

“WE’LL SAIL LIKE COLUMBUS”:  
RACE, INDIGENEITY, SETTLER COLONIALISM,  
AND THE MAKING OF SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORAS IN CANADA

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

JUNE, 2016

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation is an interrogation of colonial and racial formations in the making of white settler states. Through an intersectional and transnational exploration of proximities between South Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada, the dissertation unravels South Asian complicities in ongoing processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands. Theorizing “pernicious continuities”—overlapping experiences of racism and colonialism between Indigenous peoples and South Asians—the dissertation studies complexities, complicities, and incommensurabilities in the making of racialized diasporas. However, it argues that varying loci of power and privilege render these complicities ambiguous, entwined, and invisible. Deploying traces as a methodological tool to study settler colonial processes, the dissertation explores the intersections of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Further, while anti-Native racism has its own genealogies in settler societies, these grammars of anti-Native racism function in relation to processes of casteism, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and border making in the making of “model” South Asian diasporas.

The dissertation draws from varying theoretical frameworks and research in Vancouver, British Columbia and Fort McMurray, Alberta. It looks at three sites of resource extraction—logging and canneries in British Columbia in the 1970s-90s and tar sands in Alberta presently—as spaces of simultaneous dispossession of Indigenous peoples and racialized, gendered, and casted labour formations. In addition, the dissertation also conceptualizes “colonial intimacies” to trace desires between differently racialized and colonized peoples within settler colonial states. It uses multiple qualitative methods, including interviews with community members, activists and academics; oral histories of South Asian migrants; ethnographic methods; archival research; and analysis of literary and visual texts, and events. It also employs storytelling, prose,

and semi-autobiographical writing methods. Overall, the dissertation centres Indigenous calls for resurgence and decolonization in theorizing racialized diasporic formations in white settler states.

## **Dedication**

For

Jiji, Babuji, Naniji, and Nanaji

## Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been a humbling, learning, and transformative experience. This section of the dissertation, perhaps, is the hardest to write, and the one that I have dreaded the most. Over the years, I have wondered how I would begin this section, who would I acknowledge, who would I not acknowledge, who would invariably be left out, and if I can actually put in words to express my gratitude. To acknowledge people, I have to acknowledge the journey. I may have reached the end in some ways, but I don't know where the journey began. There is no one starting point. It would have been easier if I could demarcate my life between academic, professional, personal, and political commitments. In absence of that, this project has been my life in more than one ways, even as I have sustained myself by continuously attempting to find a life outside of the academy. This dissertation is a culmination of my nine-year relationship with York. One thing that York has taught me well is that everything is political. Even as I acknowledge this acknowledgement is political, I am bounded by the limitation of words. I am very conscious of the people I will forget to name here. I hope that those people whose names are left out know how much I value them in my life.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge Indigenous nations and peoples who have protected, and continue to protect, the stolen lands. Teh-dil-shukriyas for your generosity and hospitality for sharing your lands with non-Indigenous peoples. This dissertation is an attempt to express my solidarity with Indigenous struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. Each word in this dissertation is dedicated to the work Indigenous peoples and nations do towards the decolonization of these lands. I also want to acknowledge my gratitude to all South Asians, who despite all odds, have made Canada their home. I am thankful for everyone who spoke to me in Fort McMurray and Vancouver. Even as I theorize our complicities in settler colonialism, I

continue to learn so much from your stories, histories, and struggles. The presence of all racialized communities, and their resilience, on these lands is a daily reminder that we are connected to Indigenous struggles through shared colonial and racial continuities.

At York University, I would not have survived graduate school without the unconditional support and guidance from my supervisor, Shobna Nijhawan. Even though we have worked together on this dissertation for a very short time, she has truly pushed me to bring the best out of me. I am also in awe of the way Shobna has been an advocate for me and my project. She has not only restored my faith in the academy through her generosity, critical insight, and openness, but Shobna has inspired me to reimagine the academy as a place where it is possible to nurture love and respect in co-existence with critical thinking. My dissertation committee members, Bonita Lawrence and Ananya Mukherjee-Reed, have seen this project through its inception. They have stood by me against many odds and I am grateful for their tireless support. This project was born through many critical conversations with Bonita in her graduate seminar. Even as the project has changed many times, I have always been humbled by Bonita's invaluable encouragement and rigorous engagement at each step of the project. The project has been deeply shaped by her constructive and thoughtful interventions. Ananya held me through several critical moments in my academic life and her unfailing faith in me has allowed me to reach where I am today. Her precise and practical mediations have been foundational in shaping the project. I am also very thankful to the dissertation examining committee members, Jodi Byrd, Enakshi Dua, and Lily Cho for their critical and productive engagement with my work. Their confidence in my work will be instrumental in shaping the project going forward.

Fraser MacPherson and Nadia Hasan have read and re-read multiple drafts of each and everything that I have written. They are my first and last readers, supporters, and critics. Without

their constant and continued labour, I would have struggled to reach this stage. Also, I offer many, many shukriyas to Özlem Aslan, Kamal Arora, Alannah Johnson, Prasad Khanolkar, Sailaja Krishnamurti, Shaista Patel, Omme Salma Rahemtullah, Meghana Rao, Melanie Richter-Montepetit, Tina Virmani, Harshita Yalamarty, and Nikki Yeboah, for reading and engaging my work over the years. They all have been my primary internal and external committees. Thank you for holding me, always.

Kamala Kempadoo, Mona Oikawa, and Jin Haritaworn have been involved in various stages of this project and have given me pertinent and invaluable support. I have also deeply benefited with the many critical conversations with Gamal Abdel-Shehid, Andil Gosine, Eve Haque, Arun Mukherjee, Michael Nijhawan, Linda Peake, Stephanie Ross, and Mark Thomas. Outside of York, without the tremendous support given by Rita Dhamoon and Richa Nagar, this project would not have reached completion. In their own ways, their mentorship and love has not only foundationally impacted my scholarship, but also has taught me that the academy can be a space for fostering feminist friendships, respect, and solidarity. Hokulani Aikau, Shefali Chandra, Brian Chung, Monisha Das Gupta, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Nhu Le, Scott Morgensen, Saadia Toor, Kamala Visveswaran, and Lee Ann Wang have all, in different ways, have given me the motivation and encouragement to produce scholarship that is emotionally, ethically, and politically grounded.

Through the course of the project, I have been fortunate to present and publish my work in different avenues. Publishing, and most importantly collaborating, has been very important to find methods to express myself in collective, political, and nurturing ways. In addition to those mentioned above, I also want to thank Michael C. Jackman, Ghaida Moussa, Paulo Ravecca, and Begüm Uzun, for our different collaborations. I am grateful for *Sikh Formations* and *Feral*

*Feminisms* to provide opportunities to guest edit their special issues. In addition, it has been an honor to be published in *Feminist Studies*, *Jindal Global Law Review*, and *Women's Studies Quarterly*, and to be part of other edited anthologies.

Sharing my work at Sikh Studies Forum and with Shobna Nijhawan's graduate students were both crucial learning experiences. Presenting at academic conferences in Honolulu (2015), Kolkata (2012), Montreal (2011), New York (2013), Ottawa (2011), Oxford (2012), and Victoria (2014), has invaluable shaped my work. I have also benefited from presenting my work at academic association conferences, including Canadian Sociological Association (2011), Critical Race and Anti-Colonial Studies Conference (2014), Association Asian American Studies (2012, 2013 & 2015), Critical Ethnic Studies Association (2013 & 2015), Native America and Indigenous Studies Association (2015), Annual Conference on South Asia (2015), and American Studies Association (2015). Of course, sharing my work in spaces created by South Asia Research Group (SARG) has continued to provide me with the catalyst and impetus needed to write a dissertation. While it is impossible to name everyone I have engaged with, and learned from, I am very thankful for each and every conversation I have had in these spaces.

Sharing my work through teaching has also been a treasurable experience. I always keep my students in mind while writing, because it is through them that I learn the most about epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy. My students, over the years, in *Introduction to South Asian Studies* have been the most critical and relentless audience of my work. I have learned a lot from co-teaching the course with Nadia Hasan, Anindo Hazra, Sailaja Krishnamurti, Ananya Mukherjee-Reed, and Arun Mukherjee. I am also grateful to Srabani Maitra and Shobhna Nijhawan for welcoming me to their classrooms to share my work.

SARG has been my first and foremost home in the academy. The critical community support has sustained me over the years; enduring the academy without SARG seems like an impossible task. Engagements and collaborations with undergraduate students in United South Asians at York (USAY), OPIRG-York, Racism Watch York, and Women Against Occupation and War, have made the academy politically exciting and viable. Social and Political Thought (SPT), York Centre for Asian Research (YCAR), and CUPE 3903, have provided key resources to survive my time at York as well. Support from Judith Hawley, Alicia Filipowich, Raj Virk, and Shiela Wilmot has been indispensable and often life-saving. I am also thankful for the Ontario Graduate Scholarship, the Hari Sharma Foundation, and the travel grants from the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the York Graduate Student's Union, CUPE 3903, and YCAR.

In Fort McMurray, my friends SS and AS were the perfect hosts. They opened their home and lives for me even when they knew quite well what I was there for. I can never thank them enough. I am also grateful to CG for introducing me to your network of friends. In Vancouver, the city which charmed me with its nature and people, I was fortunate to learn first hand about the city and its radical and political history from Khalilah Alwani, Satwinder Bains, Chin Bannerji, Sadhu Binning, Davina Bhandar, Paul Binning, Elder Larry Grant, Harjap Grewal, Lily Grewal, Fatima Jaffer, Bindy Kaur Kang-Dhillon, Janey Lew, Eli Manning, Ashok Mathur, Renisa Mawani, Isaac Oommen, Summer Pervez Sultan, Imtiaz Poppat, Gurpreet Singh, Milan Singh, Sohan Singh Pooni, Harsha Walia, and Rita Wong. Many of these people, I call friends now and am forever indebted to making me fall in love the Vancouver. I am thankful to Sadhu Binning for pointing me towards his story "Eyes in the Dark," as well as for the many conversations we have had over the years. I am also grateful to Kiran Sunar and Tomson Highway for pointing me towards Highway's story "The Lover's Snake."

In addition, I want to thank the following people for their friendships over the years. They each deserve multiple lines of their own; I only hope they all know how important they are to me. Rajesh Ahuja, Dheeman Bhattacharyya, Kavita Bissoondial, Jesika J. Cameron, Santhosh Chandrashekar, Sabina Chatterjee, Sonny Dhoot, Sanchia DeSouza, Rinchen Dolma, Curt Gambetta, Aaron R. George, Bikrum Gill, Ravinder Gill, Ankush Gupta, Beenash Jafari, Amardeep Kaur, Akta Kaushal, Kareem Khubchandani, Dai Kojima, Saptarshi Mandal, Jan Mendes, Sara Mir, Aphiraa Nirmalarajah, Charvaak Pati, Graham Potts, Jen Preston, Deepa Rakjumar, Nedra Rodrigo, Marcela L. Rojas, Emily Rosser, Simran K. Saini, Saad Sayeed, Radha Shah, Ritika Shrimali, Balbir K. Singh, Preethy Sivakumar, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Tania Tabar, Anu Radha Varma, Sinthujan Varatharajah, and Eve Yeboah.

I have dedicated this dissertation to my grandparents. A lot that I understand about politics, complexities, and contradictions is through intimately learning about their lives, struggles, and privileges. Babuji passed away during the course of writing the dissertation. His relentless confidence in me was a tremendous source of power in my life. I wish he was here to read the final dissertation. My cousin, Shilpi Rajoria, has been an immense source of strength and gossip in my life, both traits I deeply admire. My brother, Chitrank, and I have had our fair share of troubles, and even though we lose touch every now and then, he is the pillar that keeps me grounded. Through the years, my parents, Saroj and Vrajindra, have believed in me, critiqued me, and held me, even when often I position myself as a confrontation to their lives. They have shown me what unlimited and unconditional love looks like in praxis. I am thankful to them everyday of my life.

Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Fraser MacPherson. His intellectual, political, and emotional support has sustained me, fed me, held me, and loved me. In more than one way,

he has taught me the foundational skills required to finish the dissertation: think critically, engage politically, write ethically, use “the”, drink coffee, eat fruits, dream unapologetically, and love fearlessly. Shukriya.

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## Introduction: Indians on Indian Lands

Yo I'm an Indian, from all directions  
From the west to the east

...

On the track with a dot and a feather  
Y'all white, we not, we better

...

Wherever the fuck a motherfucker stands  
Red Woods to the New York Islands  
What up to the White man  
You aight, but ain't your motherfucking land

- *"Indian From All Directions"* by *A Tribe Called Red, Das Racist, and Kool A.D. (2013)*

in a bank line  
the bank of a canadian province  
that still has new in its name  
a teller unable to understand a co-worker's accent  
says speak english  
you're in canada now

the language beneath the fingernails  
in the corners of your eyes  
when you wake wiped away by tip of little finger  
how do i begin to explain  
there is something i need to say  
and i don't know how to say it  
this new language has no words  
for these ceremonies  
for these spirits  
for this land

speak cree you're in canada now  
speak siouan  
speak salishan

- *"Collective Amnesia"* by *Rajinderpal S. Pal (1998: 21)*

I spent the summer of 2014 conducting fieldwork in Unceded Coast Salish Territories, known in settler cartographies as Vancouver, British Columbia. The year 2014 marked the centenary of the *Komagata Maru* incident—where the ship *Komagata Maru* carrying 376 South Asian migrants was denied entry to the Canadian shores.<sup>1</sup> During my stay, I attended several events commemorating the centenary in Vancouver, Surrey, and Victoria. These commemorations ranged from art events, academic workshops, talks, community gatherings, and rallies. These events are important as they keep the memories of past injustices alive, and give the imperative to continue fighting for social justice. In May 2014, I attended one such event in Vancouver; a gala organized by the Komagata Maru Heritage Foundation (KMHF) and hosted at the Musqueam Cultural Center by the Musqueam Indian Band located on the reserve.<sup>2</sup> By challenging the colonial and racial logics of the Canadian settler state, this historic gathering offered alternate historical and contemporary narratives to the injustices of the *Komagata Maru* incident by welcoming South Asians to the Musqueam territories.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1910 the Dominion of Canada changed Canada's Immigration Act that required all migrants to arrive to Canada only through a "continuous journey." After the discontinuance of a shipping line from Calcutta to Vancouver, under the new amendments South Asians could no longer travel to Canada directly. Gurdit Singh organized the *Komagata Maru*'s voyage, a Japanese steamship, challenging Canada's racial exclusion. Claiming themselves to be "imperial citizens" the 376 passengers abroad demanded the same rights as their white counterparts within the British empire. However, the *Komagata Maru* was denied entry for two months, and made to dock offshore under arduous conditions. The ship was made to sail back to India. Upon its arrival in India, the ship met with violence from the colonial state. Many passengers were killed or injured as they resisted forceful detention and police violence. This incident is known as the Budge Budge Massacre. For more on the history of the *Komagata Maru*, see: Bains et al.; Banerjee; Buchignani, Indra, and Srivastava; Dhamoon, "Unmooring the Komagata Maru"; Dua, "Towards Theorizing the Connections"; Kazimi, *Continuous Journey*; Kazimi, *Undesirables*; Mawani, "Specters of Indigeneity in British-Indian Migration, 1914"; Somani; and Srikanth.

<sup>2</sup> Musqueam Indian Band is the only First Nations Band whose reserve territories lie within the City of Vancouver boundaries. In 2010, the Band was the First Nations host for the Winter Olympics. The Cultural Centre was in fact one of the Olympics Pavilions (Jordon). Musqueam lands in South Vancouver are one of the most expensive and desirable neighborhoods in Vancouver ("Home Owners Take Musqueam Band"). The Band has leased properties for a golf course and residential housing. Negotiating rents for these properties have always been controversial because of the state's interference in Band's rights over the lands. The stark economic disparity between the Indigenous residential parts of the reserves and the non-Indigenous residential parts is hard to miss. It was indeed very significant to hold the *Komagata Maru* event on the reserve territories.

At the gathering, Musqueam elder Larry Grant welcomed South Asians and asserted that the ship would not have been turned away if the Musqueam nation had sovereignty over their own lands in 1914. He recounted how Indigenous peoples had welcomed the Spanish, British, and French into their territories but these visitors became the colonizers; they occupied Indigenous lands and imposed their borders on Indigenous peoples as well as people of colour. Grant proclaimed that the Musqueam nation would have not only welcomed the passengers aboard the *Komagata Maru* but would have also shared the lands and resources with them. His nephew, Wade Grant, Master of Ceremonies for the night, further welcomed the guests and spoke about the pain that has been passed through generations in both Indigenous and South Asian communities through the shared histories of racism and colonialism. He asserted the need for both communities to learn each other's histories and forge critical solidarities with each other to challenge the white settler state.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, this was a very important gathering as it brought together South Asians and Indigenous peoples under the same roof to talk about shared violences and legacies of colonialism and white supremacy. The gathering sought to shift South Asian understandings and experiences of racial exclusion and violences within the Canadian state and foster critical solidarities between the two communities. While significant in many aspects, the event still had many shortcomings. The gathering, inevitably, reproduced the settler logics that it intended to challenge and disrupt. The gathering was predominantly attended by South Asians (mostly Sikhs/Punjabis). Indigenous peoples were mostly missing, and limited to one table in over

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<sup>3</sup> Chief Ron George (then-President of the United Native Nations) had expressed similar solidarity at the 75<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the *Komagata Maru* in 1989: "The 22,000 members of the United Native Nations Society of British Columbia join the *Komagata Maru Historical Society* and its members in remembrance of one of the truly sad chapters in Canadian history. Had our own ancestors not been laboring under great injustices at the time the *Komagata Maru* was anchored off in Vancouver, we would have cried out against the injustices and welcomed the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* to the shores of Canada" (qtd. in *Komagata Maru Historical Society* 2).

twenty-five tables. Indigenous presence was rendered either symbolic to play the “Native” for the Indian. For instance, upon entering the guests were greeted by two South Asian women on one side and Canada Post<sup>4</sup> staff on the other side. The only Native person was the photographer. During cocktails the only “visible” Indigenous people in the space were serving samosas, pakoras, and drinks to the guests. After the cocktails, guests were taken to the dining room in a procession led by Musqueam singers in their traditional dresses. The singers continued to sing as the guests “settled” into their seats. Only a few people (mostly Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous solidarity activists) stood as the ceremony was being performed, while others started eating the samosas laid out on the table for them. Many of the guests would probably not have taken part in ceremonies conducted by Indigenous peoples and were unlikely to understand the cultural protocol, but the moment of settling into their seats echoed South Asian patterns of migration. As the Native singers exited the room singing, the seated audiences gave them a few rounds of applause. That particular moment was striking as the seated South Asians in their formal best clapped for the exiting Indigenous singers in their traditional dresses—perhaps the guests wanted to acknowledge the authenticity and be thankful for their “multicultural” evening on an “exotic” Indian reserve? Given the event was first of its kind, many South Asians would be unfamiliar with how to engage with Indigenous peoples outside the white-centric multicultural performativities. The flattening of the Indigenous performances into a multicultural script,<sup>5</sup> replicates the broader settler logics of the state.

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<sup>4</sup> Canada Post released a stamp commemorating 100 years of *Komagata Maru* at the gathering.

