaican, and the actor's poor approximation of a Jamaican accent (whether or not this casting was a result of budgetary constraints), has the effect of emphasizing the transnational connection in the film. As discussed earlier in the chapter, cultural theorists such as Davies, Gilroy, Hall and McKittrick have suggested that blackness be understood outside of nationalist frames and as a hybridized, creolized racial identity formation. In *The Black Atlantic,* for instance, Gilroy argues against African-American or black British exceptionalism, and for a notion of blackness informed through the transnational connections, movements and conversations (Gilroy, "Black Atlantic" 4).

In its imagination of transatlantic blackness, *Thomasine and Bushrod* notably challenges a nationalist construction of blackness. Amadahy and Lawrence have argued that within theoretical and literary black writing from the US, the overvaluation of slavery as the central trope structuring (North American) black identity effectively constructs the race dynamics of the US through a black/white binary, which unwittingly disavows the significance of settler colonialism for understanding blackness (Amadahy and Lawrence 122). Without dismissing the profound significance of slavery, Amadahy and Lawrence argue that this is problematic because it:

> …exclude[s] the possibility of an Indigenous presence fundamentally mattering. It is as if, in African-American writing, White settlers landed in empty lands, bringing with them the African slaves who would represent the other America to the world. This erases the reality of colonization, and that the agenda of settler nations across the Americas is still to destroy all remaining Indigenous peoples, if not directly through murder then through forced assimilation (122).

It is notable then, that *Thomasine & Bushrod* not only gestures to the transnational

dimensions of black identities, but also acknowledges the presence of Indigenous peoples and of historical alliances between black and Indigenous communities in the US. However, as I discuss shortly, the acknowledgement is limited in its scope. In the second half of the film, Thomasine and Bushrod hide out among some secluded cliffs. Initially, the audience is led to believe that this scene will play out in the same way that it does in so many western movies – with an ambush by silent, angry Indians. Eerie music plays as Thomasine and Bushrod fearfully approach the cliffs, signaling that they have indeed reached unknown Indian Territory. The spooky ambiance of the scene echoes a common trope of western movies, as well as American literature, in which Native presence is marked through dread and haunting (Bergland). Renee Bergland has argued that the figure of the ghostly, spiritual or dying Indian in American literature (and, I would add, American cultural texts more generally) speaks to the melancholic relationship of American national identity to Indigenous peoples. The presence of Indigenous people, and the violent struggle through which manifest destiny was carried out is a specter that haunts American cultural imagination. However, the dread – and the filmic convention of the ghostly, vengeful Indian - is soon interrupted by the affinity that is established between black and Indigenous peoples. The fact that Thomasine and Bushrod even choose to enter the cliffs, in contrast to the Marshall, who refuses to enter out of fear, immediately suggests this affinity. The affinity is confirmed when they encounter a small black Indigenous community, who provide the pair with shelter in the cliffs. An elder named Pecolia, who identifies herself as being of mixed black-Native ancestry, reveals that she knew Bushrod's parents. Pecolia's parents were Chiefs of the Comanche Nation,

she tells them, and Bushrod's mother was also Comanche. His mother "rode with her father in raids against the intruder", while Bushrod's father was tall, strong, and "blacker than the great buffalo[11]". The meeting with Pecolia is significant as this is the only explicit reference to colonization in the film, and to a history of black-Indigenous alliances that otherwise receives scant attention[12]. At the same time, the character of Pecolia in the film is not too different from the romanticized, noble Indian found across American popular cultures. She resembles the "noble savage" - portrayed either a strong and stoic masculine leader, or a wise, spiritual elder. Though the noble savage may be a "positive" stereotype of sorts, it remains a representation that does not grant voice or agency to Indigenous subjects. In popular American cultural texts, this figure is often absorbed into a national imaginary in which it symbolizes values such as valour, nobility and grandeur. In *Celluloid Indian,* for example, Jacqueline Kilpatrick observes that the noble savage of 1960s & 1970s Hollywood films could be found standing in for a universally oppressed minority in some cases; and in other cases, such as in *Tell Them Willie Boy Is Here* (1969), as the "legendary warrior" (71). In other words, the noble savage has generally served as a site upon which American national identifications, concerns and anxieties have been negotiated and deferred, rather than as a site for negotiating Indigenous voice and agency. In *Thomasine,* the character of Pecolia serves a similar function. She is a source of wisdom, and she lends legitimacy to Thomasine & Bushrod's exploits by affirming Bushrod's Indigeneity, but ultimately, Thomasine and

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[11] "Buffalo" here is also a reference to "Buffalo Soldiers". Blacks who fought alongside white settlers in the Indian wars were referred to as Buffalo soldiers by Native peoples.

[12] For instance, *Thomasine and Bushrod* and *Posse* are two of the few films that include representations of these alliances.

Bushrod are unaffected by her knowledge. It does not change the course of their actions, or their understanding of themselves.

The radical transnational and Indigenous alliances also sit somewhat contradictorily next to the ongoing theme of settlement in the film. The motivation for Thomasine and Bushrod's bank robbing spree, after all, is settlement, shaped by heteronormative desires for property ownership and a nuclear family structure. It is only when Thomasine states that she wants "a home, and horses, and a little piece of land. I mean, wouldn't you like to be breaking your own horses?", that Bushrod declares that "whatever we have to do to stay alive, I don't care what it is, we'll do it. All right? And everything that you want, I'll get it for you. I promise". Settlement is also the reason why Thomasine and Bushrod decide to eventually abandon their criminal pursuits. At the end of the film, after Thomasine has revealed that she is pregnant, they decide to rob one last bank before finding "a ranch across the border" and retiring. However, this fantasy of settlement is interrupted by Thomasine's sudden death. The tragic ending of the film, and the failure to achieve the fantasy of settlement could be read as the impossibility for blacks to be settled, or "at home". It is a radical ending, to the extent that it suggests that access to heteronormative institutions is conditioned not only through sexual desire, but through race. Discourses of race position racialized bodies as perversely outside of the boundaries of respectability; as incapable of the capacity to regenerate towards productive futures (Puar 211)[13]. However, is the tragedy in the film about the *inability* to

[13] Puar argues that "[f]or queer politics, the challenge is…to understand how the biopolitics of regenerative capacity already demarcate racialized and sexualized statistical population aggregates as those in decay, destined for no future, based not upon whether they can or cannot reproduce children but on what

be settled (where the goal of settlement remains untroubled); or that settlement is fraught and complicated, a fantasy only fulfilled through violence and loss? The dream-like epilogue seems to suggest the former. It replays the fantasy for viewers through a slow-motion reprise of an earlier scene of Thomasine and Bushrod playfully splashing one another in a tranquil pond, in an idyllic, green, secluded area. This valuation of settlement in *Thomasine and Bushrod* places limits on the otherwise radical and subversive elements of the film.

ERASURE THROUGH INCLUSION AND ALLIANCE: *POSSE*

Whereas in *Thomasine & Bushrod* transnational alliances offer the possibility of destabilizing colonial discourses, in *Posse,* black-Indigenous alliances fortify the construction of a nationalist, essentialist African-American identity. The film is one of a number of revisionist westerns produced in the 1990s. As documented by Stephen J. Summerhill and John Alexander Williams in *Sinking Columbus,* the 1992 Quincentenary celebrations of Columbus' voyage to the New World inspired much conversation, debate and cultural production concerning Indigenous peoples and struggles in the 1980s and 1990s. In the lead up to official celebrations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists engaged in protests that reframed Columbus' "discovery" of Americas as invasion, drawing attention to the effects of colonial violence on Indigenous nations (Shohat and Stam 71). A number of independent film and videos produced counter-narratives to the "discovery" narratives promulgated by the 1992 celebrations, including such titles as

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capacities they can and cannot regenerate and what kinds of assemblages they compel, repel, spur, deflate" (211).

Surviving Columbus (1990), *The Columbus Invasion: Colonialism and the Indian Resistance* (1992) and *Columbus Didn't Discover Us* (1992) (Shohat and Stam 71). In a related vein, the early 1990s also saw the production of a number of revisionist western films, in which dominant narratives about white settlers, Indigenous peoples, and American history more generally were brought under question. Examples of 1990s revisionist westerns include *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) and *Dances With Wolves* (1990). The highly-praised *Dances,* for instance, was hailed as offering a more accurate representation of Indigenous people. However, critiques by critical race and Indigenous studies scholars have suggested that the film was more about white salvation and redemption than about a critique of white settler colonialism. Shari Huhndorf, for instance, writes that:

> Like earlier Westerns, [*Dances With Wolves*], it tells a story that leaves stereotyped visions of Native life intact and the radically unequal relations between European Americans and Native Americans unquestioned. Although its primary Native characters are overwhelmingly wise and virtuous, they are nevertheless as unrealistic as the bloodthirsty savages populating other narratives. In any case, they remain more or less incidental to the story. Their primary importance resides in their relation to Dunbar, who is the film's hero and center of consciousness. Not only does this white character retain center stage in the drama, he soon proves himself superior to his Native counterparts (*Going Native* 3).

Several mainstream westerns in the 1990s featured black actors in prominent roles, including *Wild Wild West* (1999; starring Will Smith, with Kevin Kline), and the *Black Fox* trilogy (1995; starring Tony Todd, with Christopher Reeve). *Black Fox* is similar to earlier films like *Sergeant Rutledge* (1970), in which the racial struggles of the Black character in the film are significant to the plot line of the film. However, in *Wild Wild West* race is more "incidental", with blackness functioning more as a sort of

currency, or an aesthetic providing comic relief and entertainment. The (slightly) wider range of representations of blackness reflects the political climate of the 1990s, where systemic racism and inequity continued to exist alongside official racial equity achieved through civil rights legislation (Omi)[14].

Mario Van Peebles' *Posse* (1993) is one of a few black westerns produced around this time (others include Danny Glover's made-for-TV film *Buffalo Soldiers* (1997), and Van Peebles' follow up to *Posse, Los Locos* (1997)) that also participated in historical revisionism. Unlike mainstream revisionist westerns, however, the objective of these films was to draw attention to the African-American "buffalo soldiers" who participated in the "Indian Wars" and played a role in settling the American West. The tagline for *Posse* reads "the untold story of the Wild West". In contrast to Herb Jeffries' black musical westerns of the late 1930s, and the blaxploitation westerns of the 1970s - which do not engage in a substantive exploration of history - these films were far more concerned with telling the "truth" of American history. *Posse,* which received wider distribution than *Buffalo Soldiers*, is set in 1898, during the Spanish-American war. *Posse* is the story of cowboy Jesse Lee's cavalry of mostly African-American soldiers, who desert the war in order to avenge the lynching of Lee's father by white supremacists in his hometown, Freemanville. The film was produced on the heels of a number of all- (or

[14] Since the end of the 1990s, the western genre as a whole has fallen out of fashion again. However, among western flicks that were produced in the 2000s, some have featured black characters (*Dead Birds* (2004); *Django Unchained* (2012) and *Gallowwalker* (2013) are three examples). Moreover, in 2003, the film *Gang of Roses,* about a posse of black vigilante cowgirls, was released, with Mario Van Peebles reprising his Jessie Lee role; a sequel, *Gang of Roses II: The Next Generation*, was released on video in 2012. A similar film - *Ride Sweet Die Slow* - featuring a cast of multiracial vigilante cowgirls, was released in 2005.

mostly) black cast films in the 1990s, many of which took place in contemporary urban settings. Explaining his reasons for breaking the urban trend, Van Peebles explained in an interview with *NOW* Magazine that "[i]n terms of cinema, it was important that we step out of the 'hood. We had all the 'hood-based movies a year or two ago – *New Jack City* and *Boyz N The Hood* – and they were successful and fun and healthy, but it's also healthy to keep going" (Bailey 1993:30). The film significantly revises the official story that says that all cowboys were white, showing that African-American men did indeed play a role in the settlement of the West. However, though the film distinguishes blacks from white settlers, it simultaneously positions them as part of a multi-racial American settler project.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, settler identities are not only formed in relation to Indigenous ones, but are constituted through relationships to land. In *Posse,* black identities that are distinctly American are articulated through reference to the historical presence and participation of blacks in the expansion of the American West. This historical link to settlement – and entitlement to national belonging – is fortified through reference to the historical alliances between black and Indigenous communities. Though these references may be a representation of the histories of mutual aid, support and interracial coupling between black and Indigenous communities in the US (Coleman; Forbes; Katz), they sit contradictorily beside the film's simultaneous valuation of American cultural nationalism, through the figure of the cowboy. In contrast to *Thomasine & Bushrod,* in which representations of multiple forms of alliances disrupt an essential construction of blackness, *Posse's* representations of black proximities to

Indigenous peoples, struggles and land reaffirms its construction of a specifically African-*American* blackness that is at once natural and timeless; quintessentially American; and constituted through racial difference.

Indeed, though the black characters of the film are the heroes with whom we, the audience, are expected to empathize, Van Peebles does not invite viewers to see these characters, in a colour-blind fashion, as simply "the same" as white cowboys. In fact, through an inversion of stereotypes, he asks the audience to do just the opposite. By antagonizing the white characters as selfish and tyrannical in the film, and by presenting the black characters as more human – but also as a members of a distinct and autonomous community marked by racialized difference- *Posse* asks its audience to recognize the black characters specifically through their collective difference. Even the title of the film, *Posse,* gestures to the collectivity of this identity, despite the fact that the plot revolves primarily around Jesse Lee. This construction of black identity presents a contradiction in the film. On the one hand, the heroes of *Posse* are driven by liberal values such freedom and equality. On the other, they are marked by racialized difference. The significance of this racialized difference is not fleshed out by Van Peebles in the film. Instead, he resorts to using a number of anachronisms in the film, in the plot, casting choices, and production styles. These anachronisms meld together past and present, and present a unified history of African-Americans, from the late 19th century, to the late 20th century. Yet, as demonstrated by the work of scholars such as Hall ("Cultural Identity") and Gilroy (*There Ain't No Black*), mentioned earlier in this chapter, has demonstrated, identities are not fixed and essential, but always open to contestation and negotiation.

Identities shift across time and space, and racial identifications shift in response to shifting contexts. In *Posse,* rather than recognizing black identities as dynamic, and as shaped and produced by social, political and economic circumstances, blackness is constructed as timeless, and the anachronisms themselves are presented as evidence of this timelessness.

For example, in terms of casting, the film features cameo appearances by several generations of African-American actors. Woody Strode – one of the first black actors to appear in American westerns – plays the narrator; Blaxploitation-era actor Pam Grier plays a burlesque dancer; and veteran director Melvin Van Peebles (father of Mario Van Peebles) plays Papa Joe. By casting these Hollywood veterans, the junior Van Peebles makes a statement about the presence of African-Americans within the film industry, and links *Posse* to a long lineage of black films. These casting choices implicitly situate blackness within the history of Hollywood, and given Hollywood's role in shaping American national identity, within the history of America. In this sense, the counter-history of *Posse* is not simply about blacks in the American West, but about blacks in American cinema.

Other anachronisms are sprinkled throughout the film, from the use of hip-hop music in the soundtrack, to the dialogue. For instance, during the fight scene, a Freemanville resident asks "why can't we all just get along"; this is a reference to police brutality survivor Rodney King's speech during the 1992 Los Angeles riots[15]. Much of

[15] The riots in South Central, LA followed the acquittal, by a mostly white jury, of the officers who were captured beating King on camera. King made a public appearance at a press conference held during the riots, in which he pleaded, "can we all get along?" (Medina A1). Popular references to King's speech, as in

Posse's dialogue and characters are likewise contemporary and largely intended to entertain contemporary audiences. Posse member Jeezy, for example, declares at one point: "I'm tired of this cowboy shit!" Though played for comedic effect, such anachronisms allow for quick associations between past and present. Further, in a nod to 1960s civil rights struggles, Jesse's father, Reverend King David Lee, is a Martin Luther King-like character and the founder of Freemanville. He preaches that "education is freedom", arguing that it is "easier to hate …than to love" and establishes the first school in the town. He is lynched by Ku Klux Klan members, Jesus-like, on the school. Anachronisms such as these collapse the blackness of 1890s American West with the American blackness of the twentieth century, and explicitly link this identity to contemporary civil rights struggles.

Moreover, the film asks the audience to recognize black cowboys as truly American – more American, perhaps, than white cowboys – in their drive for rogue justice, independence and free spirit. In this sense, despite the superficial critique of Columbus that is presented in the prologue of the film, it does not fundamentally challenge settler colonialism. Ultimately, the full realization of civil rights *demands* faith in the settler colonial state. For example, the Wild West is often characterized by its wildness – by the blatant disregard for the rule of law in favour of vigilante justice. Somewhat ironically perhaps, in *Posse,* a cowboy culture of lawlessness is appropriated

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Posse, inaccurately report him as having said "can't we all just get along?" or "why can't we all just get along?"

by Jesse and his men as a means for procuring racial justice. This perception of the law is made clear in a scene in which Papa Joe has been imprisoned for his alliance with Jesse:

> PRISON GUARD: *(sarcastic)* You're gonna get a fair trial, as God is my witness.
> PAPA JOE: That the same law that enslaved blacks and stole the Indian's land.