<sup>5</sup> I draw on critical race and Indigenous critiques of multiculturalism in Canada and other white settler states. Multicultural policies have been critiqued for maintaining the racial and colonial status quo in Canada by displacing critiques of race and colonialism with the discourses of culture and celebration of diversity. It has reduced racial violence to cultural artifacts of food, dance, music and festivals. In fact, multiculturalism has been adopted by the Canadian state to maintain its whiteness and illegal claims to Indigenous lands. For instance, Jodi Byrd notes: “the current multicultural settler colonialism that provides the foundation for U.S. participatory democracy [needs to be] understood as precisely that—the colonization of indigenous peoples and lands by force” (xx). Further, scholars note how multiculturalism was a tool to attract immigrants as labour for the growing Canadian economy. Thus,

The ceremony was followed by thoughtful welcoming notes by Elder Larry Grant and Wade Grant. The welcome notes were followed by a series of speeches by mostly South Asian men—political party representatives, community leaders, and celebrities.<sup>6</sup> Most speeches framed racism against South Asians in Canada in the past, while the present was constructed as racism-free. Speakers celebrated the fact that over the last century South Asians are now part of the mainstream, and have been embraced by the Canadian society. *Komagata Maru* was the past and multiculturalism is the present. While few speakers acknowledged Musqueam and other Coast Salish peoples, past and ongoing occupation of Indigenous lands and the need for critical alliances between South Asians and Indigenous peoples, the majority of the speakers spoke mostly about the legacies of *Komagata Maru* and Canada’s racist past. Even when speakers mentioned colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands, it was mostly within the list of different examples of racial exclusion within the Canadian state,<sup>7</sup> equating the violences of residential schools<sup>8</sup> with *Komagata Maru*, Chinese Head Tax,<sup>9</sup> and Japanese internment.<sup>10</sup> Conflation of these violences effaces colonization of Indigenous nations and renders them as one of the many

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multiculturalism has been used the state as a nationalist tool to serve its racial, colonial and capitalist interests. Challenging the idea that multicultural nations are immigrant nations, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that “settlers are not immigrants ... settler nations are not immigrant nations” (6-7). For these reasons, I do not ground my critiques of the Canadian state in or through multiculturalism. Instead, I use the critiques of settler colonialism to theorize Canada. On critiques of multiculturalism, see: Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*; Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*; Bannerji, *Dark Side of the Nation*; Bannerji, “Returning the Gaze”; Bilge, “Mapping Québécois Sexual Nationalism”; Byrd; Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire,” *Red Skin, White Masks*; Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*; Dua, *Scratching the Surface*; Goeman, “Flirtations at the Foundations”; Hage, *White Nation*; Haque, *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework*; Jafri, “Racial Legitimations”; Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism”; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*; and Walcott, *Black like Who?*

<sup>6</sup> With the exception of one Chinese-Canadian historian and Canada Post’s white representatives.

<sup>7</sup> Missing from this narrative was the systematic xenophobic exclusion of Black and African peoples. I expand on anti-black racism in Chapter 1.

<sup>8</sup> On the history of residential schools and state apology, see: Campbell; Churchill; Fontaine; and Sellars.

<sup>9</sup> On the history of the Chinese head tax and redressal, see: Chan; Cho, “Rereading Chinese Head Tax”; Cho, “Intimacy among Strangers”; and Mawani, “Cleansing the Conscience,”

<sup>10</sup> On the history of Japanese internment camps and redressal, see: Day, “Alien Intimacies”; McAllister, “Archive and Myth”; McAllister, *Terrain of Memory*; Oikawa, “Connecting the Internment”; and Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence*.

ethnic communities seeking recognition, rights, and justice from the “benevolent” nation-state.<sup>11</sup>

The first half of the event was followed by a South Asian, rather north-Indian, dinner of tandoori chicken, gobi masala, roti and chicken chawal, served by the Native staff. The dinner was followed by more speeches by South Asian men (with the exception of one woman) and performances by Punjabi artists.

The gathering was promoted as a reenactment of what would have happened had the *Komagata Maru* come to the Musqueam nation as a way to forge alliances between South Asians and Musqueam peoples. While the intentions were in the right place, the event failed to nurture ethical alliances. It remained a South Asian gathering for South Asians, with a little multicultural flavor “served” by the Musqueam peoples on Musqueam reserve. Indigeneity worked within the parameters already defined by the settler state, as “gracious” hosts, “cultural” performers, “invisible” labour, and multicultural tokens. South Asians, on the other hand, were the “model minorities” and “minority exceptional” in their formal best who could remember the racial violences of the past, situate themselves as a community which has made it to the mainstream now, which can celebrate a stamp release, and eat their own food.<sup>12</sup> Indigeneity, thus, was a

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<sup>11</sup> Several Indigenous scholars point out that colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands is not the same as racialization of people of colour (for instance: Amaduahy and Lawrence; Barker; Byrd; Kauanui; Lawrence and Dua; Trask; and Tuck and Yang). The white settler state is produced and maintained through past and ongoing processes of colonialism and exclusion of racial others in the state. Yet these two processes are not similar and should not be conflated. I offer a critique of such articulations of shared racial violences in Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup> My analysis of the KMHF event above deploys a critique of model minority exceptionalism of South Asians, particularly Sikhs, in Canada. Parallels of Sikh exceptionalism and belonging to Canada can be drawn to Sikh cabinet ministers in Trudeau’s federal government. Furthermore, examples of Herb Dhaliwal and Ujjal Dosanjh, two Sikh political leaders, and their engagements with Indigenous peoples are very telling of South Asian complicities in Canada’s colonial project. In 1995, after becoming the Attorney-General of B.C., Dosanjh deployed the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) against Indigenous people at Gustafsen Lake, B.C. The army was sent by Dosanjh to stop Indigenous peoples conducting religious ceremony at the Lake, a site occupied by Indigenous peoples in defense of the unceded lands. In a conflict between the Burnt Church First Nation and non-Indigenous fisheries in New Brunswick over fishing rights, between 1999 and 2002, the then federal Fisheries Minister Herb Dhaliwal sided with the fisheries against Indigenous rights to catch fish. Both Dosanjh and Dhaliwal actively criminalized Indigenous assertions for sovereignty and self-determination. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I share these instances of active South Asian participation in colonization to illustrate making of racialized complicities of South Asian on stolen lands. I discuss “model minority” constructs of South Asian labour in Canada specifically vis-à-vis logics of anti-Native racism and anti-Black racism in Chapter 5. The dissertation,

multicultural-consumable-product of the night. Indigeneity was supposed to entertain, serve, and do the political work of alliance-building. The event demonstrates how, for racialized communities, being in solidarity with Indigenous communities and resisting the white settler state is complex, complicit, and often contradictory.

I begin this dissertation, *“We’ll Sail Like Columbus”: Race, Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and the Making of South Asian Diasporas in Canada*<sup>13</sup> with the analysis of the commemoration gala to illustrate the complexities and complicities of South Asian diasporic formations on stolen Indigenous lands,<sup>14</sup> commonly known as Canada. The colonial and racial dynamics of the event narrate the story of Canada and the presence of South Asians in Canada. Spatial and temporal logics, and racial hierarchies, point to how the lexicons of solidarity need to be reframed and unsettled. *Komagata Maru* not only tells us the histories and legacies of colonialism in South Asia and past and ongoing racialization of South Asians in Canada. It also narrates the history and making of the empire through the colonial pasts and presents of Indigenous nations and peoples. The centenary is not an occasion for celebration of South Asians in Canada, nor it is just a remembrance of how racist the Canadian state was in the past, but rather it is a critical moment to remember past and ongoing processes of colonialism and white supremacy. It is a reminder to forge critical solidarities with other racialized and colonized communities instead of claiming belonging and “model minority” status to the Canadian state.

*Komagata Maru* is not just “a moment” of racial exclusion in Canada’s history.

Challenging limited conceptualizations of historical racial violences, Larissa Lai suggests we

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however, does not provide an overview of varying “model minority” archetypes in the making of the South Asian diasporas in Canada.

<sup>13</sup> The title is taken from Ang Lee’s movie *Life of Pi* (2012). I elaborate on the title on page 10.

<sup>14</sup> Indigenous people see colonization of their lands as a theft by European settlers, hence “stolen” is often used as a descriptor for colonization and dispossession.

read histories of “Asian exclusion” as “recognition of the illegitimacy of European colonialism in the Americas” (18).<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Sherene Razack, Malinda Smith, and Sunera Thobani argue: “the realities of racism we now confront in Canada must be linked to the white settler colonial project in which we find ourselves” (2). Indeed, they ask “How can we theorize our “place,” when the place itself is stolen?” (2). More recently, there have been many such critical readings of the *Komagata Maru*. Theorizing the regulation of South Asian migrants to Canada in the early twentieth century, Ena Dua demonstrates how mechanisms of Canadian citizenship have always been racialized to keep the settler-state white (“Towards Theorizing the Connections”). Further, her work illustrates how in claiming their rights as British subjects, South Asians invariably posited themselves as colonialists in Canada; thus, asserting settlerness, albeit limitedly, in the colonization of Indigenous peoples.

Renisa Mawani demonstrates how the effects of the ship’s (failed) journey were seen across the British Empire. “Specters of indigeneity,” Mawani argues, “shaped discussions and informed legal and political responses to the exigencies of Indian migration in the present and future” (“Specters of Indigeneity” 371-72). Indigeneity was deployed in different ways by the Empire and South Asians, although never on the terms of Indigenous peoples themselves, to their own advantages in the struggle over the ship’s journey. Grounding indigeneity, Rita K.

Dhamoon, argues to unmoor the *Komagata Maru*:

... by locating its passage through past and present colonial cacophonies that constitute Canada as a settler nation, rather than approaching the *Komagata Maru* as a story of past South Asian exclusion or a historical story of colonialism from afar. (“Unmooring the Komagata Maru” 2)

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<sup>15</sup> Lai further argues: “One might even read a buried desire in white subjectivity for whites’ own expulsion, projected on to those it deems its others. To enact such an expulsion ritually functions to reproduce white legitimacy, but only as a return of the repressed” (18).

Dhamoon reminds us that the *Komagata Maru* has to be seen within the settler colonial logics of the state, “to secure and naturalize different manifestations of settler governmentality” (21). Unmooring the *Komagata Maru* centers past and ongoing colonial and racial formations,<sup>16</sup> connecting ongoing Indigenous struggles against the settler state and South Asian struggles against racial exclusion, and seeks to unsettle the Canadian state. Theorizing colonial and racial taxonomies in the making of *Komagata Maru* allows us to rupture the linearity of time, and brings to light the continuities of these violences.

*Komagata Maru* was not an isolated event in the past, but rather it establishes itself in contemporary everyday racial and colonial logics. For instance, more recently the *Ocean Lady* and *MV Sun Sea* carrying Tamil migrants faced similar racist exclusions on the same shores as the *Komagata Maru* (Cader; Hasan et al.; Krishnamurti “Queue-jumpers, terrorists, breeders”). In 2009, the *Ocean Lady* arrived with 76 Tamil migrants fleeing genocide in Sri Lanka; they were all detained on arrival. Similarly, the *MV Sun Sea* arrived in Vancouver carrying 492 Tamil refugees in August 2010; all on board were immediately imprisoned. The passengers on both ships were fleeing genocidal violence against Tamil people during Sri Lanka’s “war” against Tamils fighting for the self-determination of Eelam Tamil. They arrived in Canada with the intention of claiming refugee status, instead they were all detained. They were labelled “terrorists,” “illegal,” “irregular,” “trafficked,” and “smuggled” peoples. Thus, Canada continues to impose “border imperialist” (Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*) racial exclusions against people of colour on stolen Indigenous lands.<sup>17</sup> Without an understanding of original and ongoing

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<sup>16</sup> For more on racial formations, see HoSang, LaBennett and Pulido; Omi and Winant.

<sup>17</sup> Eelam Tamil refugees were treated in similar, sometimes even more violent ways, by the Australian settler state. However, it should be noted that Indigenous peoples welcomed Tamil refugees in Australia by giving them Aboriginal passports in a symbolic gesture (“Aboriginal Passports Issued to Asylum Seekers”). Similarly, in Canada many Indigenous communities have welcomed Syrian refugees (Dormer; “Syrian Refugees Welcomed”). Much like the example of Musqueam nation welcoming the *Komagata Maru*, these examples are very significant, as they

processes of colonialism in Canada, any theorization of racial exclusion of peoples of colour is inaccurate and incomplete. Continued exclusion of racialized communities, and their simultaneous inclusion and integration,<sup>18</sup> over the last century has only been made possible through dispossessing, displacing, colonizing, and sometimes killing Indigenous nations.

The title of the dissertation, “We’ll sail like Columbus,” is taken from Ang Lee's feature film *Life of Pi* (2012).<sup>19</sup> The film revolves around Piscine Molitor “Pi” Patel’s journey from India to Canada; on which he survives a shipwreck and the rest of his family dies. In India, Pi’s family runs a zoo. His father decides to close the zoo and intends to sell the animals in North America and move to Winnipeg. While announcing his decision to the family, the father says, “We’ll sail like Columbus.” Pi, is quick to point the ironies in the fact that Columbus intended to sail to India and not the Americas, so why would the family sail to Canada like Columbus. However, the bigger irony in Pi’s father’s statement lies in the Indian aspirations to be Columbus in the Americas. It draws attention to the fact that for many South Asians and other racialized communities, Canada and the U.S. are the lands of dreams and desires. These lands offer opportunities of better, richer, and free(r) lives. The desire to be away from violences, oppression, and misery at home are the real factors behind migration for many, but for others the desires and migrations are manifestations of their privileges (economic, social, cultural, and otherwise).

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demonstrate Indigenous nations claiming sovereignty of their lands and welcoming communities of colour to their lands when the settler states impose arbitrary violent borders on refugees and other precarious migrants.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, South Asians were given voting rights in Canada in 1947, whereas Indigenous peoples were given the right only in 1960. Further, Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta show how Indian Affairs was placed within the Department of Citizenship and Immigration between 1950-66. They demonstrate how the settler state treated Indigenous peoples as “immigrants too,” and Indigenous peoples and new immigrants were targeted through similar “Canadianization” programs.

<sup>19</sup> The film is adapted from Yann Martel's book *Life of Pi*. The film script was written by David Magee.

Those aboard the *Komagata Maru* also had similar desires. As “economic migrants” and subjects of the British empire, many of them had fought for the colonial army, some sought a better life in the land of opportunities, others perhaps sought a life away from colonial violences (Kazimi). Since 1914, many South Asians continue to come to these lands in Canada and the U.S. Needless to say, these lands belong to Indigenous nations and peoples, and are under continued colonization. Indigenous peoples have resisted the occupation of their lands since Columbus claimed to have “discovered” these lands. The title invites us to ask: What does it mean to sail like Columbus? What does it mean to come to these lands like Columbus? Who gets to sail like Columbus and who deserves to sail like Columbus? What happens after Columbus arrives? How do we understand the racial and colonial logics at play in this fantasy? Who can dream about becoming Columbus? This dissertation investigates the desires, aspirations, migrations, and the inherent complexities, complicities, and contradictions of South Asian arrivals to stolen lands.

More specifically, this dissertation is a study of South Asian diasporic formations on stolen Indigenous lands. Interrogating racial hierarchies and subjectivities can be an important tool towards the project of decolonization. To this end, this dissertation focuses on South Asian communities in Canada and their relationships to Canadian settler colonialism and Indigenous peoples. Following Māori scholar Linda T. Smith's call for “site by site” review to transform colonized views of histories (34), I look at racialized im/migrant histories and experiences in Canada. While the dissertation draws from multiple “sites” of South Asian diasporic formations in Canada, it specifically theorizes experiences of first generation Indians from India in extractive industries.<sup>20</sup> I focus primarily on first generation immigrant communities to

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<sup>20</sup> Both in Fort McMurray and Vancouver, I interviewed South Asians who migrated with parents or moved from elsewhere of South Asia to Canada. Thus, not all the respondents were strictly first generation. However, given the

underscore the the transnational and intersectional connections between colonial and racial histories, legacies, and geographies. First generation communities are an important site of analysis to understand how they negotiate, survive, resist, and often reproduce the racial and colonial logics that shape their “settlerdom,” I look at three sites of resource-based industries—the logging and cannery industries in British Columbia and the tar sands in Alberta—as simultaneous spaces of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples, and spaces of racialized and gendered labour formation. Needless to say, these industries operate on Indigenous lands—unceded or under (colonial) treaties mostly signed in the late nineteenth century—to extract resources from these lands. Resource extraction is central to Canada’s dispossession of Indigenous nations and concomitantly becomes a highly visible site for Indigenous peoples’ struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. The settler state requires the labour of racialized peoples in order to pursue its colonial-capitalist quests. Racialized labour, thus, in extractive industries becomes highly complicit in settler colonial processes.

Through an intersectional,<sup>21</sup> transnational, and relational exploration of raciality, indigeneity, caste, coloniality, gender, and class, I demonstrate how South Asians are often racially constructed as the outsider-other, on the one hand, and they are (wittingly or unwittingly) complicit in ongoing processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands, on the other. However, varying processes of power, privilege and oppression, render these complicities complicated, multiple, entangled, and contradictory. Anti-Native racism<sup>22</sup> has its own

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complexities of their migrations, their experiences are more closely aligned to those of first generation South Asians than second or succeeding generations.

<sup>21</sup> I draw from the works on intersectionality by hooks, *Where We Stand*; Bilge, “Beyond Subordination”; Bilge, “Intersectionality Undone”; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*; Collins, “It’s All in the Family”; Crenshaw; Dhamoon, “A Feminist Approach”; Dhamoon, “Considerations on Mainstreaming”; Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference Politics*; Lorde, *Sister Outsider*; Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes”; J. Puar; Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*; and Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

<sup>22</sup> In exploring relations between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, I provide examples of anti-Native racism from my interviews with South Asians in Fort McMurray and Vancouver. South Asian discourses of anti-Native

genealogies and taxonomies in white settler societies, yet these grammars function in relation to technologies of othering and difference making, which includes processes of casteism,<sup>23</sup> anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia. I explore processes of settler colonialism in conversation with these processes throughout the dissertation. As I explore the complexities and complicities by theorizing South Asian presence in Canada, I argue that these cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, complexities *produce* complicities. By looking at multiple sites and histories, and how they constitute, inflect, resist, and relate to each other, this dissertation intends to unsettle South Asian claims to Canada and produce a robust analysis of how South Asians negotiate their “settler-ness”<sup>24</sup> on stolen lands.

To be clear, unsettling South Asians in Canada requires the decolonization of Indigenous nations and lands. I am not employing unsettling outside the questions of coloniality and indigeneity. Works on diasporas often seek to “unsettle diasporas” to look at the questions of belonging, identity formations, displacement, and nationalist projects. For instance, Purnima Mankekar in her recent book titled *Unsettling India* deploys “unsettlement as an analytic toward a feminist project of denaturalizing and unpacking the totalizing claims of nationhood” (5). She unsettles constructs of “India” and “Indianness,” in India and Indian diasporic formations in the U.S. Mankekar writes further: “unsettlement allows me to think of culture and cultural change neither in terms of unchanging continuity ... nor in terms of radical transformation, rupture, or a sea change” (18). Her work, specifically on South Asian diasporic formations in the U.S.,

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racism in both Fort McMurray and Vancouver, and arguably elsewhere in Canada, are very similar – vile and irrationally constructed. Many respondents in both Vancouver and Fort McMurray would assume that I would “understand how Native peoples are.” They would feel free to share their racist attitudes. While the racist tropes may seem repetitive and unnecessary to the reader, I share them to illustrate the normalization, inevitableness, and pervasiveness of racial and colonial violences.

<sup>23</sup> I deploy caste as a social category of power and violence making throughout the dissertation. I explore questions of caste specifically in Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>24</sup> I engage with questions of “settler-ness” in Chapter 1.

obfuscate indigeneity and ongoing processes of colonization of Indigenous “Indianness,” I am critical of her deployment of unsettlement of Indianness without foregrounding settler colonial processes in the making of the “Indian” in the U.S.<sup>25</sup> In this dissertation, I argue that no diasporas in white settler states can be unsettled without the unsettling of the settler state and the decolonization of Indigenous lands.

The project, however, is not an anthropological, historical, sociological, or cultural study of Indigenous peoples or South Asians in Canada. Instead, the dissertation employs indigeneity, coloniality, and raciality as foundational logics in the making of the Canadian settler state and South Asian diasporas in Canada. It explores how transnational and intersectional processes of colonialism and white supremacy shape, and in turn are shaped by, processes of capitalism, casteism, and heteropatriarchy. Further, the dissertation, drawing from Rita K. Dhamoon’s work on identity and difference politics, grounding the politics of identity and difference-making in analyzing relations between Indigenous peoples and South Asians (*Identity/Difference Politics*). Shifting the focus from culture, the dissertation examines, borrowing from Renisa Mawani, “how meanings of differences are produced, organized, and regulated through power, and the effects of these meanings on socio-political arrangements” (2). Conceptualizing identity as difference, Dhamoon proposes to study “the very process of *becoming* a subject through meanings of difference” (11). Furthermore, the dissertation studies the modalities of othering instead of focusing on the “othered” subjects (16), thus, focusing on how South Asians other Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, within the context of India, her work effaces questions of caste and indigeneity, and ongoing projects of occupation by the Indian state. I tangentially engage with these questions throughout the dissertation, however, they are not the primary focus of the project.

To that end, this dissertation draws from theories, empirical evidence, and personal reflections. The project is based on over a year of research in Vancouver, B.C. and Fort McMurray, Alberta. I use diverse qualitative methods, including interviews with community members, activists and academics; oral histories of South Asian migrants; archival work in archives and public libraries; ethnographic analysis; discourse analysis; and analysis of literary and visual texts, events and popular culture. I look at the sites of resource extraction as spaces of simultaneous dispossession of Indigenous peoples and racialized and gendered labour formations. In addition, I engage with short stories by Cree writer Tomson Highway and Punjabi writer Sadhu Binning to conceptualize the complexities of what I call “colonial intimacies”— desires and intimacies between racialized and colonized peoples. Furthermore, as an upper caste (brahmin), upwardly mobile, genderqueer (with cis-male privilege), almost-diasporic, Canadian citizen by birth, Indian settler on Indian lands, I draw upon personal reflections, stories, and experiences to theorize racialized diasporic formations and complicities. I employ prose and semi-autobiographical writing as a methodological tool to critically engage with my positionality. Multi-sited, multi-theoretical, and multiple methods oriented, this dissertation centres Indigenous calls for resurgence and decolonization in theorizing racialized diasporic formations in white settler states.

There is no one specific body of theory that the project is in conversation with. Rather, I engage with multiple theoretical scholarships to offer a critically and ethically grounded discussion of Indians on Indian lands. To investigate the complexities and complicities, I bring together disparate disciplines of critical race, diaspora and ethnic studies; theories of (settler/anti/post/de) colonialism; Indigenous theories; Black studies; critical race, Indigenous, Black, and transnational feminisms; queer of colour critiques; Dalit and anti-caste critiques; and

area studies (specifically South Asian, Canadian, and American studies<sup>26</sup>) on questions of coloniality, race, caste, gender, class, and indigeneity. To forge intellectual and political solidarities amongst varying peoples against these intersecting structures, Indigenous feminists Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith propose a Native studies that “would be based not on intellectual isolationism but on intellectual promiscuity, sympathy, and solidarity” (11). Grounded in their proposal for “a different political imaginary” (11), I specifically engage with Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism and diasporic formations.

Thus, traversing multiple fields, my project theorizes different facets of transnational convergences in the making of South Asian diasporas. Further, the project is invested in unravelling processes and politics of knowledge production. By looking at the sites of knowledge production as complicit in processes of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism, each chapter raises epistemological questions that point to the complicities, silences, and violences within the knowledges produced in the academy (or not produced). Similarly, I also focus on questions of caste and the academy in South Asia and South Asian diasporic sites of knowledge production. The dissertation seeks to answer the following question throughout: Can (pedagogically) “we,” as students and teachers, break the dichotomization between sites of knowledge consumption and sites of knowledge production, and transcend boundaries to decolonize the academy?

By way of introduction, in the next two sections I explore Indigenous critiques of postcolonial and transnational feminist theories. Postcolonial and transnational feminist theories

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<sup>26</sup> There are significant differences in settler colonial and racial formations in the U.S. and Canada, which I allude to at different points in the dissertation. However, there are also crucial similarities between the states on how they racially and colonially reproduce themselves. Thus, I consistently draw from critiques of the U.S. settler state to theorize Canadian settler formations.

have been foundational to my growth as a student of race, gender, sexuality, and colonialism. However, both theoretical bodies have come under critique by Indigenous scholars for their limited engagements with Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and decolonization. I explore these tensions and frictions in the following two sections to illustrate the incommensurabilities in bringing together a critical engagement between raciality, coloniality, and indigeneity. These two sections provide a framework to ground the arguments I make in the following chapters. The third section provides a brief outline of the chapters. In the fourth section, I discuss key methods and methodologies that guide the dissertation. More specifically, I explore methodological and ethical questions of conducting research “on” indigeneity and processes of settler colonialism as a non-Indigenous scholar. In the last section, I discuss the terminologies and nomenclature deployed in the dissertation.

### **Postcolonial Engagements**

In my classrooms on South Asia in York University, when I talk about colonization of Turtle Island<sup>27</sup> I am invariably asked by students: “What does this have to do with South Asia?”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in conversations about my research with South Asian scholars, many times I am often asked: “But South Asians have no relations with Indigenous peoples? Do they? If not, then why Indigenous peoples?” In both spaces, these conversations are followed with racial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples and a denial of the continued colonization of Turtle Island. As a student and teacher of South Asia and South Asian diasporas in a settler academy, my experiences in the

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<sup>27</sup> Turtle Island is a term used by many Indigenous communities for the continent of North America. This term challenges Canadian-American-Mexican centric colonial-geopolitical borders and names of North America and highlight other (Indigenous and decolonial) epistemological ways of knowing and living.

<sup>28</sup> Parts of this section were developed in previously published works: Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities,” “Whither Decolonization,” and “Un/settling Immigrants,”

academy have made me reflect on my relations to stolen lands more critically. In the early years of graduate school, feeling alienated by dominantly white and Eurocentric spaces, I took refuge in postcolonial theory and area studies (mainly South Asian Studies). It is in these spaces that I came to understand myself as a racialized person and learned about colonial histories and legacies in South Asia. Slowly, primarily through activist and community engagements, I started learning more about Indigenous peoples and their struggles for resurgence and decolonization and came to an understanding of Canada as a colonial state; not “colonial” because of its obsession and affinity with the Queen or “postcolonial” because of its break from the empire, but colonial because it continues to colonize Indigenous lands. However, in academic spaces these conversations were not easy, and continue to be difficult and polarizing; albeit in some ways now settler colonialism has become a fashionable topic in certain (white) spaces of academia. All of this simultaneously erases Indigenous scholars and students in the academy.

Teaching South Asian Studies was a major eye opener. While the conversations in the classroom were always grounded in colonialism in South Asia, I found it extremely hard to connect those conversations to ongoing processes of colonialism here. At the same time, discussions in graduate seminars for me as a student, were also void of these reflections, where critiques of settler colonialism are frequently rejected as “political” and not academically rigorous. More alarmingly, these classrooms continue to exclude Indigenous students and scholarship. These experiences point to the complicities of all non-Indigenous peoples in ongoing processes of colonialism, politically and intellectually. My experiences as a student and teacher of South Asian Studies made me question the role area studies and postcolonial theory play in (re)producing and institutionalizing hegemonic constructs of the “nation”—both, the nation “here” and “there,” My assumption that theorizing colonialism in South Asia would easily

enable critical conversations with (ongoing) settler colonialism and white supremacy on Turtle Island has been proven wrong, many times. In the academy, the failures to engage with colonial materialities connecting South Asia and Turtle Island point to the symptomatic logics of settler colonial violences. These logics are operationalized by varying methods, for instance, by pedagogically effacing Indigenous critiques of the academy and the settler state, along with systematic and structural marginalization of Indigenous scholars and students. At the same time, postcolonial theory is used to limit the theorizing of ongoing processes of settler colonialism. Further, racialized communities are often equated with Indigenous peoples as equity-seeking groups, erasing the incommensurabilities within anti-racist and anti-colonial struggles.<sup>29</sup> The questions then is: why is it so challenging to translate South Asian experiences with colonialism and racism to a broader politics of decolonization of stolen Indigenous lands in Canada?

Understanding settler colonialism as a distinctive form of colonialism is key to challenging epistemological and pedagogical invisibilization of past and ongoing settler colonial processes. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard asserts that colonial domination in Canada is “territorially acquisitive in perpetuity” (152). Similarly, Indigenous feminists Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill call settler colonialism “a persistent structure” (12). The settler state works to have total control over Indigenous life and land, for as Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck and Asian scholar K. Wayne Yang note: “land is what is most valuable, contested, required” (5). Coulthard elaborates further on the centrality of land to settler colonial processes, when he argues that settler colonialism:

... continues to be structurally committed to maintain ... ongoing state access to the land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and foundation of colonial-state formation, settlement and capitalist development on the other. (7)

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<sup>29</sup> I explore these incommensurabilities throughout the dissertation.

The settler colonial-capitalist project is produced through ongoing process of invasion, exploitation, and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and their lands. According to Indigenous scholars Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence, settler colonialism comes to be “taken-for-granted as normative, inevitable, and, indeed, invisible” (124). The violences, from the everyday to the structural, thus, are effaced and rendered inevitable. Feminist, queer and Two-Spirit Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism have further demonstrated the intricacies of settler colonialism with gender and sexuality.<sup>30</sup> In fact, they argue that the settler colonial project has always been, and continues, to be gendered and heteropatriarchal; and colonial violences are primarily committed on the bodies of Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit peoples. Thus, Indigenous scholars show the entangled and multiple processes of settler colonialism with capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy.

Indigenous critiques of white settler colonial nation-states—Canada, the United States of America, Australia, and New Zealand<sup>31</sup>—pose critical and challenging questions to postcolonial theorizations of coloniality and postcoloniality.<sup>32</sup> While postcolonial epistemologies seek to resist the “mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath” (Gandhi 4), many scholars working within the context of white settler colonial states, have argued that the ongoing colonization of

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<sup>30</sup> For more in Indigenous feminist, queer and Two-Spirit critiques, see: Aikau et al.; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; Barker, *Native Acts*; Driskill, “Doubleweaving Two-Spirit Critiques”; A. Smith, “Queer Theory and Native Studies”; Driskill, Justice, et al., *Sovereign Erotics*; Goeman, *Mark My Words*; Green; Lawrence, “*Real*” *Indians and Others*; Maraacle; Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman*; A. Simpson; L. B. Simpson, *Lighting the Eighth Fire*; Ladner and Simpson; A. Smith, *Conquest*; and Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.

<sup>31</sup> Along with Israel, South Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

<sup>32</sup> Defining “postcolonial theory” is antithetical to the terrain of postcolonial theories, and in fact, imposing a singular understanding would be to erase all complexities and multiplicities within it. Rather than creating a homogenous discipline, I will engage with specific critiques of postcolonial theory. But for the purposes of this project, I identify the field with works produced on processes of colonialism and postcolonialism in Asia and Africa, by scholars such as (but not limited to): Bhabha; Césaire; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; P. Chatterjee; Devi; Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Gandhi; Loomba; Mbembe; Mbembé; Memmi; Said, *Orientalism*; Said, “Orientalism Reconsidered”; Said, *Culture and Imperialism*; Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*; Spivak, *In Other Worlds*; and Thiong’o. For the purposes of this section, my engagement is limited to postcolonial theory produced by South Asian diasporic academics.

Indigenous lands and peoples becomes normalized and inevitable within postcolonial theorizations. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux Tribe) critiques postcolonial theory for failing to further the question of Indigenous sovereignty. While postcolonial and Indigenous theories share their commitments to resisting logics of coloniality (Byrd and Rothberg 1), “too often they [postcolonial epistemologies] erase indigenous perspectives completely” (3). In so critiquing the academy, Mi’kmaw scholar Bonita Lawrence observes:

‘Native [Hi]story’ becomes accounts of specific intervals of ‘contact,’ accounts which neutralize processes of genocide, which never mention racism, and which do not take as part of their purview the devastating and ongoing implications of the policies and processes that are so neutrally described. A second problem . . . is the longevity of colonialism and the fact that some Indigenous peoples are considered by non-Native academics to be virtually extinct, to exist only in the pages of historical texts. (“Rewriting Histories” 24)

Native history is, thus, rendered to the past, and critiques of racism in the Americas efface Indigenous experiences of racism and colonialism (Byrd, *The Transit*; Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism”; Lawrence and Dua, “The Limitations of Postcolonial Theory”; Tuck and Yang).

Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua argue that postcolonial theory undermines Indigenous struggles for decolonization, in the Americas as well as globally. They (“The Limitations of Postcolonial Theory”) highlight five key areas through which postcolonial theory has effaced indigeneity: deployment of the term “postcolonial” which erases the ongoing processes of colonization (15); anti-racist analysis which invisibilizes indigeneity (18); theories of diaspora which obfuscate diasporic formations and settlements in settler states (18); consequently the erasure of diasporic complicities and investments in the settler states; and postcolonial theories which are damaging to Indigenous peoples, like the ones theorizing hybridity, genocide of Indigenous peoples, decontextualizing Indigenous connections to land, and rejection of nation

and nationhood (21). Andrea Smith notes that the production of postcolonial thought in the U.S. and Canada rest on the continued colonization of Indigenous peoples and disguises the fact that the “postcolonial conscious subject” is a “settler subject” (“Queer Theory and Native Studies” 49). Many Indigenous scholars note how there is no postcolonial situation in white settler colonies as the colonizers/settlers are still present on Indigenous lands. Famously, Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism: “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” (qtd. in L. Smith 24). Goenpul Tribe scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes that within the context of white settler colonial processes of Australia: “the colonials did not go home and 'postcolonial' remains based on whiteness” (“I Still Call Australia Home” 30). Moreton-Robinson further argues that Indigenous people's position within the nation-state is where the power relations established (and enforced) are at the very heart of white nationhood and belonging (37). Indigenous theorizing, within white settler societies, thus, brings to the forefront questions about what decolonization, in the context of ongoing colonization, actually entails. This throws critical and disruptive challenges to postcolonial theory as well.

The effacement of indigeneity in postcolonial theory has significant implications for Indigenous peoples and nations. Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma scholar Jodi Byrd shows how in the imaginations and critiques of the U.S. Empire the “Indian is left nowhere and everywhere within the ontological premises” (*The Transit* xix). She extends this critique to postcolonial epistemologies as well, only have a limited engagement with Indigenous knowledges (xxxii). These critiques, Byrd contends, have pushed Indigenous peoples towards “a vanishing point” (3) and reproduced a “historical aphasia of the conquest” (xxvi). Without a critical engagement with indigeneity, theorizations of coloniality and empire are limiting and limited. While critiquing

postcolonial theory's complicity in erasing indigeneity, Byrd calls for a deeper engagement between postcolonial and Indigenous theories. This will, Byrd argues:

elucidate how liberal colonist discourses depend upon sublimating indigenous cultures and histories into fictive hybridities and social constructions as they simultaneously trap indigenous peoples within the dialectics of genocide. (xxxiv)

Hence, indigeneity is central to theorizations of raciality and coloniality in the Americas and globally. Critical engagements with indigeneity will allow for postcolonial theory to unsettle its own epistemologies of temporality and spatiality.

Conversely, Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith argue that a postcolonial framework would be beneficial for Indigenous studies as postcolonial theory “speaks to the (im)possibilities of preserving tradition ... after the radical transformation in Native communities and Native peoples created by the colonial moment” (14). Thus, postcolonial and Indigenous epistemologies have many differences, contradictions, and incommensurabilities, but bringing them together also provides a space and opportunities for much deeper and critical anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and feminist theorizations. Conversations on issues of land, indigeneity, state, sacred and spirituality, knowledge, questions of internal and settler colonialism, and decolonization, open spaces for both postcolonial and Indigenous critiques to come together. A primary site for such dialogues, I propose, is the role of people of colour within settler colonialism. To this end, this dissertation focuses on South Asian communities in Canada and their relationships to Canadian settler colonialism and indigenous peoples.

### **Transnational Feminist Engagements**

Theorizing the complexities and complicities of the intertwined processes of colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy, this dissertation foregrounds transnational

analytics.<sup>33</sup> What is the “transnational” in transnational analytics? While the term “transnational” has many meanings (Grewal and Kaplan, “Global Identities”), I ground its use in this dissertation within transnational feminist critiques. Transnational feminisms emerged as a critique of dominant women's studies in the North American academy in the 1990s, giving an umbrella to anti-racist, women of color, postcolonial, and Third World feminists.<sup>34</sup> The scholarship of transnational feminisms is vast and ever growing, and provides a wide range of critical scholarship on pertinent global issues.<sup>35</sup>

Richa Nagar and Amanda Swarr provide the following definition of transnational feminisms:

... we propose that transnational feminisms are an intersectional set of understandings, tools, and practices that can: (a) attend to racialized, classed, masculinized, and heteronormative logics and practices of globalization and capitalist patriarchies, and the multiple ways in which they (re)structure colonial and neocolonial relations of domination and subordination; (b) grapple with the complex and contradictory ways in which these processes both inform and are shaped by a range of subjectivities and understandings of individual and collective agency; and (c) interweave critiques, actions, and self-reflexivity so as to resist a priori predictions of what might constitute feminist politics in a given place and time. (5)

This definition lays out how a transnational feminist analytic is essential for my work. Firstly, the framework allows for a transnational understanding of South Asian migration to Canada by grounding it in processes of colonialism in South Asia and the Americas; and encouraging

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<sup>33</sup> Parts of this section were developed in previously published works: Patel, Moussa and Upadhyay.

<sup>34</sup> Ranjoo S. Herr noting the differences between transnational feminisms and Third World feminisms, shows how transnational feminisms focuses on the transnational scale, whereas the latter focuses on local and national contexts.

<sup>35</sup> These includes questions of sex work and global “trafficking” (Kempadoo; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik), questions of religion and spirituality (Chandra, “Whiteness on the Margins”; Chandra, ““India Will Change You Forever””; Hasan; Jamal; Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem; S. Khan), war on terror (Mohanty, Riley, and Pratt; Perera and Razack), South-South feminist exchanges and encounters (Nijhawan, “At the Margins of Empire”; Nijhawan, “Fallen Through the Nationalist”), questions of Palestine and Israeli Apartheid (Abdo, *Women in Israel*; Abdo, *Captive Revolution*; Olwan), queer subjectivities (Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem; J. Puar; Toor), prison-industrial complex (Sudbury), development processes and labour exploitation (Chowdhury; Kapur; Nagar, *Playing with Fire*), and questions of solidarity, authorship and collaborations (Davies; Nagar, *Muddying the Waters*; Nagar and Ali; Swarr and Nagar).

intersectional conversations between indigeneity, race, caste, class, gender, and sexuality. Secondly, in theorizing diasporic subject formations, transnational analysis informs us of the complexities and contradictions of simultaneous experiences of marginalization and complicity for racialized peoples migrating to settler states. Thirdly, by questioning processes of knowledge production in the academy and politics of solidarity, the transnational framework allows a disruption of the binaries of theory and praxis, global and local, here and there, and individual and collective, and posits critical questions of knowledge production within a colonized space. And lastly, connecting local to the global as “cross-national processes” (Alexander and Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies* xix), a transnational feminist framework enables a decentering of the settler states, and recognizes Indigenous peoples and racialized communities as “transnational” in relation to each other.