Papa Joe's response suggests that it is the law which is unjust, and which must be broken for true justice to prevail. In this sense, Jesse and his posse are the quintessential cowboys, and by extension, quintessential Americans: it is in their defiance of the law that they finally establish justice and freedom. At the same time, this claim to Americanness is only partial. Echoing Fanon's lament in *Black Skin, White Masks,* that the "epidermal racial schema" (92) overdetermines the capacity of the colonized black subject to be recognized as wholly human, Jesse and the posse are only ever recognized as *black* Americans, both in the film itself, and in audiences' reception of the film. Simultaneously, though there is the possibility of retribution for black survivors of slavery, in the form of land and property, there is no similar retribution for Indigenous peoples.

Land is revealed to be the root source of conflict in the film. Sheriff Bates, from neighbouring Cutterstown, wants to take over Freemanville property in order to reap the profits from a future railway development. The final showdown in the film is about safeguarding black settler land from white settler encroachment. However, *Posse* can't be dismissed as simply mimicking white settler relationships to land, though this may appear to be the case on the surface. For example, the landscapes of *Posse* clearly reproduce the vacuousness of land as represented in the traditional western, evoking the notion of *terra nullius* once again. Visually, the West of *Posse* appears to be essentially the same as the

West of other films. Yet, for white settlers, it was the ability to control and manage the harsh, rugged landscape (in contrast to Indigenous peoples' perceived inability to exert such control) which provided the justification for colonial appropriation of the land (e.g. Razack, "Introduction" 3). Black settler identities in *Posse* aren't presumed to share this exact relation to land. While black slave labour is certainly seen to justify retribution in the form of land, it is not black industriousness or capacity to cultivate the land that is emphasized. Rather, it is black proximity to Indigenous struggles, due to the transatlantic slave trade, that underlies the logic behind the fight for land in *Posse.* When Jesse Lee tells the townspeople of Freemanville that "the same thing they did to the Red Man, they gonna do to [the black Man]", he implicitly suggests that it is the condition of being oppressed by white settlers which provides the impetus to fight for Freemanville. In this sense, blacks are constructed as "Natives" (in the sense of being oppressed or colonized people), whose land is being seized by Settlers.

To be clear, *Posse* does include "positive" representations of Indigenous peoples, and advances a didactic critique of settler colonialism. The opening narrative of the film, for example, references settler colonialism by critiquing Columbus' 1492 "discovery" of the Americas. The dialogue is similarly peppered with references to Indigenous displacement and genocide. However, like revisionist westerns such as *Dances With Wolves,* which are really stories about heroic white men, rather than counter-narratives about Indigenous peoples, the positive representations of Indigeneity in *Posse* do more to bolster the black heroes of the film than to offer a counter-narrative about Indigeneity. Moreover, while histories of black-Indigenous alliances are celebrated in the film, the

violence of Indigenous displacement and dispossession is consigned to the past, rendering null ongoing struggles around Indigenous nationhood and sovereignty. In other words, settler colonialism is presented as a historical event, rather than a structural feature of American nationhood. Consequently, representations of Indigeneity in the film serve not only to affirm the validity of Black struggles with racist White settlers, but to evict blackness and anti-racism from complicity with the settler colonial project.

For instance, though white characters are the obvious villainous Others through which the audience is able to identify with the black characters, Indigenous peoples are the other Others in the film[16]. The film portrays Indigenous peoples as allies to Jesse Lee's posse, and suggests that camaraderie exists between the two communities. Indigenous peoples are thus significant in the story as they allow black cowboys to sidestep the colonial associations of the cowboy. The strongest example of this black-Indigenous intimacy is the romance between Jesse and love interest, Lana, who is the mixed-blood offspring of a black man and Sioux woman, and the most fleshed-out Native character in the film. Lana, and the romance between her and Jesse, is, on the one hand, a representation of the histories of inter-coupling between black and Indigenous communities in the US (Coleman; Forbes; Katz). Yet, in the context of the film's investment in staking claim to African-American nationhood, her presence also speaks to the gendered construction of nationhood. Postcolonial feminist scholars have suggested within discourses of nationalism, women are the symbolic bearers of nation and culture (Anthias and Yuval-Davis; Dubey; Radhakrishnan; Walby). In *Posse,* Lana represents,

[16] Chinese railroad workers are also shown briefly in the film, and the exploitation of their labour is presented as additional evidence of the injustice of white settlers.

through her Sioux ancestry, an indigenized black nationhood through which black claims to land are naturalized. With her long hair and leather buckskin dress, Lana resembles the "Sexualized Maiden" figure discussed by M. Elise Marubbio. Marubbio argues that this figure "symbolizes a temporal moment after colonization and assimilation take place" (7). She is, in other words, the embodied evidence of Indigenous assimilation within the settler colonial nation; the remainder of colonial occupation that has already taken place. As Anne McClintock suggests, the borders and boundaries of unknown territories have long been symbolized through the female body (24). However, while the sexualized maiden of mainstream Hollywood often represents "the danger of crossing racial taboos," (Marubbio 7), Lana represents the possibility for black-Indigenous solidarity via Indigenous assimilation into black communities. Metaphors of family, kinship and ancestry have been central to national imaginaries (Parker, Russo, Sommer and Yaeger 5); in *Posse,* African-American claims to land are sealed through the interracial coupling of black men and Indigenous women. Tellingly, Lana lives in Freemanville with her (black) father, Papa Joe. Meanwhile, the whereabouts of her mother are not revealed, and her connection to Indigeneity rests primarily with objects, rather than people, as evidenced by her clothing and the artefacts that adorn her room. These signifiers of Indigenous cultures function as fetish objects that invoke fascination with Indigeneity, while containing the threat posed by Indigenous claims to land. The anxieties produced by questions about nationhood and sovereignty are thus sidestepped.

In the film, the sexual intimacies between black and Indigenous communities represented through the film's hetero-romance serve to confirm the strength of the

political alliances between the two communities, and by extension, black rootedness to the land. For example, near the film's climax, an Indigenous resident of Cuttersville (also nameless), who has sought refuge in Freemanville, corroborates Jesse's logic for fighting against white settlers. Jesse argues that white settlers are encroaching upon the black town, just as they have encroached upon Indigenous territory. In response, the Indigenous resident declares, "Jesse's right. I been through it." Indigenous testimony thus seals Jesse's mission with a mark of authenticity and gives credence to the Black settlers. Moreover, by joining forces with Jesse, the Indigenous man (presumably standing in for all Indigenous peoples) affirms the black-white nature of race politics in the U.S., while also suggesting a natural black-Indigenous alliance.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In this chapter, I have discussed what a critique of settler colonialism might bring to discussions about black western films, and to *Harlem Rides the Range, Thomasine & Bushrod,* and *Posse* specifically. However, conversations about racialized identities more generally would benefit from a consideration of how settler colonial relations construct these identities. To look at how the racialized Self is represented in in a context of settler colonial structure, raises the question of how one knows racially "different" identities in the first place. It places notions of difference and marginality under interrogation, undoing their stability. Given the foundational significance of settler colonialism within white settler states, as well as the wide circulation of settler colonial discourse outside of white settler states (for example, through Hollywood films), this is critical. In the next

chapter, I continue this conversation on race, settler colonialism and representation by turning to Jackie Chan's transnational martial arts westerns.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAILED MASCULINITY, LIBERAL MULTICULTURALISM AND SETTLER COLONIALISM IN JACKIE CHAN'S *SHANGHAI* FILMS

> The West was a place where people came to realize their dreams. And there's always going to be something wonderful or exciting that you're going to encounter.
>
> --Tim Dey, Director of *Shanghai Noon* (2000)
>
> …I always wanted to film this stuff, because I love cowboy movies. I remember when I was young, I loved John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Kirk Douglas. By 5 years old I was already wearing a cowboy hat, all the guns... Now it's just like my dream came true.
>
> --Jackie Chan, on making *Shanghai Noon* (2000)

In the last chapter, I examined the indigenizing work accomplished by black westerns, in order to argue that nation-based articulations of black identities may participate in the erasure of Indigenous presence and claims to land. In this chapter, my analysis shifts to Hong Kong film artist Jackie Chan's martial arts westerns, *Shanghai Noon* (2000) and *Shanghai Knights* (2003), two films in which he co-starred, and for which he served as co-producer. Chan's participation in these two western/martial arts comedy-action films raises questions around the relationship between racialized masculinity, whiteness, heteronormativity, and colonial violence. On the one hand, Chan's role in the film is contextualized in terms of the range of variable, contradictory and competing discourses of race and gender that structure representations of Asian masculinity in Hollywood, such that it is feminized in relation to white masculinity. While Chan's character in the *Shanghai* films may be a hero, he is certainly no John Wayne, Clint Eastwood or Kirk Douglas. At the same time, Chan's reconstructed cowboy

is found within the space of not one, but two, major Hollywood films. Moreover, the racialized and gendered politics of representation structuring his role in the film are also embedded in the politics of settler colonial representation – vis-à-vis the western genre – albeit in a comedic, parodied way. As discussed in chapter two, parody deploys the very forms and conventions it seeks to critique, in order to draw attention to the ways that they have been socially constructed, undoing presumptions of their stability and continuity. Yet, one effect of parody, as Linda Hutcheon points out, is that it "[manages] to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions [it appears] to challenge" (Hutcheon 1-2). In film, Nicole Matthews defines parody as a form of comedy, writing that "[parodies] derive most of their jokes from heightened awareness of the conventions of particular genres" (12). In relation to the western genre specifically, Matthew R. Turner observes that "[c]omedy relies, to a large extent, on the reversal of expectations; because of the familiarity of the highly codified conventions of the Western, it becomes a prime target" (218).

The use of comedy in the *Shanghai* films, derived from their parody of the western genre, simultaneously destabilizes and reiterates colonial discourses of representation. For the gags to be intelligible to the extent that their points of reference can be deconstructed, these original points of reference demand repetition. While the use of parody in the films may instruct us not to take *Shanghai Noon* or *Shanghai Knights* seriously, the repetition of recognizable aspects of the genre nonetheless contributes to the naturalization of colonial discourses. By foregrounding the settler colonial context of these films, I argue that the use of parody in these films, together with their thematic

focus on cultural misunderstanding, failed masculinity and interracial romance, effaces and displaces colonial violence. This erasure, in turn, naturalizes white settler claims to land. This erasure and displacement takes place through the films' destabilization of the conventions of the western genre, and the subsequent recoding of colonialism and imperialism in terms of liberal multiculturalism.

SYNOPSIS OF FILMS

Both *Shanghai Noon,* and its sequel, *Shanghai Knights,* were produced by Chan in collaboration with US companies Touchstone and Spyglass Entertainment, and written by Alfred Gough and Miles Millar. In contrast to the black westerns discussed in chapter three, the films had mass appeal and were widely circulated, earning approximately $60 million each at the box office. *Shanghai Noon* is based on an idea Chan had many years prior, an "eastern western" that he had "always dreamed of doing" (J. Chan with Jeff Yang 346)[1]. The films are "post-westerns" in that they reference the themes, settings and characters of the western genre, often with explicit intertextual references; the centrality of Jackie Chan's fighting skills would also classify these as martial arts films[2].

In *Shanghai Noon,* set in 1881 – just one year before the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act suspended Chinese immigration to the United States - Chan's character, Chon Wang

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[1] *Once Upon a Time in China and America* (1997), starring Jet Li, directed by Sammo Hung and produced by Hong Kong-based China Star Entertainment, features a premise similar to *Shanghai Noon.* In his autobiography, Jackie Chan claims that Hung stole his original idea (J. Chan with Yang, 349). However, there is also earlier precedent for the martial arts western. In *Kung Fu,* the American TV series (1972-1975), a Shaolin monk travels through the Old American West in search of his half-brother. While the film starred actor David Carradine in yellow-face, Bruce Lee was not only passed over for the role, but his widow Linda Lee Caldwell writes in her memoir that Lee came up with the original concept. Lee was also featured in a 1971 episode of *The Pierre Berton Show* discussing the idea and his difficulties he faced in pitching it to Warner Brothers and Paramount Studios.

[2] David Desser defines Hollywood martial-arts films as those that "feature Asian martial arts, though broad and varied, represent fighting styles quite distinct from Western martial arts such as boxing or fencing" ("The Martial Arts Film" 77).

(a homonym for "John Wayne"), is a lowly Imperial Guard for the Chinese Emperor who travels to Carson City, Nevada, to rescue the Emperor's daughter, Princess Pei-Pei[3]. When the Emperor's daughter, Princess Pei-Pei, is kidnapped by her English tutor and taken to Carson City, Nevada, Chon is tasked with accompanying his Uncle, an interpreter, on the voyage to America. Along the way, Chon strikes a reluctant friendship with outlaw Roy O'Bannon, who schools Chon in the ways of the cowboy. Chon also finds himself accidentally married to Falling Leaves, the daughter of a Sioux Chief. With the help of Roy, and Falling Leaves, Chon eventually rescues Pei-Pei, who is being held hostage by villain Lo Fang. Lo Fang, a traitor to the Chinese Emperor, also runs a labour camp for Chinese railway workers. The film concludes with Roy and Chon having been rewarded by the Emperor in gold for Princess Pei-Pei's rescue, and serving as the new Sheriffs of Carson City. There is also a suggested romance between Chon and Princess Pei-Pei, and between Roy and Falling Leaves (who, by this time, no longer appears to be married to Chon).

Shanghai Noon spawned a sequel, entitled *Shanghai Knights*, set six years later, in 1887. In it, Roy accompanies Chon to England, where, along with Chon's sister, Lin, they avenge the death of Chon's father, guardian of the Chinese Imperial Seal. The central plotline of *Shanghai Knights* revolves around the murder of Chon's father, the

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[3] The Virginia & Truckee Railroad was built between Virginia City and Carson City in the late 1800s, and introduced Chinese labourers to Carson City (L. Chan 269-270). There were around 800 Chinese migrants in the city by 1880 (L. Chan 269). The majority of these were labourers, cooks and launderers, but others worked in service occupations, including jewelers, watchmakers, tinsmiths, doctors, dentists and teachers (L. Chan 269). Carson City's Chinatown was five blocks long, the largest of any in the state of Nevada (L. Chan 269). In the late 19th century, Loren B. Chan notes that anti-Chinese racism was most vociferously championed by white working class Americans and European immigrants, who were institutionally supported by Nevada politicians, and by federal laws and policies (270-271).

guardian of the Imperial Seal. Chon's sister, Chon Lin, has followed the murderer, Lord Rathbone, back to England to reclaim the Imperial Seal. Chon, still the Sheriff of Carson City, travels to New York to look for Roy, to ask for his share of the Emperor's gold so that he can go to England to help his sister. He soon finds out that Roy, who is now a waiter and gigolo at a fancy hotel, has squandered Chon's savings. However, Roy volunteers to help Chon get to England, and to avenge his father's death. Roy, Chon and Lin eventually uncover a conspiracy plot between Rathbone and Wu Chow, the illegitimate brother of the Emperor of China, both of whom have aspirations to the throne, in England and in China respectively. By the end of the film, Roy and Chon are granted knighthood for their efforts, and Roy and Lin have begun a new romance (with Chon's blessing).

ASIAN MASCULINITIES, RACIAL FAILURE AND JACKIE CHAN

Existing scholarship on race, representation and Jackie Chan has contextualized his performances in terms of dominant constructions of Asian masculinities, and in terms of martial arts films and transnational cultural production, importantly linking together filmic representation with the material conditions of production, distribution and circulation (K. Chan; Jayamanne; Lo; Marchetti; Shu; Szeto; Tasker). These writers have commented on Chan's unique brand of comical martial arts aesthetic, which is contrasted to the tough aesthetic of the late Asian American/Hong Kong action star Bruce Lee, suggesting that Chan offers an alternative form of heroic masculinity to audiences (Shu; Tasker). They have noted the diluted, liberal forms of political critique contained in Chan's films as compared to the more explicitly anti-colonial, anti-imperial slant of Lee's

films (Jayamanne; Marchetti). Further, scholars have discussed Chan's popularity and diluted political critique in terms of the desire to market kung fu to middle class audiences in Asia, Europe and North America (Chan; Shu). They have suggested, moreover, that the transnational contexts of production, circulation and distribution framing Chan's work demand that it be read outside the singular frameworks of nation and identity (Lo; Szeto). However, as in the black westerns discussed in the last chapter, settler colonialism has not received sustained attention as a significant context that might frame interpretations of Chan's work. Placing this existing scholarship alongside the concerns of Indigenous and settler colonial studies reveals that stereotyped representations of Asianness not only reinforce white superiority, but reaffirm settler colonial claims to land.