It is also important to note, however, that global hegemonic constructs of “nationhood” continue to deny recognition of Indigenous nations and territories, even as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples recognizes the right for self-determination of Indigenous peoples.<sup>36</sup> Whereas racialized communities may come from nations, whether recognized or not, they can still “claim” their territories; for instance, Eelam Tamils, Palestinians, Tibetans, Kashmiris, Kurds, and other occupied peoples’ struggles are still recognized globally, albeit marginally and precariously. While this argument is limiting, it points to the fact that Indigenous claims to territories are not “recognized” in similar ways. This is not to hierarchize occupations and sufferings, but rather to attend to how settler colonial modalities in the Americas continue to deny nationhood to Indigenous peoples and hold a high degree of legitimacy in the global context, and as Bonita Lawrence pointed out to me in conversation,

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<sup>36</sup> I further discuss the UN Declaration in Chapter 2.

Indigenous peoples remain “forgotten” globally. Thus, a transnational and “cross-national” recognition of Indigenous peoples, I argue, can potentially engender decolonial solidarities between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, along with other racialized peoples, that can unsettle, disrupt, and dismantle the settler state.

However, there are very limited critiques of settler colonialism and engagements with Indigenous feminisms given by transnational feminists. In fact, transnational feminisms have come under immense critique by Indigenous feminists and even transnational feminists themselves. Chicana feminist Maylei Blackwell (Blackwell, Briggs, and Chiu) asks:

What would transnational feminism look like then if we put these forms of Indigenous world making at the center? What would the center of feminism look like if the Indigenous women-led Idle No More movement was put at the center of our analysis? As a transnational movement, it would change a lot of ways we see the world and reinvigorate transnational feminism. (18)

Blackwell challenges transnational feminisms for its epistemological silence on processes of settler colonialism. Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill specifically asks non-Indigenous queer scholars in settler colonial nations:

If you are reading this in the United States or Canada, whose land are you on, dear reader? What are the specific names of the Native nation(s) who have historical claim to the territory on which you currently read this article? What are their histories before European invasions? What are their historical and present acts of resistance to colonial occupation? If you are like most people in the United State and Canada, you cannot answer these questions. And this disturbs me. (71)

Driskill asks scholars to pay attention to the materiality of lands they are on, and to question the processes of colonialism that their scholarship in settler academies is complicit with. Heeding these questions by Blackwell and Driskill, in this section I explore the “normative gestures” and “normative cartographic rules” (Alexander and Mohanty, “Cartographies of Knowledge” 24 & 31) within transnational feminisms which seek to invisibilize Indigenous struggles against colonialism through the following themes, the erasure of Indigenous women; differing

conceptualizations of “transnational”; and challenging transnational feminist knowledges on “here and there,” the nation, and land.

First, on the erasure of Indigenous women, Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill argue that gender and women’s studies in the U.S. and Canada have largely ignored the questions of indigeneity and settler colonialism. Challenging these gaps within the gender and women’s studies and the broader academy, they argue:

Native feminist theories at their heart challenge the academy’s common modes of disciplinarity; they exhort ethnic studies and Indigenous studies, as well as gender and women’s studies, to address the erasure of Indigenous women and Native feminist theories in ways that are not simply token inclusion of seemingly secondary (or beyond) issues, but rather shift the entire basis of how disciplines see and understand their proper subjects. (14)

They pose a challenge to not only transnational feminisms but also to gender and women’s studies, ethnic studies, and Indigenous studies for their erasure of the Indigenous women in theorizations of coloniality, race, gender, and sexuality. Within transnational feminisms, for instance, Radhika Mohanram in her sharp critique of Chandra T. Mohanty’s now-classic essay “Under Western Eyes” shows how Mohanty symptomatically reproduces the Third World woman as homogenous across histories and geographies (91-92), a frame which Mohanty herself critiques. Mohanram argues that there is no space for the struggles of Native women in Mohanty’s analysis. To her credit, Mohanty (*Feminism without Borders*) acknowledged this limitation in her revised essay “‘Under Western Eyes’ Revisited” and argued that Indigenous women’s struggles do not follow a post-colonial trajectory and cannot be addressed easily under the categories such as “western,” “first world,” “eastern” and “Third World” (228). It is hence urgent, Alexander and Mohanty argue, to theorize white settler colonialism as it is foundational to the “spatialization of power at this very moment in history” (“Cartographies of Knowledge” 39). Centering Indigenous women’s experiences in theorizing power allows for “a unique

potential to decolonize the ascendancy of whiteness on many global contexts” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 11). I expand on the continuous erasure of Indigenous women in settler states in Chapters 4 and 5.

Concurrently, connected to the erasure of Indigenous women in feminist writings, is the question of what the “transnational” is. As many have pointed out (Alexander and Mohanty, “Cartographies of Knowledge”; Desai, Bouchard, and Detournay; Fernandes; Mohanram), “transnational” is usually deployed as a marker for diasporic racialized migrants. In a special issue of the journal *Feral Feminisms*, for which I was a guest editor along with Shaista Patel and Ghaida Moussa (“Complicities, Connections, & Struggles”), we sought to engage transnational feminisms with critiques of settler colonialism. In our call for papers, we had specifically asked for submissions by Black and Indigenous scholars, however, we did not receive as many submissions as we were anticipating. From the limited engagement from Black and Indigenous feminists, we concluded that transnationalism as a framework is not necessarily inclusive of Blackness and indigeneity. We questioned our positionality as diasporic people of colour in our claims to transnational feminisms, and our “ascendancy to whiteness” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 11). However, we did not understand how many Native feminists and scholars do see themselves as transnational, as they have always questioned the violences of nation-states on their bodies, communities, and nations; their frameworks have always been transnational. Blackwell, highlighting many “genealogies of transnationalism,” notes how Indigenous women activists have always been engaged in transnational activism across the borders imposed by the settler states (4). Theorizing the prefix “trans,” Indigenous scholar Chadwick Allen formulates trans-Indigenous “to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories, and texts” (xiv). Tonawanda Band of Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman

(Aikau et al.) calls Indigenous scholars to conceive of “trans-indigeneity” instead of transnationalism by centering Indigenous relationships with land and water (95), and Indigenous understandings of “mobility, territory, and political configurations” (93). In our call for papers, we had failed to conceptualize transnationality in a way that incorporated indigeneity. Borrowing from Desai, Bouchard, and Detournay who understand transnational feminisms as “heterogeneous, irreducible, and related” (49), in this dissertation I argue for a more critically expansive and inclusive understanding of transnationality and indigeneity.

As noted above, transnational feminisms are grounded in breaking the binaries of the “here” and “there” and the “local” and “global.” In these critiques while transnational constructions of race, gender, and sexuality are addressed, indigeneity is often amiss. Scholars arguing to write about “there” by reflecting on “here,” often erase the ongoing process of colonialism that indeed allow them to be “settled” in western academies. Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred argues that the (anti) colonial war is still on in the Americas, and notes that for many non-Native scholars “decolonization [here] is not admitted as a necessity, at least not in terms of true decolonization as has been mandated morally and politically in Africa and Asia” (106).<sup>37</sup> Cherokee writer Jeff Corntassel calls this the “free Tibet” syndrome, where non-Indigenous activists are committed to fighting for countries in the global South, yet are oblivious to the struggles on Turtle Island (qtd. in Aikau et al. 85).<sup>38</sup> Tuck and Yang argue that the turn towards the transnational often disregards the positionality of where scholars “settle” and work, and how they are implicated in the structures of colonialism (29). Indeed, the question Kanaka

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<sup>37</sup> However, I argue that processes of “true” decolonization, unlike what Alfred suggests, have not been completed anywhere, including ex-colonies in Africa and Asia. While white settlers may have left these colonies, colonial legacies continue to shape all postcolonial nation-states. At the same time, I recognize the urgency of decolonizing Indigenous lands here.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, elsewhere with Michael C. Jackman, I argue that anti-pinkwashing activism against Israel in Canada can invariably white-wash Canadian settler processes, and reproduce Canada as a benevolent state.

Maoli feminist Maile Arwin (in Aikau et al.) asks is “Are trans- national feminists willing to identify (in certain contexts) as settlers and/or *arrivants*?<sup>39</sup> Or, to at least commit to the idea that decolonization and return of land to Indigenous peoples ...” (90). Blackwell contends that all transnational feminist theorizations must ground an analysis of settler colonial and racial histories (in Blackwell et al. 6). Kanaka ‘Ōiwi Hawai‘i scholar Hokulani Aikau (in Aikau et al.) calls transnational feminist scholars working on/from/within colonized lands to ground the analysis where they are “before scaling up the critique and establishing strategies for resistance and mobilization at the regional or global level” (85). Along with these critiques, she asks for people to actively engage in fighting colonialism and envision “preferred futures” (87). This dissertation seeks to envision shared decolonial futures by theorizing the making of privileges and complicities of South Asians in Canada, in order to unsettle these privileges and complicities.

The fourth point of contention between Indigenous feminisms and transnational feminisms is the question of nation. Grounded in postcolonial critiques of the nation-state, many transnational feminists reject all forms of nations and nationalisms and deem them to be oppressive to women (Grewal and Kaplan, *Scattered Hegemonies*; Alarcón, Kaplan, and Moallem). In refusing the models of nations and nation-state, and decentering western nation-states specifically, transnational feminists argue to go beyond the nation and forge transnational alliances. However, the project of going beyond the nation-state invariably can reproduce the same nation-state. Leela Fernandes makes a similar argument: “discarding the nation-state as a unit of analysis does not automatically dislodge a U.S.-centric epistemic project” (6). Fernandes makes a critical point about reproduction of the nation-state, however, I contend that the nation-

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<sup>39</sup> I discuss the term “arrivant” in Chapter 1.

state reproduced, in fact, is the settler state. Thus, the focus of critique needs to be the settler colonial logics in the making of the settler state, and not just a blanket rejection of the western nation-state.

I argue that transnational feminisms need to centre the settler-state in order to unsettle the state.<sup>40</sup> Discarding questions of nationhood erases the colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands. Moreover, it ignores Indigenous understanding of nations and nationhood.<sup>41</sup> Noting the differences between Third World feminisms and transnational feminisms on the questions of nation and nation-state, Ranjoo S. Herr argues that the latter body of scholarship needs to engage with local/national without rejecting the questions of the nation. She calls feminist theorizations critical of the nation to recognize Indigenous women as “full moral agents who advocate nationalism as a strategic tool to resist imperialism and colonialism” (n.pag.). Quests for Indigenous nationhoods are urgent, as Arvin et al. remind us that the struggles of Indigenous women are inseparable from Indigenous decolonization and sovereignty (10).

Rita K. Dhamoon offers place-based anti-colonial and decolonial ways of conceptualizing transnationalism as a way to ground Indigenous feminist struggles and interweave the histories and struggles for differently colonized and racialized peoples (“A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing”). Firstly, she contends that anti-colonial transnational praxis needs to attend to “the battleground of the settler-colonial nation-state and Indigenous nationhood in the wider global context of white supremacy and capitalist flows of migration and labour” (n.pag.). This anti-colonial approach unsettles the inevitability of heteropatriarchal settler

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<sup>40</sup> To be clear, when I say centre the settler state to unsettle the state, I do not imply to construct binaries of centre and margin. Rather, I am unsettling the binary and calling for a reconceptualization of the centre grounded in Indigenous worldviews. Further, by locating complexities and complicities in the formation of South Asian diasporas, I am destabilizing the binary by locating multiplicities of power.

<sup>41</sup> For Indigenous understandings of nation and nationhood, see: Acoose et al.; Goodyear-Ka’opua, Hussey, and Wright; Kappo and King; Ladner and Simpson; Lawrence, *Fractured Homeland*; L. B. Simpson, *Lighting the Eighth Fire*; L. B. Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*; Sunseri; and Weaver, Womack, and Warrior.

states and draws connections between various gendered state practices. Secondly, the decolonial conceptualization of transnationalism moves away from the rejection of nations, to reconceptualizing nationhood through rethinking relationability. Land is central to Indigenous relationability, which is often missed within postcolonial and transnational feminist theorizations. Goeman argues that transnational conceptualizations of land are bound by colonial logics (97). Differences within transnational feminisms are theorized, she contends, “in terms of social, cultural, and political with a concentration on the human” (94). For Indigenous peoples, land is foundational to people’s social, cultural and spiritual practices, and thus, both the human and nonhuman are central to understanding difference (98). She encourages feminists to rethink the lands they live on (98) and proposes “a closer interrogation of these multiple social, cultural, and geopolitical meanings that make land and water a key concept in Indigenous political struggle and also feminist struggle” (96). Attempts at solidarity that fail to center land do not rupture the settler state or work towards decolonization.

Drawing from these critiques, I propose a critical transnational feminist approach that is attentive to the logics of settler colonialism and “critically aware of its own historical, geographical, and political locations ... and critically self-reflexive processes of knowledge production and dissemination” (Nagar and Swarr 3). Shefali Chandra calls for widening the scope of transnational studies to “invest ourselves in learning about the covert hierarchies constantly manufactured, exported, and appropriated in a far-from-innocent, deeply heteropatriarchal, and academically fetishized, local” (“Whiteness on the Margins” 150). While Chandra is pointing to transnational formations in non-western histories, I draw from her to theorize the contemporary “histories” of Indigenous and racialized peoples in the “local” settler states. Jacqui M. Alexander’s theorization of “palimpsestic time” provides an important anti-

colonial epistemological and methodological tool to theorize settler colonialism for transnational feminists. By analyzing how “new” time is structured through the “old” scrambled palimpsestic, time and by breaking the binaries of “here and now” and “there and then” to “here and there” and “now and then,” we can effectively theorize the “local and global” together (190). This highlights the continuities and disjunctures of practices within and among various state formations (191), and can theorize violence as intimately connected to the project of modernity (219). Alexander argues: “Thus, neoimperial modernity understood as democracy can no longer be positioned in a hierarchical superior relationship to neocolonial traditions understood as underdevelopment and therefore of no relevance to modernity” (194). This framework allows us to think about race and colonialism in local and global contexts. Further, it enables a critical theorization of migration in both local and global contexts.

I argue that a critical transnational feminist analysis of settler colonialism in this political context draws connections between the destruction of lands, waters, and resources by settler economies in Indigenous lands to the exploitation of racialized and migrant labour within these economies. It helps us make sense of the settler security state that deports people of colour, targets Indigenous sovereignties, and incarcerates, and often kills, Indigenous, Black and other people of colour at higher rates than white settlers. It allows for an understanding of gender and white heteropatriarchies that affect, in very different ways, Indigenous, Black and racialized communities, and target women, trans and queer bodies. Linking Indigenous feminists critiques with transnational feminisms, thus, offers decolonial possibilities for solidarity and alliances between differently racialized and colonized peoples.

## **About this Dissertation**

The ideas in this dissertation are neither unique nor new, for they emerge out of engagements with academic, activist, and artist communities. Each of the following chapters engages with multiple theories, themes, sites, and methods. Read together, they demonstrate the deeply interwoven racial and colonial logics operating in contemporary Canada. Instead of drawing together a linear narrative of South Asians in Canada, the chapters illustrate the incommensurabilities in theorizing South Asian complicities in processes of settler colonialism. The chapters offer insight to help understand the complex and complicit formations of South Asian diasporas in Canada. The chapters specifically centre the experiences of first generation Indians from India in resource extractive industries to theorise the transnational and intersectional connections between colonial and racial logics.

Chapter 1 lays the theoretical framework of the dissertation. Exploring overlapping experiences of racism and colonialism between Indigenous peoples and South Asians,<sup>42</sup> here and there, what I call “pernicious continuities” (Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities”), the project studies the making of the white settler state and racialized diasporas. This chapter provides a model to theorize pernicious continuities by outlining complexities, complicities and “traces” as the three conceptual pillars of the dissertation. I explore different sites, positionalities, experiences and facets of South Asian presence in Canada and their relations to indigeneity and processes of settler colonialism. In the first section, I theorize the pernicious continuities and complexities of intermeshed and entangled racial and colonial histories and processes, that connect all differently racialized and colonized peoples. In this section, I also theorize histories and legacies of enslavement and anti-Black racism, logics of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia, and

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<sup>42</sup> To be clear, I am not arguing that South Asians are colonized here on Indigenous lands. Rather, I am pointing to the shared processes that led to colonization here and there.

structures of “border imperialism” (Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*) as central to understanding settler colonial processes and intermittent racial hierarchies in Canada. The second section, draws upon the discussion of complexities to interrogate complicities by looking at questions of settler-ness. Focusing on concepts of “settlers of colour” (Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism”; Trask “Settlers of Color”; Tuck and Wayne) and “arrivants” (Byrd, *The Transit*), in this section I argue for an intricate understanding of race, diaspora, and indigeneity. The third section discusses silences and absences as a crucial tool of the settler colonial project. In this section, I offer traces as a method of unmapping silences and absences. I conclude the chapter by discussing the recent turn in ethnic studies towards racial comparativism to ground incommensurabilities in the making of South Asian diasporas in Canada.

Chapters 2 and 3 add more layers to the complexities of raciality and indigeneity by bringing in questions of caste in the analysis of South Asian diasporas. In Chapter 2, I use Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal (DBAT) critiques of the Indian state and society, to understand Indian (and more generally South Asian) diasporic formations in Canada. Dalit is a political term used by erstwhile “untouchables”—peoples who are outside of the traditional four-tier Hindu caste system. Bahujan is a term used widely by lower caste communities in India. Adivasi is used as an umbrella term for the Indigenous communities in India. Some Indigenous communities use the term Tribal to identify themselves. A critical engagement with a DBAT framework and its intersections with race, diaspora, and indigeneity in white settler states enables me to theorize structures of caste and settler colonialism, and the relationships between them—which remains mainly unexamined within South Asian diaspora studies. Within dominant narratives, if and where the two structures are conceptualized at all, they are imagined as disconnected and distant. Chapter 3 argues that these seemingly mutually exclusive and isolated structures need to be

analyzed together to critically understand questions of race, caste, and indigeneity. The South Asian subject within the white settler state is produced through erasures of questions of indigeneity and caste. While, on the one hand, the upper caste, upwardly mobile, Hindu Indian diasporic-self is racially othered in white settler states, on the other hand, this subject is constructed through an assemblage of other-others. This continuum includes the Indigenous-Other, Black-Other, Dalit-Other, Bahujan-Other, and Adivasi-Other, as well as the Muslim-Other, refugee-Other, and non-citizen-Other. I argue that Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, and Tribals as the Indian state's Others, offer epistemologies to challenge and unsettle the Indian state; and, allow for transnational conversations on caste, race, and indigeneity across South Asian countries and places where South Asian diasporas have "settled."

In Chapter 4, I explore intimacies between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, which I call "colonial intimacies." In this chapter I propose a theoretical framework to understand colonial intimacies and trace intimacies as desires, violences, silences, and solidarities between Indigenous peoples and South Asians in Canada. I do so by drawing upon Cree writer Tomson Highway's short story "The Lover Snake" (1985) and Punjabi writer Sadhu Binning's short story "Eyes in the Dark" (2014). I demonstrate how colonial intimacies are shaped through settler colonial state processes. These intimacies are important to investigate the violences of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity through the intersectional axes of race and indigeneity. Even though South Asians may be complicit within settler colonial violences, spaces for "decolonial love" (Díaz, *This Is How You Lose Her*; Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Sandoval; and L. B. Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love*) and solidarity are not foreclosed. It is these possibilities that make the settler state anxious, and invested in keeping

these colonized and racialized peoples apart. Thus, these intimacies can potentially be critical sites of dismantling the settler state and can be working towards decolonization.