In terms of representation, scholarship focusing on Jackie Chan is situated within broader conversations about Asian masculinities, which are constructed in relation to white masculinities, legible only in terms of their positioning vis-à-vis white masculinities (Chen; Chin et al; Eng; Fung). This point is illuminated through the framework provided by Edward Said's concept of Orientalism. Orientalism refers to the essentialization and fetishization of the "East" as exotic, foreign, and backward in relation to the "West." Said draws upon Foucault's notion of discourse and Gramsci's notion of hegemony in order to describe how literature, travel writings and other cultural texts of Europeans (primarily British and French) (and Americans, to a lesser extent) constituted the "East" as an object of discourse, and, in the process, simultaneously constructed the "West". The East, configured as a site of Otherness, foreignness and

exoticism, came to stand in for what the West was not – savage, uncivilized, barbaric – and in so doing, constructed the West in relation to the East. However, Said describes Orientalism as a totalizing discourse; as shaped, in other words, by a hierarchy of power in which the East and those peoples and lands configured as belonging to it, are subjected to orientalism by the "West". Yet, in Foucault's conceptualization of discourse, *both* power and resistance are structured by the same terms. In other words, resistance to Orientalist discourse is also shaped by the contours of that discourse. This is a critique of Said that is put forward by Sheng Mei-Ma in her discussion of Asian American identity[4]. Ma describes how Orientalism may be interpellated by, and internalized by, its subjects (xiii). Thus it is not only popular or hegemonic representations that are implicated in the reiteration of Orientalist discourses, but also minority discourses of resistance, including those of the liberal variety espoused by Jackie Chan.

The specific character of the discourses constituting Asian American masculinities is summed up by Frank Chin, Jeffery Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada and Shawn Hsu Wong, who, in their collective introduction to *Aiiieeeie! An Anthology of Asian American Writers* (1974), describe the cultural emasculation of Asian American men, noting they are constructed as passive, weak and submissive within dominant imaginaries (xxx)[5]. In his widely distributed essay, "Looking For My Penis: The Eroticized Asian in Gay Video Porn," Richard Fung also describes the simultaneously racialized and gendered dimensions of this emasculation when he writes that "Asian and

[4] Said's discussion of Orientalism focuses less on the "Far East" (East Asia) than it does on the "Near" or "Middle East". However, Ma applies his methodological framework to the discursive regimes constituting the Far East.

[5] Asian American studies scholars such as Elaine Kim and Sheng Mei-Ma argue that Chin et al. reiterate stereotypes of Asian masculinity at the same time as they attempt to refute them (Kim 189; Ma xv-xvi).

anus are conflated" (343). David L. Eng, in his discussion of Asian American literary and cultural texts, elaborates on Fung's argument, noting that "the Asian American male is both materially and psychically feminized within the context of a larger U.S. cultural imaginary" (2). This cultural marginalization is linked, in turn, to histories of migration and citizenship. Eng references the germinal work of Lisa Lowe, who, in *Immigrant Acts,* outlines how technologies of immigration and citizenship have constructed the Asian American masculine subject through the mutually constitutive axes of race, gender and sexuality. Moral panics around "yellow peril" – fear of Asian invasion – incited exclusionary labour and immigration policies. Thus, during the construction of the railroad, Chinese men were recruited as cheap labourers, but were restricted from bringing women or children with them. This, in turn, posed another threat – the threat of miscegenation -as panic ensued around the possibility of interracial coupling between Asian men and white women, and the pursuant contamination of white purity. Notions of Asian men as feminized emerged within popular discourses as a means to contain this threat, while reaffirming the idealization of white, middle-class masculinity. To return to the concept of Orientalism, the castigation of Asian masculinity to the realm of the feminine serves to bolster and idealize white American masculinity; these respective constructions mutually reinforce one another, and are legible in relation to one another.

This historically produced discourse about Asian masculinity persists within contemporary popular cultures. There continue to be limited representations of Asian masculinity (or femininity) within Hollywood. Fu Manchu – a mustached Chinese villain introduced by British writer Sax Rohmer in the 1930s, and subsequently popularized in

other cultural forms- and Charlie Chan – a goofy character from a series of film and television shows produced between the 1920s and 1981, based on a detective novel by Earl Derr Biggers (Ng; Lo 140)– represent two iconic signifiers of Asianness against which Asian actors in Hollywood, are read. The particular positioning of Jackie Chan as a friendly or non-threatening figure is made intelligible in relation to Charlie Chan. Norman Denzin describes how, in Charlie Chan films, "the Asian male was simultaneously excluded from, and included inside, a Western-Orientalizing discourse which made him stranger and friend at the same time" (quoted in Lo 140-1). Kwai-Cheung Lo further suggests that, "[a]ppearing familiar and different, as subject and object, and with a paradoxically fixed and mutable ethnic identity, the Charlie Chan character offers a certain kind of entertaining exoticism with which the American audience can feel comfortable and through which a white hierarchy continues to assert itself" (141).

The difference between these popular representations of Asianness, and the work of Jackie Chan, is that Chan is himself a minority subject whose identity is circumscribed by constructions of Asian masculinity. Moreover, Chan is not only a performer, but a producer who has some degree of agency in determining the kinds of roles he plays. In his autobiography *I Am Jackie Chan* (written with Jeff Yang), for instance, Chan characterizes himself as having fashioned his own persona, largely in contrast to his predecessor Bruce Lee. He recounts that, following Bruce Lee's untimely death in 1973, film studios in Hong Kong scrambled to find a "replacement" hero. Chan was initially recruited by Lo Wei Productions in 1976 to fill Lee's shoes, and, like other martial arts

film actors at the time, encouraged to emulate Lee's style and aesthetic (J. Chan with Yang 205). Chan was eventually given the opportunity, by independent studio Seasonal Films, to develop his vision for a new kind of martial arts film, one that incorporated slapstick comedy and a softer hero (J. Chan with Yang 218-9). Chan describes himself as the anti-hero to Lee's hero: "Bruce was Superman, but I think audiences want to see someone who's just a man. Like them. Someone who wins only after making a lot of mistakes, who has a sense of humor…[s]omeone who is not afraid to be a coward" (J. Chan with Yang 219).

Cultural critics have likewise discussed how Jackie Chan's comical kung fu sensibilities have stood as an alternative to Bruce Lee's hard masculine style that have both challenged stereotypes about Asian men as "soft", while also resisting the revaluation of "toughness" as an idealized characteristic of masculinity (Gallagher; Shu; Tasker). For instance, Yuan Shu suggests that in contrast to Bruce Lee's hard, tough masculinity, Jackie Chan's bodily aesthetic engages heavily with comedy to create a softer, more humanized masculinity that is nonetheless strong (Shu 55); Mark Gallagher argues that Chan's reconstituted masculinity poses a challenge to the traditional American action hero through his combination of "exceptional acrobatic skills" with "earnestness and comic timing" (Gallagher 23). Such commentary seems to suggest that Chan's construction of masculinity is an alternative one distinguished from both Fu Manchu or Charlie Chan stereotypes, as well as from the action hero toughness embodied by actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone.

Yet Jackie Chan's comical kung fu sensibilities have also been interpreted in Hollywood through the rubric of visual spectacle. His mainstream popularity has stemmed not from the plot or character development in his films, but from a fascination with his physicality. To date, Chan's Hollywood films have featured limited dialogue, and are largely a showcase of his slapstick martial arts skills[6]. For instance, he faced expectations from directors and producers that he perform in the style of Bruce Lee; and, at press conferences, was sometimes asked to offer demonstrations of his fighting skills. Recalling one such experience during his first visit to the US, he writes in his autobiography: "Here I was, the biggest star in Asia, and the host was asking me to perform like a trained dog! What was I supposed to do - sit up and beg? Roll over? I'd spent hours the previous night going over the things I wanted to say about my film, and all they wanted me to do was kick and jump around" (J. Chan with Yang 262). Bruce Lee himself has been an object of fascination within American popular culture; Yvonne Tasker observes that many critics described Lee as narcissistic – an odd characterization that, in an industry centred on exhibition, says Tasker, suggests a discomfort or dis-ease with Lee's assertion of masculinity ("Fists of Fury" 324). At the same time, Chan and Lee's bodies-as-spectacle corresponds to an objectification of racialized masculinity, which is, in essence, also a means of feminization; a means of containing the threat of its prowess by transforming them, from subjects, to objects (as evidenced by the American

[6] Jackie Chan made the transition to Hollywood, and Western audiences, in the early 1980s, after he had begun to work with major Hong Kong film studio, Golden Harvest (J. Chan with Yang 253). Golden Harvest had already-established links with American production companies, and Chan began work on some of these co-projects (J. Chan with Yang 268).

public's fascination with martial artistry that is encapsulated in the requests made to Chan to perform at press conferences).

The effects of the feminization of Asian masculinities described above are illustrated through Chan's role in the *Shanghai* films. Despite Chan's wish to play a cowboy, much of the comedy of *Shanghai Noon* derives from the element of absurdity and incredulity linked to Chan's authority to take up the role of cowboy. Chon Wang is innocent, virtuous and a little naïve. Unlike dominant representations of the cowboy, he has a softness, and, despite his fighting abilities, is definitely not a "manly" man. As an Imperial Guard, he is not rough, independent or a loner, but child-like, fiercely loyal, driven by a strong sense of duty and a clear moral compass. In other words, in part, Chan's success and popularity in these films derives from his ability to conform to numerous, competing and contradictory stereotypical representations of Asian masculinity in American popular cultures.

Moreover, despite Chan's involvement in the production process, the subject of the film is arguably Owen Wilson's character, Roy O'Bannon. It is Roy with whom the contemporary American audience is expected to identify. The positive response to his performance in *Shanghai Noon* by some reviewers is perhaps an indication of this; for example, critic Scott Weinberg of *eFilmCritic* writes that "Owen Wilson steals the show, even with all the chop-socky [sic] going on. His Roy is mellow and laid back. In many scenes, he allows Jackie to take center stage, only to upstage him from the background" (n.p); another critic, Cindy Fuchs of *PopMatters*, comments that "Wilson is so perfect that he steals the picture right out from under Chan" (n.p). A truly anachronistic character

(he randomly spouts new age wisdom and operates through a contemporary liberal moral code, rather than the do-or-die ethic of the Old West), Roy offers detached commentary on the action of the film that enable the audience to willingly suspend their disbelief. A great deal of the film's laughs come from Roy and Chon's odd-couple pairing. Chon's naïve masculinity is contrasted to the laid-back masculinity of Roy. Chon is uptight, guided by strict loyalty to the Emperor, which is only loosened through the help of Roy. Roy is no tough cowboy though; he has the persona of a surfer dude/beach bum, and is a new age romancer who is popular with the ladies. Roy and Chon are able to bond in part because they share a soft masculinity; though he is tasked with teaching Chon how to be a cowboy, Roy is revealed to be a well-intentioned "nonviolent" cowboy, who is a poorly skilled fighter. However, while Roy does not possess the characteristics of the classic lone cowboy guarding the frontier, he certainly appreciates the legacy of that cowboy, in terms of the values of freedom and independence the cowboy represents and protects. Furthermore, in the context of the "bad guys" of *Shanghai Noon* and *Knights* – who are rough, tough and violent – Roy does indeed stand out from the pack.

For example, in instructing Chon on how to be a cowboy, Roy not only shares the tricks of the trade (how to shoot, ride a horse, and generally perform the part), but inculcates Chon in prototypical American values. He encourages Chon to be independent and carefree. This is epitomized in the following speech he delivers to Chon at a few points in the film. Chon initially brushes off Roy's words, but finally repeats them with conviction at the climax of the film, signaling his conformation to American values: "This is the West, not the East. And the sun may rise where we come from, but here is

where it sets." Incidentally, Chon's first English words just happen to be "America" and "happily ever after". Even while the speech is purposely cheesy – its seriousness is undercut by Roy's deadpan delivery, and a comically exaggerated musical crescendo – the "feel good" aspect of the film comes from the audience's comfort in knowing that Chan has "loosened up" and assimilated to Roy's liberal American values, which are ultimately presented as harmless (because Roy does not appear to be very strongly tied to not an inherently violent cowboy).

If Owen Wilson's Roy O'Bannon is the subject at the centre of the film, his centrality is enabled through what Kenneth Chan has read as Jackie Chan's "racial failure" in the *Shanghai* films; or, his inability to fully embody the figure of the John Wayne cowboy (K. Chan 140)[7]. K. Chan develops this concept of racial failure through Homi Bhaba's discussion of colonial mimicry. According to Bhabha, colonial mimicry refers to the way that colonial discourse ambivalently represents its Other "as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (Bhabha, "Of Mimicry…" 126, original emphasis). In other words, the Other of colonial discourse is always already constituted through failure, consigned to being a poor copy of an original. Yet, Bhabha also suggests that while colonial discourse relegates the Other to the role of mimic, this relegation simultaneously threatens the authority or authenticity of the colonial Self. To

[7] Kenneth Chan also uses this framework to look at a third Jackie Chan film, a James Bond parody called *The Tuxedo.*

the extent that it reflects or exposes colonial discourse, the colonial mimic both reaffirms and undoes the authority that discourse[8].

Engaging with Bhabha's theory, K. Chan proposes that Jackie Chan's failure to embody the role of cowboy/John Wayne due to his race difference allows him to expose and recast (albeit with limits) the racial-colonial underpinnings of this figure. Specifically, K. Chan argues that "the historical specificity of his Chineseness" allows J. Chan to offer a postcolonial critique in *Shanghai Noon,* in which the white settler construction of the Wild West is complicated by the presence of Chinese labourers and Native nations (139). However, while K. Chan speaks of the transgressive aspects of this racial failure, it is precisely because of Chan's ambiguous position as a racialized cowboy in the films that colonial violence comes to be normalized[9]. Conversely, the threat or anxieties produced by colonial mimicry, as outlined by Bhabha, are contained due to Chan's body, whose Asianness and foreignness stand in as a proxy for liberal multiculturalism, which in turn enables colonial violence to be configured as cultural misunderstanding. Although K. Chan's analysis recognizes the colonial imaginary of the Western genre, he does not incorporate a discussion of the representational strategies or conventions of the genre, and is consequently unable to account for how racial failure functions to enable white settler narratives in the films.

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[8] Parody and mimicry are related, but not equivalent. For instance, while colonial mimicry is *performative,* parody is always *performed.* In the *Shanghai* films, Jackie Chan, as Chon Wang, is, according to K. Chan a colonial mimic whose performance of Chon Wang also parodies the classic western hero. More broadly, the films parody the western genre by engaging with its conventions in terms of costumes, setting, plot and characters.

[9] To be clear, K. Chan is ambivalent about the capacity for political critique in Jackie Chan's films, particularly given their mass appeal. However, his critique focuses not on what is accomplished through J. Chan's racial failure, but on the limits of its possibilities given the mainstream circulation of his films.

Paying attention to the settler colonial dimensions of the *Shanghai* films provides a counterpoint to the work of Kenneth Chan and others commenting on race, representation and Jackie Chan's films (Jayamanne; Lo; Marchetti; Shu; Szeto; Tasker). Jackie Chan's "failed" performance of John Wayne – his failed masculinity, by extension – is not located outside the racial-colonial underpinnings of the cowboy and the western. Rather, it is constitutive of them. The "cultural confusion" incited by Chon Wang, the subsequent relegation of colonialism to a problem of cultural misunderstanding, and Chon Wang's facilitation of romance between Roy O'Bannon and Native and Asian women all serve to naturalize white settler colonialism. More specifically, in the *Shanghai* films, the failed masculinity of Jackie Chan's character, Chon Wang symbolically serves a dual function. His failed masculinity assimilates settler colonial relations into the logic of liberal multiculturalism, all the while containing the threat of *both* yellow peril and Indigenous sovereignty by enabling heterosexual romance between Roy O'Bannon and racialized/colonized women.

THE ASSIMILATION OF COLONIALISM INTO MULTICULTURALISM

Films in the martial arts film genre, such as Bruce Lee's *Fists of Fury* (1972) and *The Way of the Dragon* (1972) have often included a strong cultural nationalist element with plotlines that feature Lee as a lone fighter battling against colonial and imperial oppressors. In line with this theme, the *Shanghai* films, like Jackie Chan's other films (such as *Drunken Master* (1978)) offer some degree of anti-colonial, anti-imperial critique. However, the critique is a limited one. In the first place, the structural or discursive aspects of colonial or imperial power are reduced to the bad intentions of a few

villainous characters that act independently of colonial-imperial nation-states. In *Shanghai Noon,* histories of racism and colonialism are referenced. For example, the exploitation of Chinese labour in the American West figures prominently - Pei-Pei is being held hostage by villain Lo Fang, a traitor to the Emperor, who runs a labour camp for Chinese railway workers - yet, the centrality of racialized labour exploitation to American nation building is recast as the handiwork of Lo Fang. In *Shanghai Knights,* British imperialism is brought under question; Lord Rathbone aspires to bring China under British rule. However, as with *Shanghai Noon*, the systemic aspects of the imperial project are reduced to the intentions of a "bad apple" (Lord Rathbone), who is, again, collaborating with a villainous traitor to China (Wu Chow). Moreover, British imperialism is rescued from critique through the knighting ceremony at the conclusion of the film, a symbolic confirmation that Roy and Chon have been working with empire, rather than against it.