In the final chapter, I consider the cacophony of hegemonic and horizontal relations (Byrd, *The Transit*) and intimacies of the four continents (Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*) to trace relations between Indigenous nations and South Asians in present-day Canada. I analyze the formation of South Asian subjectivities as “labourers,” “workers,” and “citizens” on stolen Indigenous lands. I look at three sites of resource-based industries: the logging and cannery industries in British Columbia and the tar sands in Alberta.<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, these industries operate on Indigenous lands—unceded or under (colonial) treaties mostly signed in late nineteenth century—to extract resources from these lands. Resource extraction is central to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and their struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. In this chapter, I argue that the settler state requires the labour of racialized peoples in order to pursue its colonial-capitalist quests. Specifically, I look at the labour of South Asians in the making and maintenance of the Canadian settler state. Analyzing racialized and gendered constructs of “model” and “steady” worker, I argue that while race, gender, and class structurally marginalize the labour of South Asians in these industries, their labour still remains complicit in settler-colonial processes. These constructs of the model-self render Indigenous peoples as the “unmodel-other,” I ground this chapter in analyzing the desires of migrating racialized bodies. By looking at modalities of desire and labour, which work together to produce the settler state, I argue that the desiring racialized bodies are the same as the

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<sup>43</sup> The oil deposits in the region are found as consolidated sandstone containing a mixture of sand, clay, water, and bitumen (viscous and dense form of petroleum). They are commonly known as tar sands due to bitumen’s similar appearance, viscosity, odor and colour to tar. In the oil market, however, they are known as oil sands, in order to sanitize the environmental destruction at the heart of the production. Due to this reason I use tar sands consistently throughout the dissertation.

labouring racialized bodies. Seen together, the desiring/labouring racialized bodies, help us understand the logics of varying racial and colonial processes in the making of white settler states. Further, tracing the trajectory of the dreams and desires of migrants that motivate them to come to Canada, and following Eve Tuck's ("Suspending Damage"; "Breaking up with Deleuze") conceptualization of a "desire-based" epistemological shift, I centre Indigenous desires' for self-determination to understand racialized desires; thereby, rendering these desires as complex, contradictory, and agential. I conclude the dissertation by offering a summary of the chapters. I also demonstrate the need to theorize the triangulation of raciality, indigeneity, and coloniality.

### **Methods and Methodologies**

To comprehend everyday facets of settler colonialism and racialized diasporic formations this project is multi-sited, multiple methods oriented, and interdisciplinary. One site or one method or one discipline cannot encapsulate the complexities, complicities, and traces of the working of the settler state. Thus, I draw from my research in Vancouver, B.C. and Fort McMurray, Alberta, as well as from my lived experiences in Toronto, Ontario. I utilize diverse qualitative methods; including interviews; archival research; ethnographic methods; and discourse, popular culture and literary analyses. Chapters 3 and 5 draw directly from fieldwork in Fort McMurray and Vancouver to look at questions of indigeneity, race, caste, class, and gender. I draw primarily from interviews with first generation South Asians employed in extractive industries. Chapter 4 analyzes short stories by Sadhu Binning and Thomson Highway to look at questions of sexuality, intimacies, and desire. In this chapter I also draw from interviews and archival sources in Vancouver as well from popular culture.

Fort McMurray is at the centre of ongoing projects of Indigenous colonization as it is located in Indigenous territories of northern Alberta and is one of the largest and most destructive extractive industries in the country. Fort McMurray is a pertinent research site because of a large South Asian presence in the city.<sup>44</sup> I conducted fourteen interviews in Fort McMurray during the summer of 2013. My lead contact in the city was a school friend from Delhi and his partner. Through their contacts, I met several people whom I interviewed. Most interviews were conducted in private spaces, either my friend's home or the homes of the people being interviewed, while two were conducted in the office of the respondents, and one was conducted in a children's play area. All of the interviews were semi-structured, conducted in English (with limited use of Hindi and Urdu),<sup>45</sup> and ranged from twenty minutes to two hours in length. I interviewed nine cis-men engineers working from middle to upper middle levels in the oil companies. In addition, I spoke to five cis-women. While I do not want to reduce the identities of the cis-woman-identified respondents to their marital status, it is important to highlight as their presence in Fort McMurray is determined by the jobs of their partners; two women had employment in the Human Resources departments, one as an engineer in an oil company, one was a bank worker, and one runs a day care out of her home. Given the deeply masculinist nature of the extractive tar sands industry and the city, attention to all forms of gender formations, cis-heteropatriarchal, and heteronormative structures is essential (I explore these themes in the following chapters).

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<sup>44</sup> According to the Census of Canada, in the urban service area of Fort McMurray South Asians make 6.5% of the population. Of the residents in the urban service area who indicated that their region of origin was not Canada (5.4%), 25.2% noted their region of origin as Southern Asia.

<sup>45</sup> Respondents were multi-lingual and spoke a range of languages including Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Punjabi, and Urdu.

All the respondents were highly educated and skilled, upwardly mobile, upper caste Hindus, and in heterosexual endogamic marriages.<sup>46</sup> All of the respondents came from different urban centers in India. Some had moved to Canada as youth with their families, while some moved later for education, and others later in their careers. A few came to Canada via the United States, Malaysia or the U.A.E. Only one of my respondents was from Pakistan. Like others, this respondent was also highly educated, upwardly mobile, in a heterosexual marriage, and came from an urban centre in Pakistan. While there is a thriving Pakistani community, as well as Bangladeshi, Tamil, and Sri Lankan communities in Fort McMurray, I was unable to reach out to them for interviews because of the limitations of my networks in the city. This barrier was a testament to how South Asian diasporic communities are often divided along colonial/postcolonial national lines with very few overlapping spaces (including workplaces). All my respondents were also upper caste Hindu, with the exception of the Pakistani respondent, and all had very limited interactions with Muslim and Sikh Indians. However most socialized with other Hindus across regional and linguistic boundaries (presumably all upper caste). For all my respondents, upper-caste Hindu Indian identity was a major marker for socializing both within and outside work places.

At the time of the interviews, respondents had been in town for an average of 5-6 years (a minimum of 3 years and maximum of 13 years). All my respondents were either Canadian citizens or permanent residents. They are among the minority of skilled white-collar racialized workers in “Fort McMurray”—who are able to afford a “stable” work routine (with most weekends off) and still make “great money.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, this group of people has “made it”

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<sup>46</sup> Endogamy refers to marriage within caste. I expand on this in Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>47</sup> This is in comparison to racialized temporary foreign workers. This project does not engage with the lives of temporary foreign workers. This was mainly due the fact that access to these jobs is controlled by the employers. These workers live in industry provided housing which are often next to the extraction sites (far from the city). This

financially within Canada's neoliberal economy. It is important to note that all the men worked as engineers and did not occupy any positions of power in the managerial or directorial ranks.<sup>48</sup> These racialized, high-income, skilled engineers claim access to "model minority" status and aspire to upwardly mobile heteronormative whiteness. Class is very integral to this analysis of skilled racialized workers in the tar sands and their aspirations to "model" subjects. Class, like other social categories, is dynamic, making class analysis more complicated, multilayered, and non-unidirectional. I expand further on class in Chapter 5.

In Vancouver I spoke to Punjabis who had come to Canada in the 1960s-70s from different rural parts of the Punjab, India. The late '60s and early '70s saw an increased and steady migration of South Asians to the region as a result of the thriving forestry and fishery industries.<sup>49</sup> Some of these migrants settled in the Lower Mainland, while many others were scattered across central B.C., northern B.C.<sup>50</sup> and Vancouver Island.<sup>51</sup> I reached out to most of my respondents through community elders—through poets, writers, activists, and academic networks.<sup>52</sup> These elders connected with different respondents. Everyone I spoke to has now retired and "settled" in B.C.'s Lower Mainland. I conducted the interviews in a combination of

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is an important limitation of the project. However, my focus on people with permanent status or citizenship allows for a more explicit engagement with the processes of citizen-formations and helps unravels the complexities of "settled" citizens.

<sup>48</sup> As I expand in Chapter 5, there exists a glass ceiling for most racialized workers—while their skilled labour is important for the economy, they are deemed not fit enough to hold positions of power in the tar sands companies.

<sup>49</sup> On South Asian labour history in B.C., see: Kamala Nayar.

<sup>50</sup> By the 1950s, many sawmills in the Lower Mainland had reached their saturation or were in decline. Many Punjabi migrants were forced to move to more isolated areas in northern B.C. for work. In addition, in 1958 a Punjabi lumber industrialist established his own sawmills in Prince Rupert – Prince Rupert Sawmills Ltd. This served as a catalyst for increased Punjabi migration to Prince Rupert and other parts of northern B.C. (K. Nayar).

<sup>51</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, my discussion is limited to Punjabi communities in mainland B.C. There was a significant community of South Asians on Vancouver Island. But due to logistical and financial reasons, I was not able to focus on these communities.

<sup>52</sup> I also interviewed ten South Asian activists who were involved in anti-racist organizing in the 1970s-90s in the Lower Mainland. These people were mainly active in two South Asian anti-racist organizations: East Indian Defense Committee and B.C. Organization to Fight Racism. I have included some of these conversations (in particular Sadhu Binning and Paul Binning) in Chapter 3, 4 and 5.

Punjabi, Hindi and English, while my respondents were most comfortable in Punjabi. I spoke to six men who worked in lumber mills<sup>53</sup> and six women who worked in fish canneries.<sup>54</sup> Men mostly came with visitor status and women mostly came as sponsored partners.<sup>55</sup> The respondents had varying formal education levels. Some respondents possessed land back home and many did not. Like all my respondents in Fort McMurray, those in Vancouver were upper caste (jat - which is a high caste amongst Sikhs) and in heterosexual endogamic marriages. Everyone was either a naturalized Canadian citizen or a Permanent Resident. But unlike the Fort McMurray respondents, the Vancouver respondents were not necessarily as privileged and upwardly mobile. They had all retired from working class jobs, having worked day-in and day-out for twenty or thirty years. While all the respondents own houses in the Lower Mainland now and their children seem to be settled in upwardly mobile careers, there are stark differences in their experiences in Canada from those of the people I interviewed in Fort McMurray. Working class jobs enabled everyday proximity to the Native-other and perhaps a more composite understanding of the settler state. For the Vancouver respondents, this proximity produced a different sense of belonging to Canada as many knew more intimately that they were on Native lands.

In addition to interviews, I also conducted ethnographic research in both cities. In Fort McMurray, I spent considerable time in one of the oil company's headquarters, in public spaces such as the mall and strip malls, and the Native Friendship Centre. I also spent time at South Asian social get-togethers. In Vancouver, I spent a lot of time in South Asian market spaces,

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<sup>53</sup> I spoke to two men who worked in Prince Rupert, two in Terrace, two in Vancouver, and one in Quesnel. They are retired now and live in different parts of the Lower Mainland.

<sup>54</sup> Out of the six women I interviewed, five worked in Prince Rupert (two of them lived in Prince Rupert, while two travelled from Kitimat and one travelled from Terrace), and one lived and worked in Vancouver. All, except one, had moved directly from Punjab; one moved via the U.K.

<sup>55</sup> However, there are examples of opposite migration patterns as well.

gurdwaras, and social programs organized for elders. In addition, I also attended several community events such as commemorations, activist gatherings, cultural events, and religious functions. These spaces allowed me to make observations of the day-to-day lives of South Asians and to better understand their lived experiences. These observations inform my theorizations of diasporic formations. I also conducted archival research in Vancouver, consulting the City of Vancouver Archives, Vancouver Public Library, Simon Fraser University Archives and Records Management, Simon Fraser University Collections and Rare Books, and the University of British Columbia Archives. At these places I was able to collect valuable materials pertaining to different histories of B.C., including South Asian history, histories of racist violence and anti-racist organizing, histories of different Indigenous nations, and South Asian publications and cultural production. I refer to these archives throughout the dissertation.

This project raised several methodological queries and challenges for me. I raise some of those related to questions of positionality, relationality, and knowledge production in the following chapters. Here, I focus on the main question of centering Indigenous voices. Throughout the life of this project, from the proposal stage to now, the imperative methodological and political question that I have continued to ask myself is: how do I ethically and responsibly engage with Indigenous voices, histories, and experiences? While I made the decision of not formally interviewing Indigenous peoples, the question is still in the process of being answered. In Fort McMurray and Vancouver, I engaged in many informal conversations with Indigenous elders, activists, and academics (more in Vancouver than Fort McMurray). My writing draws from both Indigenous scholarship and activist critiques. However, the dissertation does not draw from structured interviews with Indigenous peoples. Apart from the obvious factor of lack of institutional support for Indigenous research, this was also a conscious choice made for

several reasons. First, there was the question of expressing “solidarity” with Indigenous resurgence and unmapping racialized complicities in the settler state. The project focuses on the complexities of South Asian presences in Canada and their relations with state colonization processes, on what it means for South Asians to be settled on stolen lands. This makes the question—“What is/was your understanding of Indigenous peoples?”—asked to South Asians is more relevant to the project than asking Indigenous peoples specifically “What is/was your understanding of South Asians?” Further, as discussed in the Introduction, I draw from Rita K. Dhamoon to focus on the modalities of othering instead of focusing on the “othered” subjects (*Identity/Difference* 16), and so I made the decision to interview South Asians only.<sup>56</sup>

Second, York University’s ethics protocol places unreasonable demands upon Indigenous communities. Although the ethics guidelines recognize epistemic violences committed by the academy on Indigenous nations and peoples, and the ethics procedures are the same for Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike, the responsibilities are different for different researchers. As an outsider researcher researching Indigenous communities, it seemed unreasonable and unethical for me to ask Indigenous communities to support my project. What the academy desires is a collaboration with the communities; the protocol asks for writing a proposal with Indigenous peoples and conducting the research with them. For instance, according to York University’s “Guidelines for Research Involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples”:

One of the key principles of research involving Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples is the engagement of the community or communities within which the research will be conducted. Specifically, researchers conducting research where the research is likely to affect the welfare of an Aboriginal/Indigenous Peoples community, or communities, to which prospective participants belong, researchers shall seek engagement with the relevant community. The nature and extent of community engagement in a project shall

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<sup>56</sup> In Chapter 2 and 3, I explore processes of othering of the caste-other and the need to focus on the upper subject to understand processes of caste power, privilege, and violence.

be determined jointly by the researcher and the relevant community, and shall be appropriate to community characteristics and the nature of the research. (1-2)

While in theory this is a crucial and much-needed principle, for me it was a deterrent because it demands an imposition of myself on Indigenous communities—to ask them to make my research their priority.<sup>57</sup> For the purposes of my project, I felt this was neither ethical nor necessary. My understanding of my ethics and relations with Indigenous nations and peoples is different from what the academy requires. Because there was no requirement for me to go to South Asians communities and ask them to help me write my proposal, it did not seem plausible to do so with Indigenous peoples—to say “I want to be in the academy ... Can you help with me the project and put your labour into my project?” York’s ethics inhibit my ethics to be more responsible and affective to foster critical and political relationality with Indigenous communities.

Lastly, there was also a barrier in terms of contact, logistics, and colonial geographies. As a student with minimal financial support and no driver’s license, research with Indigenous communities who did not reside in urban areas was out of the question. As Bonita Lawrence<sup>58</sup> pointed out in a personal conversation, spatial segregation is a function of colonialism. Past and ongoing processes of colonialism have limited the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people—something that I discuss throughout this dissertation. For instance, in Fort McMurray most Native communities lived outside urban spaces which were inaccessible by public transit. In B.C., the South Asians from northern B.C. whom I interviewed had settled in Vancouver post-retirement, while much fewer northern Native peoples had the financial mobility

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<sup>57</sup> In Vancouver, I did approach Musqueam Elder Larry Grant at UBC and Robbi Wilson, Program Director, Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre Society to discuss possible collaborations. However, it was after meeting them that I realized I cannot impose my project on Indigenous communities.

<sup>58</sup> Personal Communication with Bonita Lawrence.

to migrate south. Geographies of colonialism deliberately and violently produced reserves as segregated zones. These are, in fact, the realities of colonialism.

For all these reasons, I decided not to interview Indigenous peoples. However, I am still grappling with the impacts of this decision. Despite the absence of Indigenous voices, this project is centered in Indigenous scholarship and activist critiques of colonial formations in Canada, the U.S., Hawai‘i, Australia, New Zealand, Palestine, and India. Rather than reduce indigeneity to suffering, violence and victimhood (Alfred; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; Belcourt; Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism”), I seek to center indigeneity in critiques of settler colonialism. Manu Vimalassery notes:

Indigenous aspirations to autonomy and sovereignty—whether expressed by communities or individuals and whether they appear in the public arena or in private life—deserve careful scrutiny. Attending to those aspirations moves us closer to speaking *for* indigenous people while reducing the chances that when speaking *about* them we will be telling our own story and not theirs. (“Counter-Sovereignty” 142, emphasis in original)

Taking heed of Vimalassery’s call and direction from Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism, in this project I seek to centre Indigenous resurgence and decolonization. As noted in the Introduction, this project is not an anthropological, historical, sociological, or cultural study of Indigenous peoples. The dissertation employs indigeneity as a foundational logic in the making of the Canadian state and South Asian diasporas.

### **Notes on Naming and Terminology**

Needless to say the term “Indian” has many meanings within the scope of my project. In Canada, similar to the rest of the Americas, “Indian” brings together the multiple cartographies of colonialism. Present-day India is a colonial construct. It was never a nation-state as we know it now before 1947—the year India achieved Independence from Britain. The name “India” itself

originates through multiple transformations of the Sanskrit word Sindhu, which is a river in present-day Pakistan. For the Europeans the land east of the river Sindhu/Indus was India. It was in quest of this India that Columbus sailed from Spain in 1492 to “discover” the new world of the Americas. Through colonial mistakes and ironies, he called/named the peoples on the Americas “Indios” (Spanish for Indians). Thus, there were Indians both east and west of Europe, connecting the West Indies, the East Indies and the Americas through the varying processes of colonization. In this section I explore the complexities of naming Indians Indian, both “projected and imagined” (Mathur) and “misidentified” (Forbes, *The American Discovery of Europe*).

Within the Indigenous context, the term “Indian” is highly contentious. While many communities still use the term to identify themselves, many others do not. Instead a range of other names are used to mark indigeneity, these include, Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, and First Nations, and local names for different nations, territories, tribes, and communities. In this dissertation I use Indigenous and Native interchangeably. Where necessary or possible, I use the local names for specific nations. However, I do not use the terms Aboriginal, First Nations or Native Indian as their meanings are tied to the settler-states’ colonial categorization of Indigenous peoples (Alfred; Rutherford). By using Indigenous and Native, I am not seeking to create universal and homogenous Indigenous subjects, across temporalities and spatialities, but rather seek to look at questions of identity, race, nation, culture, and colonialism here on these lands. Zapotec scholar Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez argues that indigeneity is “constructed in the context of highly complex and varied relationships between Indigenous peoples, the societies, and the status in which they live” (“The Colonization and Decolonization” 112). However, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kanaka Maoli) reminds us: “as Native peoples struggle for greater self-determination and political power, they simultaneously challenge and reproduce some of these

very same dynamics and processes” (9). Further, indigeneity is not an essential, stagnant or anachronistic identity. Jodi Byrd and Michael Rothberg argue: “indigeneity’ holds the promise of rearticulating and reframing questions of place, space, movement and belonging” (3). It is important to note that the promise is a political assertion for decolonial futurity. However, indigeneity is not monolithic or homogenous. It is also not always “decolonial.” Thus, indigeneity is space-time specific, dynamic, and politically enabled and enabling. Moreover, as I theorize indigeneity transnationally, across Canada, the U.S., and India, I do not seek to conflate indigeneity across geographies into one. I argue to pay particular attention in theorizing indigeneity locally and globally.