Secondly, colonial relations are reduced to problems of cultural misunderstanding. While the use of parody undercuts the seriousness of the western genre, the target of the critique engendered by parody is racism, rather than colonialism. Moreover, it is liberal multiculturalism (rather than anti-racism) that is offered as a panacea; racial (mis)recognition, cultural misunderstanding and stereotypes are a running gag in the *Shanghai* films, one which is played for many laughs. For instance, despite the presence of Chinese railroad workers in 19th century Nevada that is highlighted in the film, Chon, and the other three Imperial guards who travel to America, are alternately confused for being Native and Jewish.

The comedy of cultural misunderstanding also plays out in Chon's encounters with Sioux and Crow tribes early in *Shanghai Noon*; the colonial encounter, in other words, is reinterpreted as an encounter of cultural confusion. Parodying the classic Hollywood Indians of traditional westerns, the Sioux and Crow peoples that Chon meets are deliberately constructed through stereotypes: they say "How", appear to be Plains Indians (teepees, horse-riding, hunters), and include stoic elders, brutal warriors and exotic women. After rescuing a young Sioux boy from some Crow warriors (portrayed as violent and savage), he earns the respect of the Sioux tribe (portrayed as more civilized or noble). The gravity of these stereotyped representations is tempered through the cultural confusion that is incited by the presence of Chon, an Imperial Guard wearing traditional long robes; both Chon and the Sioux tribe view one another with a mixture of confusion, curiosity and suspicion. Eventually, following a few too many puffs off a peace pipe, Chon is welcomed into the family, finding himself married the next day to the Chief's daughter, Falling Leaves, and given the name Man-Who-Fights-In-Dress. Consoling the Chief on his new son-in-law, one man says, "don't worry, it could be worse. At least he's not a white guy", implying that, despite being a foreigner, Chon is less threatening than a white son-in-law[10].

The "innocence" of cultural misunderstanding in the film belies questions of colonial violence. By parodying the western genre's tendency towards racial stereotypes, the film simultaneously naturalizes the banality of settler colonial violence that is

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[10] In *Shanghai Knights,* the comedy of cultural (mis)recognition continues to some degree, with Chon posing as an Indian Maharajah in one scene. When Chon complains to Roy about the absurdity of a Chinese man playing Indian royalty, Roy explains, "it's the same thing."

normalized through the western. This is particularly troubling, and a reflection of broader tendencies within American cultural politics that reduce diverse Native nations to the racial category of "Native American" or "American Indian". This narrative-discursive move operates as a tactic to obfuscate Indigenous sovereignty. As discussed by Jodi Byrd in *The Transit of Empire,* the de-Indigenization of Native peoples that is performed through narratives such as the Bering Strait theory[11] configures Native nations as one piece of the American melting pot of cultures, while effacing Indigenous claims to land. Byrd references Ronald Horsman's delineation of American Manifest Destiny as a narrative establishing America's identity as white Anglo-Saxon, positioned against the "Indian" Other, constructed as savage or uncivilized (202). In identifying the racializing imperatives of Manifest Destiny – a narrative of colonial expansion – Byrd asserts that Horsman simultaneously establishes the tenet through which a slippage between race and colonization becomes naturalized (202). Moreover, as America expanded westward, the contradictions and illegitimacy of displacing Indigenous peoples and land was accomplished through the cultural and legal transformation of Native nations as externally colonized entities, to internally regulated groups (202). By reconfiguring Native nations as ethno-racial groups – as hyphenated Americans - Indigenous claims to land and resources were rendered incommensurable, as the US does not enter into treaties with its own citizens (202).

[11] The Bering Strait theory suggests that Indigenous peoples migrated to the Americas from Asia across a narrow strip of land connecting the two continents.

FAILED MASCULINITIES, HETERONORMATIVITY AND THE LOVE PLOT

Liberal multiculturalism does not operate alone, however, but in conjunction with discourses of heteronormativity. Heteronormativity, in turn, is enabled through discourses of race that are always already gendered (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*; Alexander; Berlant, *The Queen of America;* Eng, *Racial Castration*; Ferguson). In the *Shanghai* films, it is through the feminization of Asian masculinity that white settler heteronormativities are consolidated. Specifically, it is due to both the "failed" masculinity of Jackie Chan's character, Chon Wang, *as well as* his status as a symbol of multiculturalism/foreignness/racial difference that he is able to operate as an intermediary between Indigenous and white settler communities.

To remind readers of the plot: in *Shanghai Noon,* Chon is able to resolve the issue of cultural misunderstanding with the Sioux people he meets by becoming part of the family. While this narrative move parodies and thus destabilizes the othering of Native peoples characteristic of the classic western, it simultaneously naturalizes settler colonialism. By becoming indigenized through heterosexual union, Chon is implicitly granted authority to join the settler project. The audience is reminded of Chon's new kinship relation throughout the film. His wife, Falling Leaves, has virtually no dialogue throughout the film, and appears mainly as a sort of guardian angel watching over Chon and Roy, rescuing them from impossible situations. In this respect her presence in the film is ghostly, corresponding to Bergland's thesis concerning the presence of the figure of the spectral Native American within American literature. Bergland argues that this figure sustains American nationhood, ambiguously functioning both as a representation

of national guilt, and as evidence of successful establishment of the national project (4). Falling Leaves' absent presence similarly gives legitimacy to Roy and Chon's movements on Indigenous lands, while also serving as a reminder of the violence characterizing colonial dispossession. This anxiety is contained, however, by the love plot (Berlant and Warner 554) of the film.

Emergent work in queer Indigenous studies speaks of the centrality of patriarchy and heteronormativity to colonialism (Finley; Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism"; Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us*; Morgensen, "Theorizing Gender, Sexuality and Settler Colonialism"; Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?*). In "Decolonizing the Queer Native Body," Chris Finley argues that the regulation of gender and sexuality supports ongoing colonial violence. Referencing the germinal work of Rayna Green, Finley discusses the "Pocahontas Perplex", in which the story of Pocahontas – a young Algonquian girl who befriends, and is later taken captive by, and assimilated into, an Anglo settler community- is mythologized as a love story between her and John Smith. By framing the relationship between Pocahontas and Smith as a romance, the violence endemic to the project of conquest in the Americas is neutralized, and settlement is framed as consensual and peaceful. Finley notes that, central to this mythology is the notion that Native women are inherently heterosexual (because to understand them as anything but would question the consensuality of colonial romance), and that Native men, are conversely, constructed as outside of normative heterosexuality; as incapable of being suitable partners or fathers (for example, through the notion that they are too violent, or uncivilized, or unable to properly control/manage land/nature). Rifkin argues that this

exceptionalizing of Native communities as queer within 19th – 21st century cultural and literary narratives has been central not only to the heteronormativization of settler society, but a key strategy through which Indigenous sovereignty was undermined. Civilizing missions and discourses that targeted non-normative sexualities naturalized a particular configuration of sexuality that was privatized, configured through a separation of kinship and politics. Thus, writes Rifkin, "US imperialism against native peoples over the past two centuries can be understood as an effort to make them "straight" – to insert indigenous peoples into Anglo-American conceptions of family, home, desire and personal identity" (8).

The romantic sub-plots of *Shanghai Noon* and *Shanghai Knights* naturalize the heteronormative and patriarchal discourses central to settler colonialism. In each film, Roy's ability to "get the girl" is portrayed as benign, the result of his natural charm and attraction. However, the representation of his sexual exploits as such belies a seedier narrative concerning colonization and sexual violence. Within discourses of colonialism, land is often linked to the female body. Sexual encounters with colonized women have both symbolized conquest, and enabled conquest to happen. Anne McClintock outlines how colonial lands were mapped out as feminine lands – mysterious, uncharted; a source of both desire and anxiety. Practices of mapping, for example, represented new lands as feminized bodies, while settlers expressed simultaneous fascination and horror at the new people they met, in travel diaries and drawings (McClintock 22). In these representations, new land was conflated with the female body (McClintock 23). McClintock suggests that the feminization of land reflected the projection of psychic desires onto physical space,

and vice versa (McClintock 24). The conflation of land and female bodies has had material consequences, particularly as the anxiety engendered by conquest has been resolved through sexual violence. Indeed, Andrea Smith argues that, "sexual violence is not simply a tool of patriarchy, but is also a tool of colonialism and racism…" ("Not An Indian Tradition" 71). In other words, sexual violence is a tactic through which both land and bodies become subject to colonization.

It is therefore unsurprising that in both *Shanghai* films, the romance is between Roy and a colonized/racialized woman, rather than a white settler woman. In both cases, the romance is facilitated by Chon. In *Shanghai Noon,* Chon unwittingly brings Roy together with his accidental wife, Falling Leaves. At the start of *Shanghai Knights,* Roy and Falling Leaves are no longer an item, and Roy continues with his womanizing ways. However, he expresses a desire to settle down and start a family. By the end of *Knights,* Roy is paired up with Chon's sister, Lin.

Chon, by contrast, is portrayed as less sexually desirable; by the end of *Shanghai Knights* he remains a lone cowboy, despite the suggestion of a new romance between him and Princess Pei-Pei at the end of *Shanghai Noon*. On the one hand, this reflects a common characteristic of the figure of the cowboy; as discussed in the second chapter, he is frequently a nomadic loner figure, often on the go, facilitating the settlement of Euro-Americans, but unable to settle down himself (Biderman; Uyl). Yet, this also reflects the subordination of Asian masculinities within popular cultures that was raised earlier in this chapter, and that is discussed by David L. Eng, Richard Fung and others. Jackie Chan is no stranger to this sort of role. *PopMatters* film critic Cindy Fuchs suggests that "for the

West, Chan represents difference - Otherness, if you will - in a way that feels entirely user-friendly. Chan's U.S. films have further elaborated on this nonthreatening-ness, by limiting him to generally asexual or homosocial plotlines" (Fuchs n.p.). As an intermediary between Roy and his love interests, Chan's character Chon is certainly very "user friendly" for a Western audience. The running joke of the romantic sub-plots in each film is the cultural gap between Roy and his objects of desire – a gap that is narrowed by Chon. By framing the relationship between Roy and these women as a primarily romantic one tempered only by cultural difference, colonial violence is reduced to cultural misunderstanding. For instance, towards the end of *Shanghai Noon*, Roy says to Falling Leaves, "I feel like there's this gap between us. It's like, I'm a cowboy, you're an Indian. You say "wampum". I say "money"". Acting as a symbolic intermediary between Roy's whiteness and the racial-sexual difference represented by Falling Leaves and Chon Lin, Chon enables Roy's romance with racialized women. In *Shanghai Noon,* he "gives" Falling Leaves – for whom he is presumed to have no desire, despite a post-drunken-sex scene early in the film – to Roy. As a member of the Sioux family by marriage, Chon is a de facto Indigenous subject who is now able to indigenize Roy, by welcoming him into the family. In *Shanghai Knights,* he reluctantly "gives" his sister Lin to Roy, granting the two his blessing. In the traffic of women, where women are tokens of exchange meant to solidify relationships between men (Rubin 38-9), these women are the property of Chon, whom he is then able to give to Roy. The trajectory of the romance subplots across the films - Roy has conveniently left Falling Leaves by the start of the second film, and is ready for a fresh new romance - may suggest a progression in which

American settler colonialism becomes the launching pad for other kinds of imperial ventures. Such a progression would echo Jodi Byrd's thesis, that ideas of Indians and Indianness as an absent presence in US legal and cultural imaginary, are constitutive of the logics of US imperial projects elsewhere (Byrd, *Transit of Empire* xix). The narrative arc from *Shanghai Noon* to *Shanghai Knights* similarly sets up the scene of American settler colonialism as the meeting point/starting point for the establishment of an American imperialism that is doubly informed by multiculturalism and heteronormativity.

For instance, while the backdrop of *Shanghai Noon* is American settler colonialism, in *Shanghai Knights* the backdrop is British Empire; the threat of an impending British takeover of China hangs overhead with villain Lord Rathbone making comments such as "it is my dream that the Chinese people will follow India's example and one day embrace British rule." Much of the humour of the film also seems to come from the idea that Britain, rather than the US, is the heart of the true colonial empire, a common enemy uniting both Americans and Chinese. For example, when they arrive in England, Chon observes that the British don't seem to be that friendly. Roy explains that this is because the British are the "sore losers" after the American Revolution: "A million of them came over, and American farmers with pitchforks beat them". There were certainly conversations about the possibilities for developing an Indiana Jones-like franchise in which Roy and Chon would travel to a range of locales; a third *Shanghai*

movie was proposed, and in the DVD featurette for *Knights,* Owen Wilson states that the pair could "go anywhere"[12].

THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL CRITIQUE IN THE *SHANGHAI* FILMS

> No matter how they have been portrayed in the past or present, cowboys and Indians are the consummate example of American colonialism.
> --Michael Yellow Bird, p.43

Could Jackie Chan have produced a western that was more attentive to its colonial underpinnings? More to the point, is it ever possible for the cowboy to be rescued from its colonial grips? Though I don't fully share Yellow Bird's position regarding the fixity of meaning of the cowboy, neither am I convinced of the position that its meaning is so malleable that it can be entirely delinked from colonial violence. To reiterate the discussion from the start of the chapter, parody "[manages] to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions [it appears] to challenge" (Hutcheon 1-2). The cowboy is not merely an empty canvas waiting to be filled, but belongs to an existing regime of representation which provides a set of reference points through which its reconstituted versions can be interpreted. To come back to Stuart Hall's method of encoding and decoding texts, while cultural meanings are not fixed or determined, there do exist dominant and preferred meanings which reflect the social order in which they are produced, and which shape how a given cultural representation might be decoded (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" 135). The figure of the cowboy is intelligible in the context of the colonial culture in which it is embedded, and which makes normal the violence of occupation.

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[12] As of 2014, any additional film sequels appear to be on indefinite hiatus.

Second, any parody of the cowboy or western must be considered in terms of the material conditions of production that constrain the possibilities for representation. The limited anti-racist/anti-colonial critique of the *Shanghai* films is contextualized not only in relation to Chan's aesthetic choices, however, but in relation to his transition to Hollywood, where both structural constraints and regimes of race, gender and sexuality inform the shape of his representational politics. Whereas for Asian audiences, Chan's slapstick kung fu might indeed serve as an alternative to Bruce Lee's hard masculinity, this slapstick is familiar to Hollywood audiences predominantly through the racialized and gendered interpretations of Asian men as effeminate. As Jeff Yang bluntly observes, "Jackie Chan needs the respect of the people who are in power. The people who are in power are white people. He will love everybody, but he needs to have face from "the Man"" (in Marchetti 65). Furthermore, as Kenneth Chan notes, in his transition to Hollywood, Chan's agency has been limited. While he directed and stunt coordinated a number of his Hong Kong films, in Hollywood he has had less autonomy, having had to "negotiate complex studio bureacuracies…and to grapple with the hierarchy of control involving numerous studio executives, directors, producers, and screenwriters" (K.Chan 132).

Indeed, part of Chan's skill is negotiating his own vision and wishes with those of his co-producers and collaborators. Commercial success plays a large part in this negotiation; his interest in producing films hinges largely on the degree to which it will lead to box office sales. To this extent, parody's tendency to repeat familiar and recognizable genre conventions that are comfortable and pleasurable for viewers

contributes to its appeal. It is therefore not surprising that in *Shanghai Noon,* for example, he would have allowed director Tim Dey to make artistic choices that would support, rather than challenge, mainstream American audiences' expectations around race, colonization and the Western genre[13]. Meanwhile, these dominant constructions of race and colonization are masked behind the multicultural gloss of the film, which is billed as the vehicle of Chan, who is still read by mainstream American audiences as a racialized minority subject, via the discourses of race and representation that are available to them. This also reflects Foucault's contention in *The History of Sexuality* that resistance to power is constituted by the same discursive terrain as power. Chan's familiar racial Otherness is central to the comedy derived from the genre parody found in *Shanghai Noon* and *Knights.* The apparent incommensurability of Chan's role as a cowboy in the films is a recognizable twist on the figure of the lone cowboy. It is also what ultimately allows the narrative to return, in the end, to Roy O'Bannon's ability to "get the girl"; or, for settler claims to land, symbolized through Indigenous women's bodies, to be naturalized.

[13] Assuming, of course, that he does not share these mainstream views; his criticisms of the 2004 election of the Democratic Progressive Party in Taiwan (a party which supports Taiwanese independence from China, and the rights of Indigenous peoples in Taiwan) would suggest otherwise. Thanks to Hsuan Hsu for this insight.

CHAPTER FIVE

"THERE ARE NO PAKISTANI COWBOYS!" SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA FILMS, QUEER FAILURE AND SETTLER COLONIALISM[1]

In this chapter, I focus on two independent diasporic South Asian films – *Wild West* (1992) and *Indian Cowboy* (2004) - that engage with the western genre, and consider their relation to settler colonialism. The chapter mobilizes queer scholarship on critical futurities (Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness;* Berlant, *Cruel Optimism;* Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*) as a means of foregrounding the settler colonial contexts of these films. Whereas *Wild West*'s narrative of failure leaves open a possibility for solidarity with Indigenous decolonization, *Indian Cowboy'*s narrative of assimilatory success forecloses this possibility. Accordingly, this analysis suggests that parodied representations of the figure of the cowboy may alternately open or foreclose possibilities for imagining decolonial futures.

Unlike Jackie Chan's *Shanghai* series (discussed in the previous chapter), neither *Wild West* nor *Indian Cowboy* received wide release. Written, directed and produced in 2004 by actor/filmmaker Nikhil Kamkolkar (formerly a software engineer at Microsoft (Kamkolkar "On Making"), *Indian Cowboy* is an independent American romantic comedy which screened

[1] "South Asian", and its corollaries, "brown", "Indian" and "desi", are ambiguous categories of naming and identification. "South Asia" can variously refer to the nation-states of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Tibet. Jigna Desai writes that this category "is often used as a strategic geopolitical or geographical term indicating political alliances, both in Asia and the diasporas, and the term is one that can configure social identities and categories without necessarily alluding to national identities." (5). South Asian is also occasionally mobilized by diasporic subjects in Canada, the U.S., and sometimes the U.K. (where "Asian" often refers to "South Asian") as a political identification referencing both common colonial histories linked to the South Asian subcontinent, and experiences of marginalization and resistance for those in the diaspora (Bahri and Vasudeva 7). At the same time, despite this grassroots political usage, the term "South Asian" just as easily privileges a narrow construction of South Asianness that references primarily North Indian, Hindu, Hindi/Punjabi-speaking geography, politics and culture. As Desai observes, "discussions of India dominate the study and meaning of South Asia in most (inter)disciplinary scholarship and (identity) politics. The framework of "South Asian" can reflect a liberal Euro-American discourse that views the region as a homogenous monocultural area in which an Orientalized version of India represents South Asia" (5).

primarily through the film festival circuit. The film explores the theme of hetero-love through a number of interconnected relationships. The central narrative is that of Nick (played by Kamkolkar), a South Asian-American software engineer and aspiring screenwriter in New Jersey on the quest for true love. Nick, described as a "dreamer, just like his father" by his mother, believes in true love of the Hollywood-and-Bollywood variety. At the beginning of the film, we learn that he frequently and quickly falls in love with women, only to realize that it is not what he describes as "love-love" (or true love). When his mother ("Ma"), who has travelled from India to visit Nick, she slyly invites her best friend Sunila's daughter Sapna (incidentally the Sanskrit word for "dream") to stay with them as well. As per Ma's plan, Nick falls for Sapna. However, there are a number of obstacles confronting their coming together. This theme of hetero-love is linked to a second theme of mobility, migration and travel, with the western genre acting as the aesthetic connection between the two.

Wild West, produced by BBC's Channel 4, received limited release in British and American cinemas. Filmed on a shoestring budget (Ebert), it is written by Harwant Bains (who also served as a production consultant), directed by David Attwood, and features a primarily South Asian cast. The film, which is Bains' first screenplay (having come to film with a playwriting background (Ebert)), features the struggles of an aspiring country music band composed of young South Asian men in the UK. The somewhat frenetic plot circles around Zaf Ayub (Naveen Andrews), an aspiring country musician in West London's Southall district, who along with his bandmates in the "Honky Tonk Cowboys" dreams of making it big someday and moving to Nashville, Tennessee. Zaf's dreams are hampered by a number of players, who throw obstacles in his way: his mother, who frequently admonishes Zaf and his brothers for bringing

shame to their family; his disgruntled employers (he can't seem to hold a steady job); a group of tough local bullies, the Tappers, thirsty for revenge because they believe they have been cheated by Zaf's brother, Ali, a used car mechanic and salesman; and English society in general, where systemic racism limits his potential for fame. Things begin to look up for Zaf and the Honky Tonks after Zaf's chance encounter and brief romance with Rifat (Sarita Chowdhury), a young woman in an abusive relationship. Rifat's vocal talent and "exotic" looks snag the Honky Tonks with a meeting with the fictional "Wild West" records. However, the record label producer ultimately decides that they want to produce Rifat as a solo act, because the Honky Tonks are otherwise not "marketable". In the end, Zaf and his brothers say goodbye to Rifat, and take the money earned from the sale of their family home, to fly off to Nashville to realize their dreams.

INTERPRETING SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORIC CINEMA

South Asian diasporic cinema refers to a small repertoire of mostly independent films, that are produced, written and/or directed by diasporic South Asian subjects, primarily (but not exclusively) located in the US, UK and Canada. They include films such as Hanif Khureishi and Stephen Frear's *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985) and, in the last decade, more popular movies such as Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2003). Reflecting broader themes and issues shaping diasporic film (Feng; Martin and Yaquinto), a common thread within South Asian diasporic cinema is a preoccupation with issues of identity, nation and race that characterize the experiences of South Asian diasporic subjects (Bardhan; Bhavani; Moorti; Rajgopal; Seshagiri). As further demonstrated by queer and feminist diasporic analyses, questions of race, identity and nation within these films are mutually constituted through representations of gender and sexuality (Desai; Gairola; Gopinath; Mahn; Rajiva). For example, in *Impossible Desires,* Gayatri

Gopinath analyzes how the possibility of representing queer female desire in South Asian diasporic cultural production is limited by a representational politics that pits hetero-feminism against queer sexualities. Thus, in films such as *Bend It Like Beckham, Monsoon Wedding* (2003), and *Hollywood/Bollywood* (2003), feminist protagonists are juxtaposed with gay male supporting characters who figure as the "real" queer subject of the film (129-130).

The representational politics of South Asian diasporic cinema are outlined by Jigna Desai in her book, *Beyond Bollywood.* Due to their location in-between the major film production industries in Hollywood and "Bollywood," Desai frames South Asian diasporic cinema as a "developing cinema that negotiates the dominant discourse, politics and economies of multiple locations" (Desai 35), including South Asian nation-states, and the nation-states to which South Asian migrants move. South Asian diaspora films, she suggests, "function significantly as part of the shifting economic, political and cultural relations between global capitalism and the postcolonial nation-state, raising questions regarding negotiation of cultural politics of diaspora located within local, national and transnational processes" (Desai 36). Desai suggests that the representational politics of South Asian diasporic films are often uneven, ambiguous and contradictory. Because of their particular location as *diasporic,* these films often are folded into the logics of dominant nationalisms, as, for example, evidence of multiculturalism's success in western states, or as representations of authentic diasporic communities (36). At the same time, their position on the margins of major national cinemas and film industries "prevents their full cooptation and incorporation into institutionally privileged canons" (36). As a result, and due the complex interplay of social, political and economic factors shaping their production, South Asian diasporic films may be able to advance social critique in ways that mainstream Hollywood and

Bollywood cinemas cannot, at the same time as they continue to reproduce the same constructions of race, gender, class and sexuality found in more popular films.

SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA FILMS AND THE POTENTIAL FOR SETTLER COLONIAL CRITIQUE

The uneven, ambiguous and contradictory representational politics outlined by Desai are certainly apparent in *Indian Cowboy* and *Wild West.* As independent films not subject to the production demands of Hollywood or Bollywood, the films break with convention in many ways; however, these breaks do not necessarily challenge dominant representational politics, including those of settler colonialism. For example, Kamkolkar made "color-blind, nationality-blind, and accent-blind" casting choices for *Indian Cowboy*. Of this decision, Kamkolkar has stated that "I really had no political agenda in this decision. I just wanted to cast the best actor for each role" (Kamkolkar "On Making"). He also states that he "didn't want to provide something that sounds 'ethnic' for its own sake" (Kamkolkar "On Making"). However, rather than subverting or problematizing the signification of race through skin colour, these casting choices reinforced social constructions of race. Nikhil's mother is played by a white actress, with her "Indianness" marked primarily through her clothing and bindi. Similarly, both *Indian Cowboy* and *Wild West* play with the misnomer "Indian," disrupting the racial coding of the cowboy as white and referencing the colonial histories through which the "Indians" of both South Asia, and of the Americas, are linked. Yet their respective parodied engagement with the figure of the cowboy achieves distinct effects that are uneven and contradictory: the cowboy of *Indian Cowboy* fantasizes about new forms of movement and mobility made possible through the transnational flows of goods and services in a late capitalist world; the cowboy of *Wild West* dreams about movement outside of the confines of racialized poverty. If *Indian Cowboy's*

cowboy is oriented toward a future marked by success, *Wild West's* cowboy is oriented toward a future marked by failure, lawlessness and rebelliousness.

Unlike the black cowboys discussed in chapter three, which have their reference point in black settlement in the American West, and in historical relationships between black and Indigenous communities, cultural representations of diasporic South Asian cowboys are not based upon South Asian presence in the American West, and do not share the historical revisionist goals of black westerns. However, in contrast to Chon Wang in Jackie Chan's *Shanghai* series, who is constructed as foreigner/fish out of water who needs to learn how to be a cowboy, the cowboys of *Wild West* and *Indian Cowboy* are definitively diasporic, and faced with questions of belonging and recognition. The racialized cowboys discussed in this chapter thus share a relationship to the settler nation-state that is distinct from those discussed in previous chapters. This distinctive relationship is underscored in the films through the misnomer "Indian" that I discussed earlier. In the contemporary moment, this misnomer occasionally opens up space for conversations around the confusions created by Columbus' colonial misnaming of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas as "Indian". Ali Kazimi, for example, reflects on the politics of representation that structure visual constructions of the "Imaginary Indian" in popular cultures in his documentary *Shooting Indians: A Journey with Jeffrey Thomas* (1997)[2]. In the documentary, Kazimi profiles and engages in conversation with Iroquois artist-photographer Jeff Thomas. Inserting himself into the film's narrative, Kazimi reflects on the transnational circulation of the misnomer "Indian," from its origins in Columbus' misnaming, to his own experiences growing up in India watching Hollywood westerns and playing with plastic "cowboy

[2] The multidisciplinary art show, *Crossing Lines: Intercultural Dialogues,* inspired by Kazimi's film and curated by SAVAC in 2009, brought together South Asian and Six Nations artists, including Kazimi and Thomas.

and Indian" figurines. However, these and other conversations have primarily focused on contemporary connections, rather than historical relationships, like the ones between black and Indigenous communities that were discussed in chapter three[3].

Indian Cowboy and *Wild West* were produced in different time periods, and reflect different histories of migration and settlement. The South Asian subject of *Indian Cowboy,* coming out of the early 2000s, is middle-class, upwardly mobile, travels with ease from India to the U.S. and is comfortably settled into the nationalist fabric of America; he is an example of the "flexible citizen" discussed by Aihwa Ong, for whom the reconfigurations of production, consumption and national borders within late capitalism have enabled new kinds of mobility, citizenship and settlement. The South Asian subject of *Wild West* is working class, has few prospects for upward mobility, does not feel at home anywhere, and is marginalized from dominant British culture and society in the early 1990s. Yet, in each case, the reference to the misnomer "Indian" reflects a preoccupation with (mis)recognition, and offers an opportunity for considering the kinds of possibilities (and impossibilities) for belonging available to the South Asian subjects of each film.

To consider these (im)possibilities of (mis)recognition, identity and belonging – and in common with the black westerns and Jackie Chan films discussed earlier - *Indian Cowboy* and *Wild West* engage with the images, iconography and themes of the western genre. In *Wild West*, American country-western music, and western paraphernalia more generally, represents the

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[3] Other examples of reflecting on the misnomer "Indian" include discussions the now-defunct popular South Asian American blog, *Sepia Mutiny;* in an entry entitled "Dot Not Feather", (where "dot" Indian=South Asian, and "feather" Indian=Native), one writer reflects on an incident where she was mistaken for Native American. In Canada, the South Asian Visual Arts Collective (SAVAC) and TRIBE Centre for Evolving Aboriginal Media organized "Define Indian" in 2006, a series of national discussions between South Asian and First Nations arts communities, in order to reflect on similarities between the two. See also Toronto theatre artist Anand Rajaram's play, *Cowboys and Indians*; and Minneapolis theatre artist Zaraawar Mistry's play, *Indian Cowboy*.

young men's desire to feel "at home". In *Indian Cowboy,* which uses the "conventions of Hollywood and Bollywood romantic comedies, and turn[s] the obligatory romantic comedy clichés on their head" (Kamkolkar), the Wild West is the setting for a dream sequence in the film, depicting the protagonist's screenplay-in-progress. To reiterate the discussion from the second chapter, as John G. Cawelti has observed, though the western as a popular genre may be in decline, "its myths, images, and forms…continue to haunt the American and European imaginations" (Cawelti 125). While Nikhil Kamkolkar, the writer, director and producer of *Indian Cowboy,* identifies that film as primarily engaged with the romance film genre, the Wild West openly haunts the movie, as I discuss shortly. Similarly, while *Wild West* is classified as a comedy on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB), the imagery and mythology of the West permeates the film. In this sense, despite the fact that neither film takes place in the late 1800s time period that most "classic" westerns do, and despite the fact that neither film is actually set in the geographical West (*Indian Cowboy* takes place in New Jersey; *Wild West* in the UK), they are "post-western", in that they "intensify and play on the audience's feelings about, and knowledge of, western movies" (French 85).

In both films, the use of postmodern strategies is central. As discussed in earlier chapters, postmodern strategies of representation, via Linda Hutcheon, involve the use and repetition of existing artistic forms, styles and genres in often self-conscious, self-reflexive, ironic and contradictory ways. One effect of postmodern strategies, as Hutcheon points out, is that they "[manage] to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions [they appear] to challenge" (Hutcheon 1-2). This effect is what Hutcheon calls *complicitous critique*. In their repetition and referencing of existing forms, styles and genres,

postmodern strategies reinscribe their primacy, and – I would add – the discourses through which they are constituted, and of which they are constitutive. In *Indian Cowboy* and *Wild West,* the self-conscious repetition and reference to the western genre (via its images, figures and tropes) open up the western, and the American mythology which westerns promulgate, for interrogation. At the same time, this repetition simultaneously reasserts the primacy of the western, and reanimates the colonial discourses through which they are constituted, and of which they are constitutive.

However, the two films' use of postmodern strategies is not equivalent. This is largely due to the ways in which each film takes up the themes of mobility, movement and travel (central to the Western genre), through representations of migration, class status and hetero-romance. While *Indian Cowboy'*s representational strategies lean towards reinforcing normative ideas about race, gender, sexuality and nation, *Wild West,* leaves many of these ideas open to question, offering a space for critical conversation that is lacking in *Indian Cowboy.* To further contextualize these representations, I turn to queer scholarship on failure and futurity.

CRITICAL UTOPIAS: QUEER FAILURES AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

The influential work of queer theorists Leo Bersani (*Homos)* and Lee Edelman (*No Future*) has emphasized the disruptive potential of a queer politics that challenges the organization of social relations via heteronormativity. Arguing against a politics of assimilation, Edelman and Bersani have respectively argued that a politic of anti-futurity or anti-relationality are required for a truly queered politics; a politics driven by non-normativity, or what Bersani calls "an anti-communal mode of connectedness" (10). Thus, in *No Future,* Edelman critiques how political projects on all ends of the spectrum have been centred on the figure of the child.

This move, argues Edelman, regulates political agency and sexual desire by privileging biological and social reproduction, while abjecting the possibilities for social relations (or, more accurately, un-relations) that are exposed through queer desires.

More recent writing, by authors such as José Esteban Muñoz (*Cruising Utopia),* Jack Halberstam (*The Queer Art of Failure)*, Sara Ahmed (*The Promise of Happiness),* Lauren Berlant (*Cruel Optimism; The Female Complaint)*, and Michael D. Snediker (*Queer Optimism)* while appreciating the impetus for anti-futurity, has pointed to the possibilities for queer futurities marked by failure, negativity, unhappiness and the unknowable. While not disputing earlier theorists' skepticism of the normative impulse of futurity, the work of these writers respectively suggests that it is possible –and urgent – to imagine futures based in ideals other than capitalist success and reproduction. For instance, in *Cruising Utopia,* Muñoz turns to queer cultures in order to argue that queer affect and relationality gesture to the possibility of something not yet reached. "Queerness is not yet here," he writes (1). "We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with possibility" (1). While *Cruising Utopia* is not uniformly engaged with race, Muñoz situates his work alongside queer feminist and queer of colour scholarship (Dinshaw; Dolan; Freccero; Freeman; Gopinath) whose analyses of queer of colour cultural politics has illuminated the limits of anti-relational/anti-futurity. Moreover, the urgency for imagining queer futures emerges for Muñoz, in part, from the understanding that Edelman's politic of anti-futurity implicitly centres a white normative subject: "[t]he future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity" (95).