Similarly, the term Indian for those from India is highly debated and controversial. First, since independence, India has become a hegemonic nation-state with both “internal” and external imperial pursuits: from the occupation of Kashmir and different parts of the North East to its interests in surrounding nation-states. Furthermore, structures of caste, indigeneity, religion, ethnicity, region, and language maintain dominant ideas of “Indianness” that excludes all those on the margins of these structures. Second, in Canada, Indian becomes a universal and essential marker for anyone who is from South Asia, erasing the multiple national, ethnic, regional, and diasporic identities that people from South Asia and different diasporic locations may use to identify themselves. I chose to use the term “South Asian” instead. In Canada, the term “South Asian” is commonly used to refer to communities who emigrated from and belong to the geopolitical region of the world that includes nation-states such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The fact that some academic departments specializing in studies of the region include Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Tibet as part of South Asia and the

UN goes as far as to include Iran, is one of the first indications of how amorphous a designation the label is.

“South Asian” is also used as an identifying term for communities with historical and ancestral links to South Asia but that have long since “settled” outside the region in other places such as the Caribbean, different parts of Africa, South East Asia, the Pacific, and elsewhere. These migrations followed colonial regimes of racialized labour processes.<sup>59</sup> Specifically, the identity markers of the “West Indian” and “East Indian” for South Asians from the Caribbean and South Asia, respectively, are very telling of the category of the “Indian,” That Native-ness is rendered as the loci of both West and East Indians/Indies/Indias in Canada disrupts the linear claims of belonging of Indians from India, and illustrates the colonial complexities and continuities. Furthermore, within the Canadian context, it is important to note the distinction between “old” and “new” South Asian diasporas, given the significant presence of Indo-Caribbean, Indo-Fijian, and Indo-Mauritian communities in Canada, and the tensions over identity, culture, and authenticity between the “old” and “new” diasporas. The distinctions between “old” diasporic formations through colonial and indentureship processes and “new” diasporic formations through postcolonial and transnational processes are foundational to understanding South Asian diasporic formations in Canada. My research focuses on the latter, yet is not devoid of the former. Lily Cho notes how the distinction is not to understand these histories as linear progressions, but rather “this distinction can be more usefully deployed to articulate the ways in which the old diaspora is constitutive of, and coeval with, the new” (*Eating Chinese* 12). The distinction is also important, as Vijay Mishra argues, to disrupt the narratives of “new” Indian im/migrant as the “legitimate archive with which to explore the histories of

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<sup>59</sup> I expand on this in Chapters 1, 3 and 5.

diasporic subjectivities” (Mishra 3). In this dissertation, even as I focus on “new” diasporas, I ground the analyses in historical colonial formations.

Thus, the term “South Asian” captures the different geographies and histories of people from South Asia and beyond. Susan Koshy argues:

The term we use, ‘South Asian diaspora’, encapsulates the difficulty of finding a political imaginary that can encompass these many histories of relocation . . . It also points towards a common history of colonialism as the impetus for the dispersals that produced the diaspora. (“Introduction” 8-9)

To engage with multiple histories of colonialism, here and there, the term “South Asian” is an important tool to study the formations of people from South Asia on stolen lands. It is critical, however, to note that “South Asian” has very little if any currency within such communities. This speaks to the racial multicultural logics of centering differences and constructing racialized otherness. Multiculturalism in Canada requires that specific histories and experiences be erased in an attempt to produce an easily knowable difference, and thus, does not account for clear dissimilarities in language, caste, region, religion, national and ethnic origins.<sup>60</sup> As Arun P. Mukherjee has argued, “‘South Asian’ is a bureaucratic . . . umbrella term [used] to produce a unitary community that is not actually there” (*Postcolonialism* 29). Such productions of unitary identity revolve around simultaneously universalizing and essentializing constructions of “Indianness” signified in broadly defined markers such as saris, bindis, henna, Bollywood, spicy food, and (Hindu) festivals. Such simplifications allow for “South Asians” to be knowable and commodifiable within and to mainstream Canadian culture. That some members of communities so designated in Canada have uncritically adopted the term to self-reference and self-identify

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<sup>60</sup> The use of the term “South Asian” is fairly recent, and can be traced to the 1980. With the emergence of South Asian studies—especially in literature departments—in the mid-1980s, and with the growing numbers of people from the sub-continent entering Canada, the term seeped into popular usage.

indicates just how powerful and central the label has become in maintaining unequal relations of power. Academic knowledge production is significantly complicit in these processes.

Since the arrival of South Asians into Canada, many different terms have been used to identify them: these includes various renditions of the words Hindu,<sup>61</sup> Sikh and Muslim, along with Indo-Canadian and East Indian. For my project, everyone I interviewed in Vancouver and Fort McMurray nationally identify themselves as Indian. In Vancouver, many South Asians I spoke identified themselves as Indo-Canadian, East Indian, Punjabi and Sikh, and in Fort McMurray Indian was the main identity, followed with regional identities.<sup>62</sup> I note in Chapter 1 how Sikh identity is marginalized due to logics of Sikhophobia and Islamophobia in India and Canada. I choose not to identify my respondents from Vancouver as Indo-Canadian and East Indian, as these identities are centered around Indian and Canadian modes of identifications.<sup>63</sup> Further, many South Asians used terms like Indo-Canadian and East Indian to dissociate themselves with the Indigenous “Indian” in Canada. Kamala E. Nayar notes how many Punjabis in B.C. did not want to be called “Indians” because of the term’s negative association with Indigenous peoples; they didn’t want to be mistaken as Indigenous (183). She notes how this rejection perpetuated Indigenous peoples’ position as “third-class” and maintained stereotypical images (191).<sup>64</sup> I do use the terms Punjabi and Sikh interchangeably with South Asians in the

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<sup>61</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century in North America, “Hindu” was a catchall term for anyone who came from South Asia. Junaid Rana notes: “The term “Hindu” did not differentiate between those who practiced the Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Christian religions—or, for that matter, subcontinental atheists” (42).

<sup>62</sup> I interviewed only one Pakistani Ahmadiya Muslim.

<sup>63</sup> I have left “East Indian” from interviews and newspaper article in direct quotations.

<sup>64</sup> For many South Asians, as I note in the following chapters, encountering the word “Indian” on government forms was always confusing. Many of them thought that it referred to their kind of “Indian.” In popular culture as well, many times the identity of “Indian” is deflected on the other “Indian.” For instance, a term like “Indian Summer” is often assumed to refer to hot humid South Asian Indian summers. In fact, a South Asian cultural festival is called “Indian Summer Festival.” However, the term does not refer to summers in India, but rather is a colonial racist term used by European settlers in the late eighteenth century against Indigenous peoples in North America. Through its anti-Native usage and misnaming and orientalisng summers in India, the term connects the two Indians through centuries of colonial encounters. Indian Summer Festival is a perfect example of how claims to multicultural

dissertation, noting the religious, cultural, and linguistic differences in both the terms. I prefer to use South Asian as marker throughout, knowing the complexities of employing South Asians to talk about Indians. Since the project is grounded in anti-colonial and anti-imperial politics, it is important to navigate these tensions in naming, rather erasing them or uncritically utilizing them. I do, however, strategically use Indian for both South Asians and Indigenous peoples at different places. I do so primarily to highlight the colonial and racial logics in the naming of these Indians and demonstrate the shared histories between these differently located Indians—Indians and *other* Indians. Thus, the dissertation overall is committed to keep the methodologies of naming amorphous, contradictory, ethical, and unsettling.

My respondents took pride in calling themselves Canadian and claiming varying forms of Canadianness. This speaks to their investments in the settler state, and implicates their identities as the settler identity. However, I do not identify my respondents, and more generally South Asians in Canada, as Asian Canadian or South Asian Canadian. I primarily do so to highlight the racial and colonial exclusions of the Canadian settler state. The dissertation is informed by critical scholarships within Asian American studies and Asian Canadian studies, and I have immensely benefitted from my participation in Association of Asian American Studies conferences. I draw from Lily Cho's formulation of (Asian Canadian) diasporas as produced through "the displacements of colonial and imperial oppression" ("Asian Canadian Futures" 182). Furthermore, Larissa Lai notes how the category of Asian Canadian is "genealogically produced and deeply relational The power comes not from a particular essence as such, but from the coalition work it does" (5). She further notes how the designation "always already contains its erasures" (16). Given the fluidity and porosity of the term, I recognize the importance and the

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neoliberal citizenship by South Asians is foregrounded by/in processes of settler colonialism and anti-Native racism in Canada.

critical work it does. However, in challenging Asian and South Asian investments to the Canadian state, I contend it is necessary to unsettle the Canadian. Rather than taking their Canadianness as given, I problematize their investments by not calling them Canadian. I choose to use the phrase South Asians in Canada to theorize the diasporic formations. Drawing from Lai, I deploy South Asians as “small ruptures in the constant emergence of a category—Asian Canadian—to investigate what is produced at different moments.” (33).

Additionally, I use the following writing techniques to challenge dominant colonial forms of writing. First, I capitalize the first letter of the words Indigenous, Native, Black, Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, Shudra (lower caste) and Tribal throughout the dissertation, whereas not for words like white, west, north, brahmin and savarna (upper caste). I do so to acknowledge the colonial epistemic violences that have rendered these communities marginalized and often erased within knowledge production. Second, words from other languages, especially Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi are not italicized in this dissertation. The people I spoke to use words in Punjabi, Urdu, and Hindi intermixed with their English. I do not wish to prioritize and normalize English as the standard language, and I want to demonstrate the colonial histories of English and how non-English speakers use the language as they see fit for their purposes. I provide translations for words when they first appear in the text. Lastly, every time an Indigenous scholar is introduced in the dissertation, I either identify them as Indigenous or provide the name of the Indigenous nation they belong too. In the Canadian academy, given that Indigenous scholarship remains invisibilized and the state’s continues to deny of Indigenous nationhoods, it is important for scholars working within settler academies to name and recognize the different nations of the Indigenous scholars we are in conversations with. Along similar lines, I identify Dalit, Adivasi, and Black scholars when I first introduce them in the dissertation.

Jodi Byrd asks: “What exactly is the proper use of ‘Indian’ in a world marked (and mapped) by European colonialism? How can ‘American Indian’ exist if they are always under erasure, always deferred by ‘Indian Americans?’” (*The Transit* 71). To Byrd’s questions, I further ask, how can the “Dalit Indian,” “Bahujan Indian,” “Adivasi Indian,” “Tribal Indian,” “Muslim Indian” etc. exist in the United States and Canada, if “Indian American” and “Indian Canadian” is always dominant? What about non-Indian South Asians? Who is the “Indian” in Canada? Who is the “Indian” in India? And who is the “Indian” in the Indian? Challenging, conflating and destabilizing the Indian spectrum, following Byrd this project asks (“my”) Indians to “acknowledge their own positions within empire and then reconceptualize space and history to make visible what imperialism and its resultant settler colonialisms and diasporas have sought to obscure” (xxx). This project, thus is a commitment to calls for Indigenous resurgence and decolonization, towards complete restoration and regeneration of Indigenous nations (Alfred and Corntassel; Corntassel), repatriation of Indigenous lands (Tuck and Yang), mobilization against all colonial structures (L. B. Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle’s Back*), destruction of capitalism (Coulthard, “For Our Nations to Live”; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*), cultural autonomy (Barker, “Self-Determination”), unsettling of all forms of gender and sexual violences (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill; L. B. Simpson, “Anger, Resentment & Love”; A. Smith, *Conquest*), and transformation of the whole society “to reflect truly liberated post-imperial vision” (Alfred 27). This dissertation is a small attempt towards unsettling Indian desires on Indian lands towards forging critical alliances for decolonial futures.

## **Chapter 1: Theorizing Pernicious Continuities: Complexities, Complicities, and Traces**

Peoples of Mississaugas of the New Credit, Huron-Wendat nations, peoples of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and different Métis communities have lived for centuries in, what is commonly known in settler cartography as, “Toronto.” For Huron-Wendat peoples it is *toronton*, “the places of meetings,” and Kaneikéhaka peoples know it is as *tkaronto*, “the place where the trees stands in the water” (Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider 7). For almost a decade, Toronto has been my home. Born in traditional lands of Wabanaki Confederacy and Mi’kmaq peoples (Charlottetown, P.E.I.) and raised in New Delhi, India, I am a visitor, a migrant, an im/migrant to these lands. By birth, I am “Canadian,” a settler. By ancestry, I am “Indian”; for the Indian state I am an “overseas citizen of India.” A racialized migrant, an Indian settler, on stolen lands, on colonized Indian lands. As an Indian immigrant in Canada, I am embedded in entangled histories; my current positionality is structured by historical geographies that led to peoples in different continents not only being colonized, but also being labelled with a monolithic identity—that of an Indian. My Indianness, as complicated as it may be, is imbricated in the colonization of Indians, the “other” Indians. On Turtle Island, I am the “other” Indian.

In the city of Toronto, however, there are very notable traces of these overlapping histories. Over the last six years I have been living near the intersection of Dundas Street West and Roncesvalles Avenue. Henry Dundas, the namesake of Dundas Street, played a key role in the expansion of British colonialism in India and for years controlled the affairs of the East India Company (Bateman; “Henry Dundas’ Private Papers”). Dundas also expressly opposed the abolishment of slavery. Colonel Walter O’Hara named Roncesvalles Avenue after the Battle of Roncesvalles (in Spain) where England defeated Napoleon; O’Hara fought in the war for the

British army (Mayers). He was also a proponent of British expansion in South Asia. Also in close proximity to my home are Indian Road, Indian Grove, Indian Road Crescent, Indian Valley Crescent, Indian Trail, and Algonquin Avenue. These roads and avenues, all named Indian after the original inhabitants of these lands (not “my” kind of Indian), are among the very few public markers of peoples who have lived here for centuries, in a city which continues to invisibilize their past and continued presence. In the broader neighborhood, I am surrounded by Lansdowne Avenue (named after Lord Lansdowne, Governor-General of Canada, 1883-88, and Viceroy of India, 1888-94), Dufferin Street (named after Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, 1872-78, and Viceroy of India, 1884-88), King Street (named after King George III), and Queen Street (named after Queen Victoria). Not too far from my home, in downtown Toronto, Queen's Park—a green space in the middle of a concrete jungle located behind Ontario’s legislature—has an equestrian statue of Edward VII, King of the United Kingdom and the British Dominions and Emperor of India (1901-10). The statue was given to the City of Toronto by the government of India in 1969; it used to stand in Delhi, my home, and now stands in Toronto, my “settled” yet temporary home. It is not a coincidence that University of Toronto's “Philosopher's Walk” is adjacent to the park. The quiet footpath stands on a buried stream, Ziibiing, as the Anishinabek peoples called it. Indigenous scholar John Borrows shows how the Walk has nearly erased the presence of Indigenous peoples, their lands, and their knowledges (ix). It remains a testament to how these lands continue to be colonized.

These names, roads, and statues have histories—not histories of British civilization, modernity and liberalism, but rather histories of British colonialism, empire, and violence, across continents, connecting the Indians. These are geographies of colonialism; they trace the colonial links between my ancestral lands in India to stolen lands on Turtle Island. These lands are all

connected through colonialism, even if both nation-states, India and Canada, claim to be “decolonized” and “postcolonial.” Moreover, these markers are also a constant reminder of how I have come to live in Toronto through processes of colonialism, capitalism, and racial and gendered hierarchies.

By way of a short autobiographical introduction, I further sketch these interlinks through my histories of migration. My father moved to Canada in the 1970s to pursue graduate studies in economics. He moved from India aspiring for a better education in the western world, a better education that would promise a better life; a colonial aspiration. In India, he was educated in the Indian university system, left behind by the same colonizers who established their universities here in Canada. That my father could complete his education in Canada, teach here briefly, and eventually move back to India to teach there, shows how the migration of racialized peoples, with obvious caste, gender, and class privileges, and simultaneous racial exclusions in Canada, is bound within colonial and capitalist logics. Further, the fact that I could “return” to Canada after 18 years of being in India without documents, as a “Canadian” by birth, maps my histories and movements through geographies of colonialism. Jigna Desai captures the meaning of South Asian migration to the global north with the following: “We [South Asians] are here [Americas/the west] because you [British/whites/colonizers] were there [South Asia]” (16). However, to this I add the following unsettling sentiment that crucially encapsulates the racial and colonial cartographies of migrations: we are here because you were there *and continue to be here*.

This chapter provides a framework to theorize racial and colonial continuities, what I call pernicious continuities, by outlining complexities, complicities, and traces as the three conceptual pillars of the dissertation. I explore different sites, positionalities, experiences, and

facets of South Asian presence in Canada and their relations to indigeneity and processes of settler colonialism. In the first section, I theorize “pernicious continuities” and complexities of intermeshed and entangled racial and colonial histories and processes that connect all differently racialized and colonized peoples. In this section, I also engage with the intersections of histories and legacies of enslavement and anti-Black racism, logics of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia, and structures of “border imperialism” (Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*) as central to understanding settler colonial processes and intermittent racial hierarchies in Canada. The second section draws upon the discussion of complexities to interrogate complicities by looking at questions of settler-ness. Focusing on concepts of “settlers of colour” (Lawrence and Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism”; Trask, “Settlers of Color”; Tuck and Yang) and “arrivants” (Byrd, *The Transit*), I argue for a more intricate understanding of race, diaspora, indigeneity and complicity. The third section discusses silences and absences as a crucial tool of the settler colonial project and offers traces as a method of unmapping these silences and absences. I conclude this chapter by discussing the recent turn in ethnic studies towards racial comparativism to ground racial and colonial incommensurabilities in the making of South Asian diasporas in Canada.

### **On Colonialism, Continuities, and Complexities**

Sylvia Wynter's pathbreaking work on colonialism and processes of racialization in the Americas highlights the paradoxes of Columbus' alleged “discovery” of the Americas in 1492. She posits that virtues of western humanism and violences of colonialism are inherently embedded in each other.<sup>1</sup> Wynter argues that “Humanism and colonialism inhabit the same cognitive political

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<sup>1</sup> See: Wynter (“1492”; “Columbus, the Ocean Blue”; and “Unsettling the Coloniality”) along with Bagues; McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*; and Scott.

universe in as much as Europe's discovery of its self is simultaneous with its discovery of its others” (in Scott 120). Through Europe's invention of the rational/secular conception of the self, Wynter contends that the peoples of the newly colonized territories (i.e. Indigenous peoples) and the enslaved peoples of Africa were made to be the other of man (“Unsettling the Coloniality”). Thus, 1492 not only marks the colonization of the Americas and “discovery” of the Indigenous, but also the advent of transatlantic enslavement. The “discovery” changed the entire global-scape through processes of colonialism, racialization, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism. Similarly, Anibal Quijano notes how European modernity/rationality was established and maintained as European and as an elevation of European humanity over the rest of the world (“Coloniality and Modernity”; “Coloniality of Power”). Quijano posits:

The large majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated against, are precisely the members of the “races”, “ethnies”, or “nations” into which the colonized populations, were categorized in the formative process of that world power, from the conquest of America and onward. (“Coloniality and Modernity” 42)

Coloniality of power is based upon the racial classification of the world population by the colonizers and has shaped all the “basic instances of the Eurocentered capitalist colonial/modern world” (45). Coloniality is the ongoing legacy through which modes of exploitation and subjugation are maintained. Wynter and Quijano provide pertinent frameworks to understand the continuities between processes of racialization, colonialism and capitalism. Colonized and racialized peoples’ histories and presents are deeply interconnected, overlapping, and complicated for Indigenous, Black and other peoples of colour—even in the Americas where migration (forced or otherwise) processes have been very different.