Heeding Muñoz' call for critical utopianism, in *The Queer Art of Failure,* Halberstam proposes that an aesthetic/practice of failure might anchor the horizons of queer politics, writing that "[u]nder certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2-3). In *The Promise of Happiness,* Ahmed similarly suggests that unhappiness of queer or feminist subjects, or of the melancholic migrant, may be a productive affect insofar as it enables the critique and transformation of the social conditions which produce unhappiness.

It should be noted that failure is experienced unevenly across the lines of race and class. Failure constitutes the subjectivity of those marginalized through racism and colonialism; for the working-class racialized migrant, for instance, failure is not a choice. The racialized migrant subject is constructed as an inherent failure in relation to capitalism; to imagine otherwise would throw into question the success/failure binary structuring capitalism. Conversely, an examination of the success/failure binary provides the occasion to expose the fissures and faultlines of settler national cultures. Moreover, an examination of success and failure also reveals the lines of both tension and alliance linking diasporic and Indigenous subjects.

A critique of success/failure provides an entry point for critiquing settler colonialism, and for situating racialized subjects alongside dialogues within Indigenous studies on decolonial futures. As argued in earlier chapters, settler colonial power is sustained through the naturalization of ideals such as property ownership, heterosexual romance, financial success and biological and social reproduction. The failure of some racialized subjects to assimilate into white (settler) nationhood exposes the racial-colonial underpinnings of the nation and provides the occasion to align with Indigenous struggles for decolonization. Conversely, diasporic

"success" at assimilation reveals the means through which racialized subjects may be folded into settler cultures, and consequently positioned against decolonial struggles.

INDIAN COWBOY (2004): DIASPORIC SUCCESS

> …the project of aspiring to "humanity" is always already a racial project; it is a project that aspires to a universality and self-determination that can exist only over and against the particularity and affectability of "the other."
>
> --Andrea Smith, "Queer Theory and Native Studies"
>
> I like America because it bucks old world traditions. I am a bit of a rebel myself and I like to shake up rigid, tradition-bound entities that wish to impose their views on me.
>
> --Nikhil Kamkolkar, cited in Vienna

In the press kit for the film, *Indian Cowboy* is described as belonging to the "South Asian independent film movement that parallels Bollywood". In its focus on the theme of heteronormative love, it claims to engage with the "conventions of Hollywood and Bollywood romantic comedies", and, according to the press kit, "turn[s] the obligatory romantic comedy clichés on their heads". Given that cowboys and the western film genre more generally are barely mentioned in the promotional materials for the film, Kamkolkar's choice for the title seems initially puzzling: why would he choose to name a film concerned primarily with love and romance, "Indian Cowboy"? Going by Kamkolkar's self-identification with rebellion and shaking up boundaries in the passage quoted above (not surprisingly, Kamkolkar's twitter handle is also @IndianCowboy), perhaps "Indian Cowboy" refers to the vision of the film itself; in its purported bucking of filmic conventions, the film is an outsider, an outlaw, a cowboy. However, while the film may indeed challenge filmic conventions to some extent, this disruption does not translate into a critique of dominant notions of diapora, nation, identity and belonging. On the contrary, in its emphasis on sustaining heterosexual love in a context of liberal multiculturalism

and capitalist globalization, the film holds up a configuration of diaspora which reinforces essentialist constructions of nation and identity. While *Indian Cowboy* mocks Bollywood and Hollywood romances, and Hollywood westerns, exposing their fallacies, it simultaneously leaves undisturbed some of their central premises, reflecting Hutcheon's contention that postmodern cultural strategies are a form of "complicitous critique". The film confirms the arguments of queer cultural theorists such as Gayatri Gopinath, who points to the heteronormative impulse of much diasporic cultural production. In *Indian Cowboy*, the figure of the cowboy is integral to this successful maintenance of heteronormative love.

Going West/Going East: Fantasies of Migration and Mobility

Go West, young man!

--Horace Greeley

Themes of mobility, travel and transport have been central to many western films. For example, as discussed in the second chapter, Frank Gruber's structuralist analysis of western film plots, identified "the Journey" as one central plot form. In this plot, the journey of the railroad, stagecoach or wagon train is impeded by raiders or Indians (in Lusted 24). The thematic focus on mobility is logical in the sense that it has been through the westward migration of Euro-American settlers that America was established as a nation. One of the most famous examples of the Journey plot is John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), in which a stagecoach carries a motley crew of individuals travels to a new town. Along the way, the stagecoach is threatened by silent but angry group of "Indians", who attack the passengers on horseback. However, thanks to the adeptly skilled Ringo (played by John Wayne), the Indians are defeated and the stagecoach continues to its destination.

Gruber's analysis itself may have been too reductionist in its categorization of film plots. However, migration, movement and travel are certainly recognizable as belonging to the western genre, and one of the ways *Indian Cowboy* engages with the genre is through these themes. A primary obstacle in the film – Sapna's plan to move back to India - is resolved through a fantasy of migration and mobility. It is through a fantasy of seamless travel across borders, made possible by the material conditions of corporate globalization, that the possibility of heteronormative coupling is preserved in *Indian Cowboy*. Sapna wants Nick to follow her to India, but Nick is reluctant to leave behind his job, home and friends. He is also haunted by the experience of having been abandoned by his father, who left Nick and his mom, presumably when Nick was a child, to go back to India. His mother followed his father shortly thereafter. Frustrated at the prospect of having to choose between India and the U.S., Nick begins to give up on his dream of "love-love". In the end, Nick and Sapna come to a compromise: they will go back and forth between the U.S. and India, "50/50". This resolution echoes a depoliticized, romanticized configuration of diaspora, which emphasizes "rootlessness, mobility and migration" (McCall 25), while eliding thornier questions around how this rootlessness and migration is produced and constituted, including questions of settler colonization and corporate globalization.

The migration fantasy is reinforced through the metaphor of Westward expansion. When Sapna invites Nick to live in India, Nick's friend Skip encourages him to "head out East, Indian cowboy, you! That's what love-love is all about." "Cowboy" here stands in as a metonym for the pursuit of love. Instead of "heading West" to find freedom, independence and riches, Skip encourages Nick to "head East" to find love, evoking orientalist fantasies of the East as a place

one goes to find romance and spiritual fulfillment. Like Roy O'Bannon in the *Shanghai* films, whose romance with Falling Leaves in *Shanghai Noon* is followed by a romance with Lin in *Shanghai Knights,* this call to head East implies a progression wherein American settler colonialism becomes the blueprint for other kinds of expansion. However, because it is framed as private, individualized romance, rather than love that is constituted through circuits of labour, migration and capital (which condition both the circumstances of their meeting, and their compromised solution), the film renders these processes neutral.

There are additional layers in Skip's postmodern speech to his friend. His repetition and reworking of American politician Horace Greeley's popular 19th Century provocation, to young men in the Eastern U.S., to find wealth in the West - "Go West young man!"- both manipulates the original meaning and reasserts its logics. In the first place, Skip's suggestion that Nick head East implies that Nick is indigenous to the West, rooted in the U.S. This suggestion speaks against dominant constructions of the nation which positions non-white bodies as perpetually foreign/outside (Smith "Indigeneity"). Moreover, because the suggestion comes from a white character, it is vested with greater authority than it would be if spoken by a non-white character. However, the indigenization of Nick also displaces and erases Indigenous claims to land.

On another register, if one reads "Go West" as a statement that is always already about colonial expansion, then Skip's "Go East" suggests that Nick's journey to India is also a form of colonial expansion. However, the 50/50 resolution of the film implies that the dream of heading East is one that Nick can't fully realize. Of course, beneath the failed possibility of going East lurks the truth that it is because someone has already gone West that Nick can even imagine the possibility of heading East in *Indian Cowboy.* More specifically, it is Euro-American settlers'

westward expansion in the 19th century, and the system and discourse of settler colonialism which sustains that settlement in the present, that give meaning and significance to the phrase "Go East!". In its suggestion that one can "head East" as others have headed West in the past, the film both erases the violence of westward expansion, and locates it squarely in the past.

Refusals of Fantasy Masculinity?

> I found an ending for this film that is far removed from the drama of Romeo and Juliet, or the syrupy sweetness of Bollywood and Hollywood films. I found an ending based on compromise and collaboration, not sacrifice. An ending that truly is a beginning of a Love-Love story.
>
> --Nikhil Kamkolkar

Kamkolkar's vision for the film, as a story that is more "truthful" than Bollywood, Hollywood or Shakespeare, is accomplished to a large extent through the "Wild West" sub-plot that appears in *Indian Cowboy.* This sub-plot appears as a figment of Nick's imagination, and interrupts the main narrative from time to time. The Wild West sequence is, in fact, a dramatization of Nick's screenplay-in-progress. It is through the contrast between Nick's real-life and the imaginary life of his screenplay that he is able to set up the "real-life" portion of the film as true and authentic. There is occasional slippage between the "real" and fantasy worlds. For example, Nick occasionally dons a cowboy hat and toy gun. When he first stumbles upon Sapna in his apartment, he cautiously approaches her with the toy gun. He also wears his cowboy gear when Sapna cajoles him into watching "classic" tragic Bollywood and Hollywood romances. In another moment, Sapna interrupts Nick as he acts out a kissing scene in his screenplay. These slippages firmly entrench the Wild West sub-plot as fake, unreal fantasy. At the same time, by accentuating the constructedness of film itself, the film-in-the-film calls the "reality" of the entire film into question.

As Nick's views and perspectives on life and love change, so does the narrative of the Wild West sequence. For example, at the start of the movie, Nick frames his film as being a "love story of galactic proportions". The epic-ness is communicated through the melodrama of the western imagery and characters. There are three characters in the dream sequence: Guru (the hero; in Sanskrit Guru also refers to a teacher or mentor), Dushman ("enemy" in Hindi/Urdu), and their object of affection, Amano ("love" in Italian). The Wild West sequence is fantastical on many levels. It has a much more stylized aesthetic than the rest of the film, marked by soft lighting, and red and orange hues. There is no dialogue in the sequence, and the pacing is slow and purposeful. Set in a "Chinese cowboy lounge", the sequence features kitschy costumes and paraphernalia. Guru wears a sleeveless collared shirt with flowered embroidery, and drinks his whisky out of a mug shaped like a cowboy boot; the bartender wears a furry cowboy hat; and the bar itself is adorned with green and red lanterns and Wild West figurines. Guru's love-love for Amano is blocked by the evil Dushman. The end of the story, which is written not by Nick, but by Sapna, takes the form of a tragic romance. It culminates in a shootout between Guru and Dushman. Though Guru wins the shootout (and its prize, Amano), Dushman shoots Guru for dead before Amano is reunited with Guru. Riddled with guilt, Dushman shoots himself, and we are left to presume that Amano does the same. Sapna's writing of the end marks a shift in the film. At the beginning, Nick's perception of reality and love mirrored the fantasy of the Wild West sequence. However, by allowing Sapna to write the ending, Nick lets go of his fantastical perceptions of love – separating reality and fantasy - and is eventually able to reach a real-life compromise with Sapna that allows them to finally unite. His fantasy about love is replaced by the girl of his dreams (literally, his "sapna").

The construction of the Wild West as a fantasy in the film may appear to suggest a refusal of a particular sort of dominant, white American masculinity coded in the figure of the cowboy. This figure, of course is ambiguous and varied. As discussed by scholars such as Will Wright, within western films, the position of the cowboy hero in relation to villains, to society and to social values is often variable across different kinds of film plots. Guru, the cowboy hero of *Indian Cowboy,* represents an idealized sort of masculinity, evidenced by his tough physique and demeanour. The construction of this idealized masculinity as unattainable fantasy, however, stands in stark contrast to the kind of anti-racist political project that David Eng problematizes in *Racial Castration.* Eng discusses how the feminization of some racialized communities within popular cultures and media serves to shore up dominant white masculinities (Eng 136). However, he cautions against racialized subjects aspiring towards this dominant construction of masculinity, observing that "[t]he struggle to recompose the psychic and material body of the racialized masculine subject can often result in the ascribing of conservative norms to emancipatory political projects" (Eng 136). Taking into consideration Eng's remarks, *Indian Cowboy*'s relegation of the Wild West to the space of imagination, and Nick's eventual refusal of its fantasy, is promising. It suggests a rejection of dominant masculinity in favour of an alternative one that is perhaps less-than-ideal.

However, if one reads the relationship between Guru and Nick symbolically, rather than literally, then Nick's refusal of fantasy masculinity is less significant than the question of what is enabled by the representation of fantasy masculinity in the film. It is instructive here to consider the function of violent outlaw cowboy within the Western genre. John Cawelti has noted that a shift in early 20th century representations of the cowboy by writers Zane Grey and W.S. Hart

(whose novels provided much of the formula for subsequent Western films and television), which constructed this figure as a loner who was often an outlaw, or else an outcast from society, either because of his violent past or his inability to settle down (83). This was in contrast to earlier representations of the cowboy as a figure of goodness and morality. As outlaw/outcast, the cowboy stood on the edge of civilization and wilderness, but his encounter with "wild nature and violent men" played an integral to the affirmation of "traditional American values [such] as monogamous love, settled family, basic separation of masculine and feminine roles, and the centrality of religion" (Cawelti 87). In *Indian Cowboy,* the cowboy protagonist, Guru, plays a similar function in the film, symbolically enabling the monogamous, heterosexual romance between Nick and Sapna. For instance, Nick's rejection of his fantasy is not only facilitated by Sapna, but affirmed through their union. In other words, he is able to reject the fantasy masculinity because he has secured partnership with Sapna. Simultaneously, Sapna's journey towards finally accepting Nick is only completed when she learns the truth about her ex-fiancé, Raghu. Raghu is a modified version of the "gay best friend" character; as Alexander Doty and Ben Gove observe, this figure enables the heterosexual plot in many popular films and television shows (Doty and Gove 88). Though Sapna is attracted to Nick, she initially refuses to commit to him because she is still in love with Raghu, who abandoned Sapna on their wedding day to run away with his best friend, Maya. Sapna eventually discovers that Raghu is in fact gay, and makes peace with her own cynicism about love and relationship by supporting Raghu's public coming out. Her discovery of Raghu's "true" sexual orientation "cures" her of her heartbreak and finally allows her to let go of her belief that "all great loves end in tragedy".

Fantasies of Multiculturalism and Inclusion

> I was an American before I even knew what America was. It's not just a country to me, but a concept, a way of life. I like America because it bucks *old world traditions*. I am a bit of a rebel myself and I like to shake up rigid, tradition-bound entities that wish to impose their views on me. But today, I'm a little miffed with America too. I see it's becoming an *old world* itself. It's gathering and claiming traditions and becoming more conservative. Anti-immigrant sentiments are high. Not only do I have to worry about the terrorists who would love to harm my kind but also about fellow citizens who would like to act out their prejudices.
>
> --Nikhil Kamkolkar, cited in Vienna (emphasis mine)

The final fantasy of *Indian Cowboy* is its fantasy of multicultural America – an America that is up for grabs by anyone, limitless in its possibilities. It is not an exact rearticulation of what Richard Slotkin calls the "Frontier Myth", in which the "redemption of American spirit or fortune" is framed "as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or "natural" state, and *regeneration through violence*" (Slotkin 12, original emphasis). However, it does rearticulate an idea of America as a land of plenty, of opportunity and equality – where one "goes West". In *Indian Cowboy,* this fantasy of America is expressed through the references to culture at various points in the film and its approach to casting, which reinforce the assimilationist emphasis of the plot. The version of multiculturalism referenced in the film is not a grassroots multiculturalism of the variety propounded by women of colour feminists in the early 1980s in *This Bridge Called My Back,* or the activism/scholarship inspired by it. Edited by writer-poets Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This Bridge* is a collection of personal essays and poems by black, Chicana, Asian American and Native American women, many of whom also identified as lesbian or bisexual. The editors and contributors to the book sought feminist alliances across socially constructed racial/cultural difference in order to advance an alternative to the predominantly white radical feminist organizing at the time, which relegated the concerns, issues and priorities of women of

colour to the margins of the movement. *Indian Cowboy*'s multiculturalism, by contrast, corresponds to a superficial multiculturalism that emphasizes cultural diversity, while eschewing conversations on the social, economic and political transformations that are necessary for systemic anti-racist change (Gordon and Newfield; Philip). As Angela Davis explains, this version of multiculturalism understands difference as spectacle, as an object to be consumed and digested (Davis 46). This kind of multiculturalism, notes Davis, frames racism as a problem of individual attitudes and conflicts (46). Because it is dehistoricized, this brand of multiculturalism also serves to erase historical colonial violence, and its contemporary iterations. There are many examples of superficial multiculturalism in *Indian Cowboy.* For instance, Nick chooses to have the Wild West sequence take place partly in a "Chinese cowboy lounge", because a "regular" bar would be too boring. He comes up with this brilliant idea after ordering Chinese take-out. Sapna is visiting the U.S. from India, and says that she loves India for "its festivals, music, [and] culture".

The Wild West sequence is one aspect of the multicultural representational politics of the film, especially as the characters in this sequence are multi-racial (Guru and Dushman are played by South Asian and white actors respectively, and Amano by an East Asian actor). Like the examples noted above, this is a gesture to "spice up" a storyline that doesn't interrogate what "spicing up" entails. On the one hand, because the Wild West is de-linked from its historical context, taken as a free-floating signifier to be manipulated in innumerable ways, the figure of the cowboy is disassociated from the violence of colonial settlement. On the other, because it refuses to speak to that history, the film's deployment of the Wild West suggests that colonial violence is a *fait accompli* and that this emblem of colonialism, the cowboy and the Wild West,

is meaning-less, a seemingly an empty canvas to be painted over by anyone. By undermining the ongoing significance of the colonial ideologies coded into the West, the continued threat of colonial violence that shapes contemporary Indigenous lives and experiences is deferred, or made invisible.

The multicultural politic framing the film reinforces an assimilationist narrative in *Indian Cowboy,* in which South Asian Americans have achieved financial success, and are comfortably folded into the cultural fabric of the nation. Nick is securely employed, appears to be quite comfortable with his identification as a hyphenated American citizen, and does not seem to have any hang-ups around his brownness or his masculinity. The assimilationist narrative is anchored through his easy friendship with his carefree and sexually promiscuous best friend and co-worker Skip, the only straight white male in the film. As the film progresses, the initial contrast between Nick and Skip's masculinity appears to fade. This is accomplished by a number of moves in the character and plot development, which collectively suggest that Nick and Skip occupy equivalent positions not only in terms of class status, but in terms of race and culture. For example, Skip is white but has a "multicultural" name, Sikandar Khorana Imanuel Pantishin, of which he is ashamed. The psychic trauma of racism that is experienced by many people of colour, often marked by the "foreignness" that is signified through one's name, is dislocated from its historical and social context and constructed as an individual problem.

Skip's trajectory in the film also mirrors that of Nick. At the start of the film, he embodies a less-than-ideal, perverse, boyish, immature masculinity (as evidenced by his love for Hawaiian shirts, morning beer and penchant for older women). By the end of the film, he "grows up" and becomes respectable by "settling down" with his black girlfriend, Vij. Like Nick, Skip

also makes a number of compromises for love along the way, like becoming monogamous and giving up his bachelor-style furniture. These moves towards respectable adulthood reflect a familiar maturation plot. As Halberstam observes,

> [i]n Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future. We applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances) and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity (*In a Queer Time and Place* 152).

The end result of both Nick and Skip's journeys in the film towards respectability is a proximate equivalency between Skip's white masculinity, and Nick's brown masculinity. Despite the racial difference that respectively constructs their masculinities, the film ends with the promise of heteronormative futures for both. In other words, despite of their racial difference, both Nick and Skip secure a foothold within the American multicultural dream; a modified version of the American dream secured through the figure of the cowboy of the traditional Hollywood western.

WILD WEST (1992): DIASPORIC IMPOSSIBILITY AND FAILURE

> *Wild West* is about making impossible dreams come true.
>
> -- Hal Hinson, *Washington Post*

> Although some of the London critics immediately insisted on a comparison with Hanif (*My Beautiful Laundrette*) Kureshi, [*Wild West* writer Harwant] Bains will have none of it: His generation, he says, doesn't identify with Britain or the Indian subcontinent, but are forming a new identity of their own.
>
> -- Robert Ebert

In contrast to *Indian Cowboy,* which gestures to the promise of a future marked by assimilation constituted through heteronormative coupling and multicultural equity, *Wild West* is doubtful about the possibilities of such promises, and its narrative arc and character development

are marked by the themes of impossibility and failure. The contrast between the two also indexes distinct politics of racism, migration and settlement in the US and the UK. As I discussed in the introduction, American race politics are structured through a black/white binary. South Asians in the US have primarily immigrated as highly skilled workers (Shankar xii). They are popularly represented as an affluent "model minority", and straddle a position in-between the black/white binary (Prashad 4-7). In *The Karma of Brown Folk,* Vijay Prashad argues that this construction of South Asians contributes to anti-black racism, as South Asian success is attributed the result of biological or cultural traits. Meanwhile, the systemic production of "success" and "failure" is obfuscated, and the salience of race denied. In the UK, citizens from Commonwealth countries gained entry into the state through Commonwealth rules following the Second World War (Anwar 1). In contrast to their American counterparts, British South Asians are predominantly working class (Anwar 7-8). Moreover, because of the structural similarities between South Asian and Afro-Caribbean migrants, there has been a longer history of alliance between the two (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and Southall Rights). Race politics in the UK have been framed through discourses of national belonging (Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*), enabling increased possibilities for multi-racial alliance formation.

Wild West is set in Southall, a predominantly South Asian suburb of West London with a history of tensions between police and South Asian youth. In 1976, the death of a young Sikh man, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, sparked the formation of the Southall Youth Movement to protest racism and police brutality (Cashmore and Troyna 155). While no charges were ever laid, it was largely believed that Chaggar was killed at the hands of white supremacist youth (Campaign Against Racism and Fascism and Southall Rights 51). The movement was further galvanized in

1979 by the killing of New Zealand schoolteacher Blair Peach at the hands of riot police, at a rally to protest the growth of organized racism in East London (Institute of Race Relations). *Wild West's* narrative of youth rebellion and British South Asian working class communities unfolds in this context of race and racism in Southall specifically, and Britain more generally.

The Wild West in Wild West

The transnational circulation of culture and cultural production is neither a totalizing process that imposes dominant global culture upon local cultures, nor an entirely localized, autonomous process wherein local cultures completely reconfigure global culture on their own terms (Grewal and Kaplan; Hall, "The Local and the Global"). Rather, as Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd assert, while "culture and cultural production are located within the expansion of global capitalism", they also "act as sites that may contradict and oppose capital, and are not subsumed fully under logic of transnational capitalism" (15).

In many ways, *Wild West* is a reflection on how one particular site of culture – Wild West mythologies – both circulate through global capitalism, and are negotiated locally in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. However, whereas in *Indian Cowboy* the West is more or less an empty canvas – a space of fantasy - *Wild West* is more attentive to the historical material processes through which Wild West mythologies circulate transnationally. The Wild West is not a dream world in *Wild West,* but a part of the everyday world of Zaf and the Honky Tonks. Its appearance in the everyday life of the young men emphasizes its absurdity, and in so doing, disturbs the sanctity of the West and cowboy mythology. This is in contrast to *Indian Cowboy,* in which, despite the kitsch of the fantasy Wild West sequence, the mythology retains an aura of mystique and allure. To return to Stuart Hall's three reading positions, both *Wild West* and

Indian Cowboy reflect "negotiated" interpretations of the western genre, but from different spaces of political critique. As outlined in chapter two, Hall identified three general positions from which the media discourses could be decoded: the dominant position; the negotiated position; and the oppositional position (Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" 136-138). In the dominant position, the viewer draws upon dominant cultural meanings, or "codes", and the message is decoded exactly as it has been intended by the encoder. In the negotiated position, the viewer is aware of the dominant codes through which they are expected to decipher the message, but adapts this meaning on a situational basis, based on, for example, life experiences which contest hegemonic meanings. Finally, in the oppositional position, the viewer recognizes the dominant/hegemonic code but rejects this in favour of an alternative reading.

In *Indian Cowboy,* both the racialization of the cowboy as South Asian, and the blending of western genre themes with romantic comedy undercut the dominant colonial coding of the western, which asserts the supremacy of Euro-American project of westward expansion and settlement. At the same time, *Indian Cowboy* does not reject this coding outright; in its glamourization of cowboy masculinity, the film hangs on to some of the dominant cultural meanings of the cowboy, which associate this figure with virile, tough and hardened masculinity. *Wild West* also undercuts much of the colonial coding of the western, through its racialization of the cowboy, as well as by spatially and temporally dislocating from the 19th century American West. Yet, while it hangs on to the roughness, rebelliousness, and tough masculinity of the figure of the cowboy, it also draws attention to its production and consumption within popular cultures. Early in the film for instance, the camera focuses on a billboard for "Cowboy brand Blackeye Beans;" Zaf's bedroom is covered in Wild West paraphernalia, including posters of Buffalo

Bill's Wild West Show and a Confederate flag; and the family backyard resembles a western movie set, complete with saloon doors. At various other points in the film, there is a western movie playing on the television, and exclamations like "dude" and "yee-haw!" are thrown around liberally.

However, *Wild West* also makes painfully clear that the Wild West is not equally consumable by everyone. In other words, despite the transnational proliferation of western films and paraphernalia, these objects remain attached to the mythologies of Euro-American settler expansion through which they have been produced. Specifically, the film points out, the figure of the cowboy is racially coded as white[4]. Thus, recognition as a cowboy – or, recognition in terms of everything signified by this figure – is conditioned through race. This inability to recognize the brown cowboy recalls Fanon's discussion of black identity in *Black Skin, White Masks,* where the black male subject continually finds his subjectivity unrecognized by the dominant gaze. Fanon describes the everyday experience of being read not as human, but as a black body; as an object of fascination and fetishization. In an oft-quoted passage, he recounts being pointed and gawked at by a child, who exclaims to his mother, "Maman, look, a Negro; I'm scared!" (Fanon, *Black Skin* 91). In this moment of misrecognition, Fanon's human subjectivity is collapsed with racialized subjectivity, as the young boy's gaze casts him as not simply a man, but a *black* man. Fanon further writes of this moment:

> …the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema…I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors. I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania* (*Black Skin* 91-92, original emphasis).

[4] The racial coding is clearly noted through the band's name, "The Honky Tonks"; "honky" is vernacular for "white".

The child's misrecognition of Fanon forces him to now rediscover himself as a subject overdetermined by race, unable to be seen outside of blackness, including its historical associations and stereotypes. *Wild West* gestures towards the failure of recognition discussed by Fanon by continually pointing to the inevitability and impossibility of a South Asian man playing cowboy. For instance, early in the film, Zaf's mother cries in exasperation "There are no Pakistani cowboys!"; later, at a performance, the Honky Tonks are booed by the audience at an Asian Talent Contest, who want to "bring back the bhangra" (referring the previous band); and, during one of their first conversations, Rifat says to Zaf "You don't see too many Asians wearing cowboy hats."

The impossibility of the Honky Tonks' Nashville dream is ultimately shattered for good when a producer at Wild West records tells them that the Honky Tonks are not "marketable". In making his case, the producer connects the misidentification problems of the Honky Tonks with the socio-historical context of the US, which is what, in his view, would make a South Asian country band untenable:

> Back in the US, they see a picture of you, they say, "Oh boy. Red Indians trying to play country". Maybe down in Texas…in Texas they say, "these hombros [sic] are Mexican! Trying to play our music". Then they get fucking historical. [They] say, "remember the Alamo".

The producer's speech importantly emphasizes links between the shared marginalization of distinct racialized communities. The racial difference of Native Americans, Latin@s, and South Asians become intertwined with one another in dominant registers of visuality. However, by positing an equivalency between the three processes of misrecognition (South Asian, "Red Indian" and "Mexican"), the three are also conflated. Although the effects of misrecognition – in

terms of the psychic trauma resulting from misrecognition – may be similar, the processes through which this misrecognition has been constituted are distinct, and conflating them risks erasing their specificity. Thus, while gesturing to misrecognition provides an opening in the film for deeper consideration of the interconnections between racialized communities, this is by no means guaranteed.

The Impossibility of Belonging

Like Nick in *Indian Cowboy, Wild West's* Zaf dreams about the possibility of a future marked by normative ideals. However, the film is less hopeful about realizing this dream. Overall, it is much more pessimistic about ideals such as upward mobility, belonging in mainstream society, and romance. In *Indian Cowboy,* these things are taken for granted. Nick is comfortably employed in a white-collar job, has a multicultural cast of friends, and he and Sapna don't think twice about travelling back and forth between India and the U.S. Nor does anyone ever question Nick about his decision to write a screenplay about an "Indian Cowboy".

Zaf, by contrast, struggles to keep a steady job, and is haunted by the death of his father, who, we learn, has passed due to many years of overwork at the Southhall Meat Company. In his essay, "Are You a Man or a Mouse?" Homi Bhabha emphasizes the continuities between the figures of father and son, and love for the nation, drawing attention to the relationship between patrilineality and nationhood. Bhabha suggests that the fatherly desire for the son to embody an empowered masculinity – encapsulated in the question, "are you a man or a mouse"? – is ironically possible only through the son's respect for the father; a relationship of subservience. Similarly, one fulfills patriarchal obligations to the nation only through service to, and respect for, the nation. In *Wild West,* Zaf's mother chastises him for failing to live up to his obligations

as a Pakistani son. Yet Zaf's sense of service to masculinist ideals is tempered by raced and classed limits to national belonging, as evoked by the conditions of his father's death. His failure to live up to masculine duties extends to his brief romance with Rifat, which ultimately remains unrequited, as Rifat snags a solo deal with Wild West records, while the Honky Tonks head to Nashville with no guarantee of success.

Simultaneously, this romantic failure is contained by Zaf's cis- and heterosexuality, which is confirmed in a scene in which Zaf's mother stumbles across Rifat's undergarments in his bedroom, and assumes that he is transgendered. Her shock and despair centres on the repercussions this may have on his prospects for a heteronormative future: "You would not be be happy as a girl. We could never find you a husband!," she exclaims in transphobic panic. "First you become a cowboy, and now this!" The mother, in this utterance, links two kinds of "trans-" identifications. As Susan Stryker, Paisley Currah and Lisa Jean Moore argue in their introduction to the Trans- issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly,* "trans-", as opposed to the closed "trans", signals the linkages between a number of distinct forms of boundary crossing, limited not just to transgender identities, and indicating the intersectional, leaky and porous nature of transness. Zaf's mother likens his failure, as a diasporic subject, to fully embody the American cowboy, to the failure of gender contained in the presumption of his transgender-ness. To return to Bhabha's "Are You A Man Or A Mouse?", Zaf's desire to be a diasporic cowboy, and his presumed desire to be feminine, are betrayals of "proper" patrifilial attachments to the nation that are expressed through respect for the Father (or, for patriarchy). The threat posed by his desire to be a cowboy is thus underscored for the audience through the threat of transgender-ness.

However, Zaf eventually reveals that the clothing belongs to Rifat, who has run away from her abusive husband and is staying with Zaf. While his mother is not overly pleased, she accepts this transgression much more readily than the presumed transgression of gender. The confirmation of hetero- and cis-identification renders Zaf's otherwise non-normative status more palatable for viewers: Zaf is the antithesis of the gunfighter of the classic western, who is famous for his competence and skill (Thumim 341). Like Guru in *Indian Cowboy,* Zaf is an outcast, a loner cowboy figure who does not fit into British society. Unlike Guru, however, and like Jesse, Thomasine and Bushrod (the black cowboys discussed in chapter three), Zaf neither symbolically nor literally enables the settlement of others. Rather, because of his racial difference, he remains on the outside of even this insider-outsider role.

We learn in the film that much of Zaf's obsession with the Wild West and country music centres on the question of identity and belonging. This is expressed in a number of ways. The Honky Tonks perform Steve Earle's "Number 29", the lyrics for which begin with "I was born and raised here, this town, my town". And, in his conversation with Rifat, Zaf tells her that he doesn't wear cowboy gear for the "shock value". "It's for myself, it's like the way I see things," he explains. But he also finds that people are too small-minded to be receptive to his dreams. "This town's too small for us," he proclaims. "This whole shit country's too small." Similarly, when the Honky Tonks are rejected by the record producer, Zaf declares, "I always thought we could duck the punches – but these people got no sense of imagination. Just like the rest of this damn, deadbeat country. We're just brown faces to them".

The British South Asian experience referenced in *Wild West* contrasts the cultural syncretism that Paul Gilroy suggests characterizes black British culture in *There Ain't No Black*

in the Union Jack (Gilroy 155). While Gilroy suggests that black British culture belongs to the African diaspora, in that it draws inspiration from the culture and politics of black American and the Caribbean, he also locates black British cultures squarely in relation to British social relations, such that it isn't possible to "theorize black culture in Britain without developing a new perspective on British culture as a whole" (156). In exploring black culture within the framework of diaspora Gilroy importantly offers "an alternative to the different varieties of absolutism which would confine culture in 'racial', ethnic or natural essences" (155). *Wild West* also imagines an alternative to absolutism, in that the central tension experienced by Zaf is not one of negotiating the "authentic" traditions of South Asia against the "modern" sensibilities of the West. Zaf feels alienated from both of these cultural-national formations. However, while the black British youth Gilroy describes negotiate their liminal positionalities while rooted in the political-cultural-geographic space of Britain, Zaf is always dreaming about being somewhere else. While dreaming/longing of an elsewhere is the affect index of being transnationalized, Zaf can't fathom finding that elsewhere in London or Britain; he locates it in Nashville. He fits in neither the dominant national space nor in the in-between spaces of marginality; his identifications are neither with roots nor with routes, but with routes he has not yet taken.