I began this chapter by tracing urban symbols and my own story of migration to illustrate the intermeshed histories of colonialism and racism between what we presently call Canada and India. I conceptualize these connections as “pernicious continuities.” In 2012, in a gurdwara in

an Oak Creek, Wisconsin, a white supremacist shot and killed six Sikhs and wounded four others. In the wake of the shootings, I wrote a reflection piece in *Sikh Formations* on racial violences on Muslim, Sikh, and brown bodies in North America (Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities”). Drawing from African feminist Amina Mama, I conceptualized connections between colonial histories and legacies in South Asia to racial violences against South Asians in North America as “pernicious continuities.” Mama, in her influential essay “Sheroes and Villains,” asserts how understanding gendered violence in Africa demands both historical and contemporary analysis. Colonialism, Mama argues, is a common historical force that surpasses the boundaries of the African continent. Further, she calls for the recognition of “pernicious continuities between colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial systems” (61). Mama theorizes “pernicious continuities” temporally within a spatially vast African continent. Taking direction from her, I theorize pernicious continuities spatially and temporally *across* continents to trace genealogies and cartographies of racism and colonialism.

Pernicious continuities help us understand the structural, ideological, affective, temporal, and spatial linkages, overlaps, and ruptures of over five hundred years of colonialism and white supremacy, from South Asia to the Americas, from Europe to Africa, from Africa to Asia, from Asia to Europe, from the Americas to Africa. These violent continuities can be seen from the fact that the South African white supremacist apartheid state took blueprints of the systems of reservations in Canada and the U.S. to establish itself. In turn, the Israeli Zionist state has taken these blueprints of apartheid to occupy Palestinian territories, and it is from the Zionists that right wing Hindutva forces in India draw inspirations from.<sup>2</sup> Further, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang

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<sup>2</sup> For more on connections and continuities between colonization of the Americas, apartheid state of South Africa, occupation of Palestine and Hindutva organizing in India, see: Barron; Krebs and Olwan; A. Kumar; Lloyd and Pulido; Olwan; Oza; Prashad, *Namaste Sharon*; Salaita; Warrior; and Waziyatawin.

point out that settler mechanisms in North America “have provided the tools for internal colonialisms elsewhere” (32); neoliberal “development” in the global South regimes have relied on these methodologies. For instance, the post-liberalization Indian state’s land-grabs and dispossession of peasants, Adivasis and Dalits,<sup>3</sup> actually draw from settler colonial instruments (32). Hence, these pernicious continuities continue to shape global forms of power, oppression and violence.<sup>4</sup>

Pernicious continuities call for an urgent and crucial unmapping of the colonial and racial continuum. Unmapping histories and spaces, Sherene Razack argues, is “exploring space as a social product, uncovering how bodies are produced in spaces and how spaces produce bodies” (17). Thus, examining pernicious continuities can unmap and unsettle identities, genealogies, histories, and spaces. Examining pernicious continuities is not to conflate or homogenize all racial and colonial violences together, but is a means to understand that colonialism is always a key element (Batacharya 41), which needs to be challenged, disrupted, and decolonized. Theorizing pernicious continuities enables centering Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism and white supremacy. By theorizing pernicious continuities in the making of the Oak Creek shootings, I was able to attend to the colonial and racial continuum to understand racial violences within the context of past and ongoing processes of colonization of the Americas.

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<sup>3</sup> Adivasi is used as an umbrella term for the Indigenous communities in India. Some Indigenous communities use the term Tribal to identify themselves. Dalit is a political term used by erstwhile “untouchables”—peoples who are outside of the traditional four-tier caste system. I explore Adivasi, and Dalit critiques of the Indian state and South Asian diasporas in Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>4</sup> Manu Vimalassery similarly has theorized “imperial continuities” to locate historical precedents of settler colonial processes in the making of the U.S. as the global imperial power (“Antecedents of Imperial Incarceration”). Failure to unmask these continuities, Vimalassery notes “averts attention from historical precedents and ongoing processes of settler colonialism, which ground and shape these United States that are fighting a “War on Terror,” limiting the scope of our political vision away from engaging thought and politics of indigenous sovereignty, so vital to any thoroughgoing critique of U.S. imperialism” (351). Like pernicious continuities, imperial continuities allow for tracing colonial and racial histories to foster critical solidarities between racialized and colonized peoples.

While Wynter primarily draws upon Black experiences and Quijano upon Latin American experiences, their theorizations provide insights into pernicious continuities for variously dispossessed, racialized, and colonized peoples—Black, Indigenous, and other peoples of colour. Racial exclusion and white supremacy need to be theorized within the context of white settler colonial states and their anti-black formations, where the state legitimizes and normalizes these violent acts on the “other.” This dissertation explores these varying, intermeshed, and complex processes of racial and colonial formations in the making of the white settler states. Of course, there are pivotal differences for different communities, peoples, and regions. Jodi Byrd argues that racialization and colonization have worked simultaneously and they should be understood as “concomitant global systems” (*The Transit* xiii), yet she warns us not to “obfuscate the distinctions between the two systems of dominance and the coerced complicities amid both” (xiii). The conflation, Byrd cautions, effaces the foundations of conquest by racializing the Indigenous body. Moreover, anti-racist analysis becomes a dominant site of critique, often superseding anti-colonial critiques within sites of knowledge production, and thereby erasing indigeneity. Indigenous peoples are rendered as another ethnic minority within the settler states, akin to other racialized peoples, effacing the coloniality of Indigenous dispossession. It is through the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, Lenape scholar Joanne Barker argues, that the Indigenous peoples are racialized (“For Whom Sovereignty”). Along similar lines, Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua have called for decolonizing anti-racism (“Decolonizing Antiracism”). They argue that critical theories of anti-racism, postcolonialism, and diaspora tend to ignore indigeneity and ongoing processes of settler colonialism. Tuck and Yang remind scholars of race, ethnicity, and diaspora that “decolonization is not a metaphor.” Since Indigenous lands remain colonized, Tuck and Yang argue that lands and lives need to be

decolonized before attempting to decolonize anything else; decolonization is a separate and unique project “from other civil and human-rights based social justice projects” (2). Thus, these scholars caution other scholars of colour in their theorizations of racism and colonization to resist effacing indigeneity and positing settler state processes as inevitable and normalized.

Byrd offers a theoretical model to understand colonialism as a cacophony of “contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles” (*The Transit* 53). Cacophony here focuses on vertical interactions between the colonizer and colonized to draw attention to differing forms of power that the colonizer asserts on the colonized. It also theorizes horizontal relations between various “minority oppressions within settler and arrivant landscapes on the baseline between racialization and conquest” (54). It pays attention to multiple forms of racial, gendered and sexual oppressions that the settler states seek to maintain and normalize. Rita K. Dhamoon argues that cacophony is also a “political strategy” to centre Indigenous voices as it signals “the ‘noise’ of shifting interconnections between peoples, histories, experiences, and systems of power, some of which are more clearly delineated than others over time and space” (“Unmooring the Komagata Maru” 8). Analyzing colonial cacophonies offers an alternative way of addressing differently located peoples and their relations to various forms of racial and colonial violences.

Elaborating on continuities and entanglements, Lisa Lowe writes that Indigenous expropriation, African enslavement, and other racial dispossessions “are imbricated processes, not sequential events; they are ongoing and continuous in our contemporary moment” (*The Intimacies of Four Continents* 7). Coloniality, thus, is maintained through spatially and temporally connected processes. Further, these variously located histories are interlocked but not identical or homogenous. Lowe elaborates on these differentiations by theorizing the “intimacies

of four continents”: the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe.<sup>5</sup> Instead of employing intimacy as desires and sexuality, Lowe proposes a framework for a “political economy” of intimacies within colonial and capitalist processes and linkages (18). Lowe elaborates on intimacies:

It includes, on the one hand, identifying the residual processes of settler colonialism that appropriated lands from indigenous people, and the colonial logics through which men and women from Africa and Asia were forcibly transported to the Americas, who with native, mixed, and creole peoples constituted colonial societies that produced the assets for the bourgeois republics in Europe and North America out of which intimacy, as liberal possessive individualism, became the hallmark. (20)

Lowe’s framework allows for a historical understanding of racial formations on a global scale. It disrupts western colonization, and subsequently western liberalism, and demonstrates the cacophonies and pernicious continuities shared by racialized and colonized peoples. It also contextualizes contemporary transnational and intersectional race hierarchies and structures; and enables theorizations of imperialist and neoliberal processes, concomitantly, with migration and diasporic formations, and the subsequent inclusions and exclusions.

Lowe’s framework allows us to ground the differences, frictions, and ruptures inherent in the cartographies of colonialism. However, in addition to Byrd’s critique of intimacies, as highlighted above, Byrd argues indigeneity is antithetical to liberalism. According to Byrd: “Indigeneity remains troubling ... [to] the notions of liberalism, democracy, and humanism ... [as] such concepts have all too often depended on the eradication of indigeneity” (“In the City” 16). I take Byrd’s formulation as a limitation of Lowe’s framework of intimacies. Even as Lowe argues to foreground processes of settler colonialism, she still erases indigeneity. The tension

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<sup>5</sup> In her earlier formulation of the intimacies, Lowe argued that global intimacies designed the modern racialized division of labour, and simultaneously modern humanism (“The Intimacies of Four Continents”). However, Byrd contended that Lowe’s figurations evade the materialities of settler colonialism that enabled labored intimacies. She asked Lowe: “Asia, Africa, Europe all meet in the Americas to labour over the dialectics of free and unfree, but what of the Americas themselves and the prior peoples upon whom that labour took place?” (*The Transit* xxv). Lowe, in 2015, drawing from Byrd and other Indigenous scholars, reformulated the intimacies and grounded her work through Indigenous critiques of settler colonialism.

between Byrd and Lowe is productive to understand the complexities of intimacies and cacophonies of racialization and colonization.

Andrea Smith offers another framework to theorize these continuities, cacophonies and intimacies (“Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars”; “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism”). Smith insists that we “rearticulate our understanding of white supremacy by not assuming that it is enacted in a single fashion; rather, white supremacy is constituted by separate and distinct, but still interrelated logics” (“Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism” 67). Her conceptualization of three pillars of white supremacy demonstrates interconnected, overlapping, and contradictory positionalities of Indigenous peoples, Black people, and people of colour. Smith identifies the pillars as: slavery/capitalism; genocide/colonialism; and orientalism/war (“Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars”; “Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism”). The first pillar enables anti-black racism and seeks to render Black bodies invariably and perpetually enslaved, and allows non-black communities to escape exploitation through capitalism. The pillar of genocide seeks to erase Indigenous peoples and colonizes their lands, in order to enable non-Indigenous people to occupy their lands. The third pillar, orientalism, marks certain peoples or nations as continuously inferior and deems them to be a constant threat through logics of war and xenophobia. According to Smith, it is through these three pillars of white supremacy that all colonized and racialized peoples are not only victims of but are also complicit in white supremacy. Further, these pillars intersect with processes of heteropatriarchy, thus gendering racialized logics of privileges and complicities. While limited in encapsulating the complexities, the pillars enable an understanding of simultaneous victimization and complicity as a critical tool to think about overlapping structures of power and privilege. This dissertation is an exploration of these varying mutually constitutive complicities.

Historical and ongoing continuities of white settler colonialism in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand are unique from other forms of colonialism—but are not temporally or spatially isolated. They have been continuously and systematically informed by, and have informed, other forms of oppression and violence. The above discussion of Byrd’s cacophonies, Lowe’s intimacies and Smith’s pillars, illustrates different modalities of racial and colonial entanglements, complexities, and pernicious continuities. This assemblage of frameworks highlights how differently located peoples experience, and continue to experience, the violences of racisms and colonialisms. Lowe notes further:

The afterlives of these conditions are deciphered not only in the great events of revolutions, wars, and republics, but in the phenomenon of everyday life, not only in the monumental successes, but also in the too frequently overlooked so-called failures. (162)

While each framework relies on different vocabularies, they all demonstrate how Black people, Indigenous peoples, and other people of colour are affected through structures of heteropatriarchy, racism, colonialism, and capitalism, albeit through varied and multiplex methods. Further, structures of settler colonialism are intermeshed with structures of anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and “border imperialism” (Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*). These racial and colonial modalities continuously shape each other, in varying, nonlinear and often contradictory ways.

While this dissertation focuses primarily on settler colonialism and how South Asians are located within it, settler colonialism is not produced and maintained in isolation from other structures. In this dissertation, I contend that to grasp the intricacies of South Asian diasporic formations in Canada, a deeper and more complex analysis is required which engages with the nexus of these varying logics of racial and colonial oppression. In addition, logics of heteropatriarchy, cis-heteronormativity, caste, and capitalism further complicate these structures.

Differently located South Asians in Canada are, somewhat uniquely but not exclusively, positioned on the margins of these structures—where sometimes they are oppressed through these logics, at other times they are in power, and in yet others they are complicit. In the following sub-sections, I explore the intersections of anti-black racism, Islamophobia and border imperialism within settler colonialism.

### ***Structures of Anti-Black Racism in Canada***

As discussed above, Wynter shows how Columbus’ alleged “discovery” of the Americas in 1492 was a turning point in world history. It is post-1492 that the west invents the rational/secular man by making Indigenous and Black peoples the other of the western-man. Race is thus an invented construction of European modernity and colonialism. To unpack the making of race in the Americas, it is imperative to analyze past and ongoing settler colonial processes as well as the enslavement of African and Black peoples and its ongoing ramifications and legacies. While my project centres settler colonialism in the making of racialized diasporas in Canada, the analysis would be incomplete and limiting without understanding the histories, legacies, and pernicious continuities of enslavement and anti-Black racism in the maintenance of the white settler states. Canada continues to shape itself by denying its colonial processes, along with invisibilizing the presence of Black and African peoples, even before the inception of the Confederation. However, the fact that Canada is a colonizing state is often effaced in the analysis of Blackness and anti-Blackness. Even as Blackness is often rendered as outside of Canada, and concomitantly as outside of its settler colonial context, it is important to note that it is the conditions produced through settler colonial mechanisms that enabled processes of enslavement.

Transatlantic slavery and the continuities of anti-Black racism in the Americas, thus, are the products of settler colonialism; as Canada continues to be a settler colonial state, the colonization of Indigenous people and the legacies of transatlantic slavery (namely, anti-Black formations) are intrinsic to the study of the contemporary Canadian state. Tuck and Yang elaborate further and hold that settler colonialism is built upon “the triad of settler-native-slave” (6). This entangled triad structures and shapes differing racial formations and hierarchies. They elaborate on the processes of enslavement:

The slave is a desirable commodity but the person underneath is imprisonable, punishable, and murderable. The violence of keeping/killing the chattel slave makes them deathlike monsters in the settler imagination; they are reconfigured/disfigured as the threat. (6)

It is through dehumanizing, terrorizing and murdering enslaved peoples, along with murdering and dispossessing Indigenous peoples, that the settler self-positions itself as superior (6). South Asians are placed within these overlapping logics of race and coloniality that work to oppress Indigenous and Black peoples. I contend throughout the dissertation that anti-Black racism informs and shapes racialized diasporic formations in Canada. In this section, I explore the workings of anti-Black racism in Canada as a condition of settler colonialism.

Black scholars and writers in Canada show how Canada continues to imagine its past and present without Blackness, and with Blackness as always present elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> They assert that Black people have always been in Canada and that Blackness continues to shape Canada’s whiteness. I borrow Rinaldo Walcott’s definition of Blackness as a sign which holds histories and legacies of resilience and oppression, which is “never closed and always under contestation”

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<sup>6</sup> This body of work includes (but not limited to): Brand, *No Burden to Carry*; Brand, *In Another Place, Not Here*; Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*; George Elliott Clarke, “Africana Canadiana”; George Elliott Clarke, *Odysseys Home: Mapping African-Canadian Literature*; Cooper; Foster; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; McKittrick, *Sylvia Wynter*; Walcott, *Rude*; Walcott, *Black like Who?*; and Walcott, “Outside in Black Studies,”

(*Black like Who* xiv-xv). In the settler colonial Canadian imaginary, Black communities have never been historical, but are always posited as new immigrant communities. In this denial of Blackness lies the inherent anti-Black characteristics of the Canadian settler state. Katherine McKittrick illustrates:

In Canada, blackness and black people are altogether deniable *and* evidence of prior codes of representation that have identified blackness/difference as irrelevant. But black existence is an actuality, which takes on several different forms that do not always conform to the idea of Canada. (*Demonic Grounds* 93, emphasis in original)

Blackness is always erasable, and therefore non-Canadian, even within the multicultural framework of Canada. McKittrick further contends that the Canadian state obliterates its own complicities and participation in Transatlantic enslavement and the histories of early Black communities in Canada, and posits itself as a historical refuge to enslaved peoples from the U.S., or contemporarily as a land of opportunities to new Black Caribbean and African im/migrants. Thus, Black communities are always non-Canadian, and “always elsewhere, recent, unfamiliar, and impossible” (99). Racial and colonial amnesia shapes Canadian ideologies of race and the state’s image historically as a “sanctuary” for enslaved African-Americans and presently as “multicultural” for Black Caribbean and African migrants. Walcott calls this erasure of Blackness “absented presence” (*Black like Who* 22). From historical narrative to present day imaginations, Black peoples have an absented presence in Canada.

Black scholars show how the settler colonial state of Canada has always been complicit in Transatlantic slavery; Blackness, Walcott argues, is always “constitutive of Canadianness” (*Rude*). Writing against Canada’s erasure of its “ignoble and unsavoury past,” Afua Cooper has documented detailed histories of Canada’s participation in transatlantic slavery as a “slave society” (8 & 11). Slavery was not just common, it was an institutionalized practice in Canada for over two centuries (from 1628-1833) and Canada was actively involved in the slave trade.

While the Canadian economy differed from the southern United States' slave economy, Cooper notes that to a degree, Canada's settler colonial economic model was also based on enslavement (12). Enslaved Africans worked in varying jobs, as house servants, farm labourers, hangmen, and in skilled occupations; they were owned by merchants, the Church, individuals, and corporations (147). The exact number of enslaved Africans is hard to determine since they were considered private property. As an estimate, from 1730-1760 in New France (present day Quebec) there were between 1,000-1,500 enslaved Black peoples (out of a total population of only 38,000) (McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* 110). Cooper and others have noted that enslaved people fought against their enslavement in all forms, from everyday acts of resistance to slave uprisings, and even allegedly setting fire to a major city (81). Moreover, processes of enslavement were racialized as well as gendered. Enslavement rendered Black women "an inhuman racial-sexual worker, an objectified body, as a site through which sex, violence, and reproduction can be imagined and enacted, and be as a captive human" (xvii). Thus, Black women's bodies were constructed as inhuman and were crucial to the racial-sexual formations of enslavement. Despite the persistent presence of enslaved and free Black peoples across the regions now known as Canada, Blackness continues to be erased from the state's self-imagination.