In theories of diaspora, scholars have emphasized identifications based on metaphors of travel, rather than fixed space (Brah; Clifford; Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Hall, "Cultural Identity"). For instance, as discussed in chapter three, in *Black Atlantic,* Gilroy draws on the metaphor of the slave ship to examine how the "black Atlantic" – or transnational black cultural formations - is constituted. As discussed above, *Wild West* references an experience that is both rootless and routeless. However, it does so by positioning some characters as more authentic or

indigenous in relation to others. For example, when it is clear that they can no longer afford their family home, Zaf's mother decides to head back to Pakistan. She leaves it up to Zaf and his brothers to decide where they want to go, explaining that "I will be with my own kind of people, Zafar. In my true country…I want you to come with me. But I know you will not. You have no true country. We did this to you." Zaf's mother is figured as indigenous[5] – and ultimately as only really belonging in Pakistan - while Zaf and his brothers figure as liminal, hybrid subjects who don't belong anywhere. By constructing the mother as an authentic or traditional subject, with a more or less fixed subject position and identifications, the complexities and hybrid nature of *her* identifications with British and Pakistani nationalisms are erased. In other words, her self-identification as "truly" Pakistani is as vexed and complicated as Zaf's non-identification with a national project. In this way, the film reinforces a binary between diaspora and indigeneity, that Andrea Smith discusses. Smith argues that within studies of diaspora, mestizaje and postcoloniality, the hybridity of the diasporic subject is often measured against an indigenous subject who is configured as immobile, fixed, essential or unchanging. These qualities of the indigenous subjects are contrasted to the fluidity and mixedness of diasporic or mestizo subjects. This binary opposition both erases the ongoing colonial conditions facing Indigenous peoples in settler states, while also making invisible the hybrid experiences of Indigenous subjects ("Queer Theory and Native Studies").

At the same time, the hybrid status of the young men is also perhaps what opens the possibility for a critique of dominant nationalist projects, both British and American. This is demonstrated by the film's parodied portrayal of the "American Dream". While Zaf does not feel

[5] Although Zaf's mother is constructed as indigenous in relation to her diasporic or hybrid sons, it is important to note that this is a literal or symbolic indigeneity; she is not subject to the material circumstances of ongoing colonialism faced by Indigenous peoples in settler colonial contexts.

like he belongs in Southall, he dreams of finding a place for himself in Nashville, where he believes that people will enjoy his music for its quality and won't care about skin colour. For instance, when Zaf attempts to convince manager Jagdeep to send a demo tape to Wild West records, he tells him that "[Wild West] know[s] country music. They ain't gonna pull the prejudice thing on account of us being Pakistani. They'll listen. They'll listen to how we play". Zaf here refers to a conceptualization of country music that is marked by discourses of purity and nostalgia for a simpler time, highlighting his own longing for some sense of rootedness, belonging and attachment to place. The reference is ironic given that the purity and nostalgia associated with country music are not abstract, but specific to a white, often working class, American identity (Mann; Manuel; Nunn). At the same time, it is *because* of its racialization as white that Zaf is able to imagine that country music is a pure or authentic musical form[6]; one of the hallmarks of whiteness is its ability to pass off as the absence of race. As Richard Dyer writes, "white power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular, but also because, when whiteness *qua* whiteness does come into focus, it is often revealed as emptiness, absence, denial or even a kind of death" (Dyer 44).

On another register, Zaf's comments echo a belief in meritocracy – that is, the belief that with hard work and determination, anyone can achieve success – that is one of the hallmarks of the American Dream. However, the film disrupts the promise of the American dream from the outset because Zaf's aspirations are already constructed as impossible, given country music's implicit association with whiteness. To repeat his mother's succinct phrasing, "there are no Pakistani cowboys". Even before learning the outcome of the film, we, the audience, are already

[6] As Erich Nunn shows, country music is not intrinsically white, but has become associated with whiteness in spite of its origins in African-American musical styles.

suspicious that a South Asian country band will "make it big" in the U.S.

(Im)possibilities of Migration?

If there is one way in which *Wild West* is hopeful – or at least ambivalently hopeful - it is at the prospect of being in-motion or in-migration. On the one hand, some of the most joyful moments in the film are spent in transit; however, mobility and transport are also always precarious, under threat, and compromised in the film. For example, Zaf rides home into the sunset on his bicycle on a vast expanse of a road, in an early shot of the film that repeats a common opening shot in many western films. As Philip French observes, in these films, "[t]he location of the westerner in his landscape is a matter of paramount importance, and there are relatively few movies which do not begin with the single man or group of men riding through the countryside" (65). French suggests that in these films, the open land often signifies (the illusion of) freedom, in contrast to the confinement and restriction of the town. *Wild West* also references the association of freedom, cheekily: Zaf's bicycle is flamboyantly decorated (complete with fringed leopard-print banana seat, and a furry tail), and his expression communicates satisfaction, confidence and determination. While in the western film, the camera would focus on the skill and physique of the cowboy on his horse, *Wild West* zooms in on the spectacle of Zaf, on his simple bicycle, decked out in a fringed buckskin jacket, pointed cowboy boots and hat, with a guitar slung over his back. When Zaf enters the city streets again a few scenes later, his bicycle is stolen. The contrast between the liberating bike ride across the empty road, and the restriction on mobility resulting from the theft of his bicycle references the town/country dichotomy of the "traditional" western identified by French.

The antagonists of the film likewise attempt to control the movements of Zaf, Rifat and the Honky Tonks through their access to modes and systems of transport. Though they are not always successful in these attempts, these struggles in the film reveal transport and mobility as a site of power and contest. In other words they establish the link between power, movement and mobility that cultural geographers have written about (Blunt; Cresswell and Merrimen; Massey). As Doreen Massey notes, "[d]ifferent social groups have distinct relationships to…differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (149). At the start of the film, Zaf is employed as a car mechanic at an auto repair shop. The very first shot of the movie is of Zaf's cowboy boots peeking out from underneath a car in the repair shop where he works. In the first place, this scene immediately tells us something about Zaf's class status – he is a blue collar worker, and though cowboy boots may signify the freedom of open country landscapes, he is in fact immobile, positioned underneath a car. When an angry customer ("Ugly Abdul") complains that Zaf has not done a proper job on his car, Zaf retaliates by welding "FUCK YOU" across the car doors. Meanwhile, his brother Ali, a used car dealer, is in trouble with local hooligans, the Tappers, who claim they've been cheated, and trash the cars in Ali's makeshift dealership in retaliation. Similarly, Rifat's abusive husband, who operates a cab company, communicates with his cabbies over the intercom in order to stalk Rifat and get revenge on Zaf. In its attention to both the pleasures and perils of transit, the film problematizes the romanticization of travel found in some articulations of diasporic identity (such as *Indian Cowboy)*. By drawing attention to the instability and often risky nature of migration, the film throws into question the valourization of "routes".

Meanwhile, the pleasurable moments with mobility experienced by the Honky Tonks are often impulsive and impetuous. In one scene, after the Tappers have wreaked havoc on their show, the Honky Tonks steal a cop car, transform it into a convertible, and take it for a joy ride before setting it ablaze. Later, in the penultimate scene of the film, the Honky Tonks are decked out in Hawaiian shirts, getting ready to board the plane for Nashville. The parting shot of the film is of the plane taking off, suggesting that they have finally realized their impossible dream of getting to Nashville. Their pioneering ambition and willingness to risk it all bears echoes of the "Journey" western film plot discussed earlier, in which the journey of the railroad, stagecoach or wagon train is impeded by raiders or Indians (in Lusted 24). The Honky Tonks too "go West" in search of fame and riches. However, they are only able to afford their airfare to the U.S. after having sold their family home in London. Moreover, because transport and mobility has been set up throughout the film as precarious and uncertain, we are left wondering what will become of the Honky Tonks. By poking holes in Zaf's dreams, rather than simply waking up to reality – as Nick does in *Indian Cowboy* - *Wild West* opens the possibility for a critical conversation around diaspora and migration even as it does not explicitly name or recognize settler colonial violence.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Both of the films I have examined in this chapter, *Indian Cowboy* and *Wild West,* play with the images, iconography and themes of the western genre, and include parodied representations of the figure of the cowboy that draw attention to the incommensurability of brown bodies and cowboys. However, they do so in divergent ways. Centralizing the question of colonial violence, my discussion drew attention to how the films' discussions of

(mis)recognition, identity and belonging is the theme of mobility, and how these were indexed through representations of class status, migration, and heterosexual romance. *Indian Cowboy,* a narrative of diasporic success, purposefully plays with the absurdity of a brown cowboy only in order to offer an alternative narrative of belonging and assimilation that is presented as more "real". Ironically, the more "real" narrative accomplishes the work of western genre, in terms of naturalizing settler claims to land, while foreclosing the possibility of hearing Indigenous claims. Meanwhile, *Wild West,* a narrative of diasporic failure, hinges on the impossibility (or difficulty) of realizing dreams of belonging and recognition. There is no alternative offered to the absurdity of the brown cowboy in *Wild West*; the protagonists of the film – Zaf and the Honky Tonks – have no choice but to uncomfortably rest in this liminal space and to wrestle with the consequences. The discomfort of the film, and its (uneven) emphasis of failure, leaves open a space for discussion on questions of migration, recognition, settlement, and the formation of cross-colonial alliances and coalitions.

Within studies of diaspora, it is easy to dismiss the concerns of Indigenous studies as simply different from those of diaspora. It may be easy to suggest that Indigeneity and settler colonialism are simply off the radar of diaspora, or that while there are moments of collision between the two frameworks, they are inherently distinct. However, by centering the question of settler colonialism in this chapter, I have demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case. Whether or not diasporic cultural production includes or references Indigenous subjects or cultures, it is possible to consider their significance in terms of settler colonialism. By tracing settler colonial discourse through the films' use of the western genre, I have offered here a

method for tracing the possibilities for forging alliances and connections, the overlapping spaces of marginalization, and the potential for solidarities amidst complicities.

CONCLUSION

RACIALIZED SUBJECTS, SETTLER COLONIALISM AND FILM

Across North America, colonialism is ongoing. The evidence is wide and far-reaching. Policies such as the *Indian Act* (in Canada) and legal rulings such as *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (in the US) limit and regulate the ability of Indigenous peoples to assert claims to sovereignty and nationhood. Hundreds of Indigenous women across the US and Canada have gone missing or been murdered, as revealed by the work of Indigenous feminist activists in campaigns such as Sisters in Spirit; this is a direct consequence of the gendered nature of colonization (Smith; *Conquest*). In Canada, the Conservative government has refused calls to launch an inquiry into these women's deaths[1]. Indigenous communities experience higher vulnerability to environmental degradation and damage. As articulated by environmental justice organizations such as the Indigenous Environmental Network, the development of the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, which would transport crude oil from the tar sands in Alberta, Canada to refineries in Nebraska, Illinois and Texas in the US, would pass through Native reserves in both countries, and has raised concerns around pollution, water contamination and health impacts (Cardinale).

It is through culture that examples of colonial violence and oppression such as these become normalized as routine, every day and banal. In popular culture, symbols of Indigeneity continue to be subject to appropriation, commodification and exotification.

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[1] Whether this government, or any colonial government, can be trusted to undertake such an inquiry is debatable. However, their refusal to be accountable for these deaths and disappearances reflects a broader refusal to take any responsibility for colonial violence, as summed up in Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's 2009 assertion that Canada has "no history of colonialism" (cited in Ljunggren).

To name just a few examples: American sports teams feature names such as the "Washington Redskins" and "Atlanta Braves"; the 2013 Hollywood film, *Lone Ranger and Tonto,* starred white actor Johnny Depp as a Native man (Tonto) with vague and undeterminable identity, much to the chagrin of Native cultural critics and activists[2]; and dressing up as "cowboys and Indians" remains popular at Halloween and at costume parties. Such cultural practices suggest that Indigenous peoples, lives and experiences are located primarily in the past, or subject to termination. These and other examples demonstrate not only that colonial violence is ongoing, but also point to its profuse, diffuse and structural nature. Settler colonialism is pervasive. It is institutionalized through law, policies and governance; it circulates in every day ways and becomes normalized through culture.

As I have reiterated across this dissertation, racialized subjects occupy an ambiguous place in relation to settler colonialism. While settler colonial power itself is structured through a binary of settler/native (for example, in the realm of the law), neither are these categories so simple or clear cut. Settler society is not uniform. Rather, settler societies are structured through racialized and gendered difference, which remain a key means through which colonialism is managed and regulated. Racialized, or non-white subjects are a part of the social, cultural and political fabric of settler society, but, as my discussion of diasporic westerns demonstrated, their investments in settler colonialism are not straightforward. My analysis of black westerns, Jackie Chan's *Shanghai* films, and South Asian diasporic films, points to the ways that racialized subjects both

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[2] See, for instance, cultural critic Adrienne Keene's take on *Lone Ranger:* http://nativeappropriations.com/2013/07/i-saw-the-lone-ranger-so-you-dont-have-to.html

participate in and challenge settler colonial cultural politics in complex, ambiguous and contradictory ways. My critique of the films, which have primarily been interpreted through the lens of "race", emphasized their settler colonial dimensions by paying attention to their representations of the constitutive elements of settler colonial cultures, which I termed heterocolonialities – the fantasies of "settling down", property ownership, family and heterosexual romance.

For instance, the chapter on black westerns discussed efforts to indigenize African American identities through representations of black cowboys in the American West in *Harlem Rides the Range, Thomasine and Bushrod,* and *Posse*. These indigenization moves were accomplished in the films with recourse to normative ideas about masculinity, relationships to land and property ownership, Indigenous women, and settling down. Placing transnational black studies in conversation with settler colonial and Indigenous studies, I argued that these indigenizing moves collectively erased and displaced Indigenous claims to land, even as these claims were (often) referenced and celebrated.

In my discussion of Jackie Chan's *Shanghai Noon* and *Shanghai Knights*, I analyzed how Chan's fish-out-of-water premise, which poked fun at the western genre's conventions, reinterpreted colonial violence as cultural confusion, thereby naturalizing the settler colonial logic underpinning the genre. The chapter argued that the significance of this cultural confusion is most clearly observed in the films' romance plots, wherein Chan's character, Chon Wang – true to both the conventions of the western, and to the representational politics that feminize Asian men within popular culture – remains a lone

cowboy, but facilitates the union between his buddy Roy O'Bannon (Owen Wilson), and Native and Asian women, whose bodies symbolize colonized land.

Finally, the last chapter, on South Asian diaspora films, investigated the politics of failure and success underpinning the films *Wild West* and *Indian Cowboy.* I drew upon discussions of critical queer futurities in order to analyze how possibilities for a critique of settler colonialism in the films were alternately opened or foreclosed. I looked at how, in *Indian Cowboy,* the figure of the cowboy and elements of the western genre constructed a success story about South Asian American assimilation told through narratives of multiculturalism, heteronormativity and limitless travel. Correspondingly, I examined how *Wild West's* narratives of the failed assimilation of racialized subjects could productively intersect with projects critiquing settler colonialism, and in support of decolonization. I suggested that *Wild West*'s narrative of failure left open a possibility for solidarity with Indigenous decolonization that was foreclosed by *Indian Cowboy'*s narrative of assimilatory success.

Collectively, the discussion and analysis across this dissertation demonstrate the significance of taking seriously settler colonialism as a logic structuring the representation of race in film and culture. As I emphasized in the introduction, settler colonialism cannot only be understood as framework of racialized oppression framing representations of Indigenous peoples; it is also a significant context shaping the representation of all racialized subjects. Conversely, the dissertation also demonstrated that discussions of settler colonialism and Indigeneity must take racialized and gendered difference seriously; race, gender and sexuality structure and regulate settler colonialism.

My methodological emphasis on tracing heterocolonialities, which examined how race, heteronormativity, patriarchy and colonization work in collaboration with one another, demonstrated how such an intersectional approach might be operationalized.

In the context of the ongoing colonial violence referenced at the start of this conclusion, attention to these intricacies of the machinations of settler colonial power may illuminate the multiple sites, discourses and logics through which it works. Crucially, this may expose and reveal new possibilities for critiquing and dismantling settler colonialism that work alongside existing and ongoing efforts of Indigenous peoples and allies to imagine decolonial futures.

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