I briefly outlined this history to draw attention to Canada's involvement in enslavement. Canada's inherent anti-Blackness is exposed through the denial of these violent and erased histories. Canada's histories and legacies of enslavement need to be theorized as part of settler colonial modalities, and any analysis of race and race-making in Canada need to be grounded in these. Further, these histories connect to the contemporary forms of anti-Black racism in Canada in two very important ways. Firstly, as George Elliot Clarke notes, Canada's practice of African and Indigenous slavery is manifested in its present labour needs which rely on racial hierarchies

in its immigration processes (xii). Secondly, Walcott highlights the continuities of racial ideologies deriving from slavery that suggest that Black bodies in Canada “can and must be abused, misused, regulated, disciplined and over-policed” (*Black like Who* 37). Contemporarily, this is reflected in gendered and sexual violences against Black women, queer, trans, and disabled peoples, high rates of incarceration, police brutality and murder, constant surveillance by the state and “citizens,” poverty and segregation, everyday experiences of racism, and anti-Black immigration practices. Thus, Blackness and anti-Blackness continue to shape Canada. Along with the continued resistance of Indigenous peoples, the resilience of Black peoples in Canada continues to rupture and unsettle the myths of two founding nations in the making of Canada (44). Black and African peoples, whether they “entered” settler colonial Canada in the eighteenth century or now, continue to be rendered as the unwanted-other. Walcott further contends that Blackness continues to shape and impact what it means for non-Black peoples to be human in the post-Columbus world, as anti-Blackness still produces Blackness as anti-human (“The Problem of the Human”). Saidiya Hartman calls this the “afterlife of slavery” (*Lose Your Mother*). That Black lives do not matter still in the U.S., Hartman contends, is “because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery” (6).

Clarke, Cooper, McKittrick, and Walcott all draw parallels to past and present struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. For instance, McKittrick recognizes how the histories of Blacks and Indigenous peoples are different, yet: “it is meaningful, in terms of geography and justice, to signal the ways in which ... race is ‘placed’” (*Demonic Grounds* 95). Thus, processes of settler colonialism and its anti-Black characteristics in Canada and the U.S. are central to how race functions. Both the Indigenous and the Black figure shape all aspects of race in these white

settler states. The figure of the Indian and the African, “haunt the edges” of colonial histories and herstories (Holland ix). Tiya Miles and Sharon Holland assert that Native America “*has been and continues to be* a critical site on the histories of the lives of dispersed African peoples” (3, emphasis in original).

There has been limited but growing literature on intimacies between Black peoples and Indigenous peoples in the U.S.,<sup>7</sup> Canada,<sup>8</sup> and the Caribbean.<sup>9</sup> Zainab Amadahy and Bonita Lawrence elaborate on interlaced and erratic relations and processes in Canada. They explore the histories between the two communities through examples of Natives owning slaves and the perversity of anti-Black racism in Indigenous communities, and Blacks claiming rights on stolen lands and at times erasing indigeneity. They also point out how these intricacies erase the presence of mixed Black-Indigenous communities like Black Mi’kmaq people in the Maritimes and Black Ojibway people in central Ontario (112). In both Canada and the U.S., Black Indian identities are “overdetermined” through processes of slavery, colonialism and regulation of Black, Indigenous, and Black-Indigenous identities (112). Further, acknowledging the ongoing oppression of Blacks in white-settler states, they contend that the struggle for freedom forces them “to make settler claims,” however, their materialities can never make them “quintessential ‘settlers’” (119 & 107). Thus, Amadahy and Lawrence acknowledge the complexities of Black and Indigenous formations within the pernicious continuities of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness. Moreover, when non-Black racialized people enter settler colonial states, they are constructed through the triad of Native-Slave-settler and made to structurally align themselves

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<sup>7</sup> On Black peoples and Indigenous peoples in the U.S., see: Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*; Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans*; Forbes, *The American Discovery of Europe*; Miles and Holland; and Tayac.

<sup>8</sup> On Black peoples and Indigenous peoples in Canada, see: Amadahy and Lawrence; Madden and Mensah.

<sup>9</sup> On Black peoples and Indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, see: Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*; Forte, *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean*; Forte, *Who Is an Indian?*; and Newton.

with the white settler-state, thereby becoming complicit in the violences against Black peoples and Indigenous peoples.

Such analysis, however, has come under critique from Afro-pessimistic theorizations.<sup>10</sup> Afro-pessimism is a Black-centric theorization of race and white supremacy where scholars maintain that anti-Blackness is the foundation of global race relations, hierarchies and violences. Unmapping processes of enslavement, Afro-pessimist critiques demonstrate how anti-Blackness operates through the binary of Black and non-Black (which includes white peoples and all non-Black racialized and colonized peoples).<sup>11</sup> Scholars like Jared Sexton (“People-of-Color-Blindness”; “The Vel of Slavery”) and Frank Wilderson III (“Gramsci’s Black Marx”; *Red, White & Black*) have been central in questioning critiques of settler colonialism and their limited engagements with anti-Blackness. Sexton critiques anti-racist praxis which dislocates the specificities of anti-Blackness, and calls the universalization and monolithic rendering of racialized victimhood by people of colour as “people-of-color blindness” (“People-of-Color-Blindness” 48).<sup>12</sup> He contends that enslaved peoples and their descendants are “neither the native nor the foreigner, neither the colonizer nor the colonized” (41). Consequently, Sexton claims that Blacks are not settler colonizers either as they were forced out of their Native lands (“The Vel of Slavery”). According to Sexton and Wilderson, Black peoples are outside the logics of settler colonialism, instead slavery is the necessity of capitalism, colonialism and settler colonialism.

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<sup>10</sup> This body of scholarship includes works such as: Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*; Marriott; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*; Patterson, *Rituals of Blood*; Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*; Sexton, “People-of-Color-Blindness”; Sexton, “The Vel of Slavery”; Sharpe; Wilderson III, “Gramsci’s Black Marx”; and Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black*.

<sup>11</sup> Iyko Day elaborates on this further: “The reason for absorbing whiteness into a variable condition of nonblackness is to deemphasize white power and instead emphasize the singularity and paradigmatic status of racial blackness as the essential condition of enslaveability” (“Being or Nothingness” 108).

<sup>12</sup> Albeit ableist in its formulation, this theorization critiques the conflation of anti-Black racism with other forms of racism.

For Sexton, slavery marks the threshold of modernity and humanism, and any calls for “settler decolonization” are “Negrophobic” as they mobilize “post-racialism by diminishing or denying the significance of race in thinking about the relative structural positions of black and non-black populations” (2). Thus, for Sexton, settler decolonization is in itself anti-Black. In a similar vein, Wilderson contends that the relations between Indigenous peoples and Black peoples is based on antagonisms. He argues that the “race of humanism” is produced through the construction of Blackness as anti-human (*Red, White & Black* 21). Thus, white peoples and non-Black peoples of colour are not only complicit in processes of anti-Blackness, their existences are also marked through the continuing “social death of Blacks” (21). Wilderson further argues that unlike the enslaved subject, the Indigenous subject is always sovereign as the settlers have killed, dispossessed and colonized Indigenous peoples by making “good use of the Indian subject’s positionality” as (already) sovereign (“Gramsci’s Black Marx”109). Within the Canadian context, Rinaldo Walcott has also raised critiques of calls for Indigenous decolonization (“The Problem of the Human”). He contends that anti-Blackness is a foundation to racial capitalist hierarchizing of all peoples, and thus critiques of settler colonialism must engage with the conditions that produce Blackness and their complicities within processes of anti-Blackness. Walcott argues that a “*pure decolonial project* remains an impossible project” without working to dismantle structures of anti-Blackness as well (93, emphasis in original). Similar to Sexton and Wilderson, Walcott is skeptical of calls for Indigenous-centric conceptualizations of coloniality and race, and struggles for decolonization and resurgence.

I outline these critiques by Sexton, Walcott and Wilderson not to place them in opposition to Indigenous critiques, or to challenge Afro-pessimist rejections of critiques of settler colonialism. Rather, I do so to highlight the interconnections of Black and Indigenous subject

formations, and the inherent complexities and frictions between these differing racial and colonial projects. However, I am critical when Blackness is deployed to displace colonialism, and calls for Black humanity that do not attend to the occupation of Indigenous lands. Jodi Byrd adds that “by figuring black oppression as foundational, it cannot address colonialist gestures within the paradigmatic ‘Indianness’ upon which it relies” (“‘Been to the Nation’” 45-46). While Black communities are differently positioned than white and other racialized communities in the reproduction of the settler state, they stand to still benefit, in however a limited and marginal way, from the colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands. Drawing from Iyko Day, I am wary of any frameworks that seek to essentialize the varying projects of racial formations in settler societies (“Being or Nothingness” 110). Resisting binary frameworks of Blackness and indigeneity, Day seeks to work with the complications and overlapping structures, and calls for a dialectical approach to theorizing settler colonial capitalism. Day elaborates:

Putting colonial land and enslaved labor at the center of a dialectical analysis, we can see that blackness is neither reducible to Indigenous land nor Indigeneity to enslaved labor. Indigenous peoples and slaves are not reducible to each other because settler colonialism abides by a dual logic that is originally driven to eliminate Native peoples from land and mix the land with enslaved black labor. (113)

The logics of Blackness and indigeneity are, therefore, not mutually exclusive, but rather anti-Blackness works as a condition produced by the settler state to violently accumulate by dispossessing both Indigenous and Black peoples. Since anti-blackness is enabled through the conditions of settler colonialism in settler states, Black liberation is inherently connected to Indigenous decolonization.

In the above discussion, I ground critiques of anti-Blackness and enslavement within critiques of settler colonialism. While the dissertation focuses on settler colonialism, I engage with anti-Blackness throughout. As South Asians are complicit in settler colonial processes, they

also simultaneously partake in and benefit from anti-Black racism. Thus, I theorize South Asian complicities within settler colonialism and its anti-Black racist formations. Theorizing caste in South Asian diasporas, in Chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrate how structures of caste intersect with structures of anti-Blackness in pertinent ways. I argue that anti-Blackness and caste violence mutually inform and shape each other in South Asian diasporic formations. In Chapter 4, exploring “colonial intimacies” between South Asians and Indigenous peoples, I engage with Black critiques of interraciality and multiraciality in theorizing intimacies and desires between differently racialized and colonized peoples. Using these critiques, I demonstrate the limits of such interracial intimacies which are shaped through erasing Black and Indigenous desires and bodies. Chapter 5 explores questions of racialized labour in settler colonial capitalist economies. I maintain that theorizations of racialized labour in white settler states needs to contextualize how these settler states have relied on enslaved and forced Black labour. Yet, I argue that it is necessary to contextualize anti-Black racism as a condition produced by settler colonial modalities. Further, I posit that constructions of South Asians as a “model minority” happens through the continued denial and erasure of Indigenous and Black labour and their struggles. The dissertation seeks to engage with Black critiques of race, colonialism and capitalism in the making of the settler states. Without these engagements, any analysis of race in settler societies is incomplete, inaccurate, and complicit in anti-Blackness.

### ***Logics of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia***

The above sections demonstrate how racial critiques of the Americas are grounded through an analysis of indigeneity and Blackness. The Muslim-other and critiques of Islamophobia are often amiss in these theorizations. I argue that Islamophobia needs to be contextualized in the

continuities and complexities of racial and colonial formations in white settler societies. The occurrence of 9/11 marked a significant shift in the racializing of Muslim bodies and making of the global north. Scholars in Canada have shown how through the post-9/11 “war on terror” Canada has become increasingly Islamophobic, intolerant, and violent towards those racialized as Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Muslim, is not just limited to a religious identity, but rather is deployed as an overarching and all-encompassing identifier that includes Arabs, Africans, South Asians, Black peoples, brown peoples, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and even racialized atheists. Islamophobia works then across racial, religious and regional borders, encompassing anyone who is rendered as a forever outsider in white settler and imperial states of the global north. Islamophobia renders all Muslims as uncivilized, static, and barbaric, while simultaneously whiteness is constructed as civilized, modern and dynamic. Contemporary forms Islamophobia are a manifestation of what Edward Said identified as “orientalism” (*Orientalism*). Through time, Islam and Muslimness have been constructed through a similar orientalist rationale of white supremacy. In this section, I explore logics of Islamophobia in the making of race in the Americas, in conversation with critiques of settler colonialism and anti-Black racism. I also draw parallels between the processes of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia to illustrate the complexities of race-making and the racialization of Muslims and Sikhs alike. Grounding the project in transnational and intersectional analyses, I also provide a brief discussion of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia in India. This engagement illustrates cartographic complexities of Islamophobia and draws connections globally to understand categories of race, religion, and migration.

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<sup>13</sup> On Islamophobia in Canada, see: Haque, “Homegrown, Muslim and Other”; Jiwani, “Gendering Terror”; Jiwani, *Discourses of Denial*; Jiwani, “Doubling Discourses and the Veiled Other”; Lakhani; Razack, *Casting out*; Razack, “Abandonment and the Dance”; Razack, “Imperiled Muslim Women”; Razack, “The ‘Sharia Law Debate’”; Thobani, *Exalted Subjects*; and Thobani, “White Innocence, Western Supremacy,”

Sherene Razack argues that Muslims have been expelled and excluded in North America and Europe through “stigmatization, surveillance, incarceration, abandonment, torture, and bombs” (*Casting Out* 5). Unmapping these exclusions within the history of the west, Razack contends:

...for Muslims and Arabs it is underpinned by the idea that modern enlightened, secular people must protect themselves from pre-modern, religious people whose loyalty to tribe and community reigns over their commitment to the rule of law. (9-10)

Constructing these binaries between Muslims and the west, the violences against Muslims are deemed normalized, inevitable, and necessary for the maintenance of the west. Muslims are, Razack asserts, “cast out” from the borders and boundaries of the global north. This rationale overlaps with multiple histories and contexts, and in the process universalizes the Muslim figure and all violences against Muslims, from Canada to France to Occupied Palestine to India to Australia. Muslims, globally, are rendered dangerous, unwanted, and terrorist.

Razack elaborates on these constructions, and shows how the “war on terror” has constructed the symbolic figures of the dangerous Muslim man, the imperiled Muslim woman, and the civilized European wo/man (5). The Muslim man is forever deemed a terrorist threat to the state, who through his “barbaric” religious convictions, is always willing to destroy the west.<sup>14</sup> These racist articulations of the Muslim man make possible indefinite detentions, deportations, and death, both here and there. Thus, war, deportation, incarceration, and mass killing are required to maintain the empire. Gender has always been at the heart of Islamophobic logics. Razack argues that Muslim “veiled” women are constructed as victims of Muslim men’s patriarchy and misogyny, always therefore in need of protection. Thus, following Gayatri Spivak’s argument, brown (Muslim) women need to be saved from brown (Muslim) men by

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<sup>14</sup> This construction of a terrorist Muslim man cuts across all age groups, including young children: for instance, 6-year-old Canadian Syed Adam Ahmed is on the high risk no-fly list in Canada (Murphy).

white men (and women) (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”). This saving justifies everything from “domestic” anti-veiling policies in Canada and France; to war, occupation, and bombing in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere. Increasingly, discourses of rescue have incorporated saving Muslims queers from homophobic Muslim men.<sup>15</sup> Saadia Toor notes:

Within this neo-Orientalist discourse 'the Muslim' enemy is today configured as *both* misogynist *and* homophobic, with an essentialized Islam comfortably posited as the roots of his illiberalism. This illiberalism is then presented as both the mark and the evidence of Islam's radical alterity from Western civilization, an alterity that cannot be tolerated and must, in fact, be destroyed. (n.pag., emphasis in original)

The essentialized Muslim figure is crucial to the making of the white western subject. Muslims are always posited as outsiders and threats to the west. Through the “war on terror,” the United States has asserted itself as the global sovereign power. Sunera Thobani illustrates how Canada has used “its middle power status and its international stature as a more ‘compassionate’ nation” to support American (Islamophobic) imperialist projects, and thereby its own imperial desires (*Exalted Subjects* 220-21). Those whom Thobani calls the “exalted subjects” of the west, “belonging to a superior order of humanity,” all become the defenders of western civilization against the constructed dangerous, illogical, religious Muslim terrorists (228).

While 9/11 has been crucial in shaping Islamophobia in the west, Muslim scholars, like Nabil I. Matar, Shaista Patel (“Defining Muslim Feminist”; “The Red/White/Black”), and Junaid Rana demonstrate how Islam has been central to formulations of race. Patel draws connections between histories of the “discovery” of the Americas to the expulsion of Muslims from Spain to demonstrate the braided intricacies between violences against the Muslims and Indigenous peoples (“Defining Muslim Feminist”).<sup>16</sup> Rana elaborates further:

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance: Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem; J. Puar; and Toor.

<sup>16</sup> Patel argues further to centre these connections and violences in contemporary politics of solidarity: “It is futile to ask for justice for Muslims in a nation-state where the genocide, the continual extermination of its Indigenous

... anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are central to the narrative of modern nations—and to modernity itself—because they emerged in the contact between the Old World and the New World ... Islam and Muslims are a central part of the concepts of race and racism through histories that span European and American forms of Orientalism and the formation and maintenance of empire through war and conquest. (27-28)

Linking the figures of the infidel savage, slave/captive, terrorist and immigrant, Rana demonstrates how Islam and Muslims have always shaped and informed processes of white supremacy and colonization. He draws foundational links to the Crusades and the Inquisition, to show how the figure of the Muslim shaped precolonial Europe and subsequently informed conquest, enslavement, and colonialism. He asserts, thus, that the figure of the Muslim in the west, as a racial category connects Indigenous peoples, Blacks, and racialized immigrants. This formulation substantially changes understandings of race through conquest and enslavement, while instead locating its formulation in medieval Europe. Thus, anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are as central to the making of North America as settler colonialism and enslavement have been. This demonstrates the continuities of racial violences across continents and oceans.

While there are different histories of Islamophobia in the west, there are different trajectories of Islamophobia in South Asia as well.<sup>17</sup> In India, since the inception of the Mughal Empire, constructs of the Muslim other have been used to invent not only who the Hindu subject is, but also the “Indian” subject. During the colonial era, divide and rule tactics of the British

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peoples, is a matter of dull and daily state affairs. Our politics must unsettle these daily practices of violence” (“Defining Muslim Feminist Politics” n.pag.).

<sup>17</sup> Since my respondents were mainly Indians from India, I discuss Islamophobia only in India. But Islamophobia shapes the rest of South Asia as well. In Sri Lanka, for instance, there has been an escalation of anti-Muslim violence since 2009, with the support of the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist state (for more, see: Amarasingham and Xavier). In Pakistan, these multiple histories shape all forms of inclusion and exclusion of Muslims. From its inception as a secular state, to its becoming an Islamic state, to the separation of Bangladesh, and the dictatorship of General Zia have all shaped who is the “right” Pakistani Muslim and who is not. On the one hand, Sunni nationalism renders Shias, Ismailis, Ahmadiyyas, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and all other non-Sunnis as not Pakistani, on the other hand, under the “War on terror” regime and war against Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistanis have come under direct attack from the west by means of drone killings and military operations (for more, see: Hasan).

Empire mobilized communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims. It is commonly argued that these tensions finally resulted in the partition of the subcontinent along religious lines into Pakistan and India. However, scholars have shown political fractures among the elite and British interference as the driving forces of partition.<sup>18</sup> Religious and communal tensions thrived in the limited understandings of what partition was and what it did. In postcolonial India, the state continues to define Indianness through the figure of the Muslim-other.<sup>19</sup> The occupation of Kashmir by the Indian state renders the Kashmiri Muslim other, and by default all Muslim others, as terrorist, anti-nationalistic, and anti-Hindu.<sup>20</sup> Along with Kashmir, there are continued violences perpetuated against Muslims in different parts of the country with the rise in right wing Hindutva ideologies. Since the 1990s, the growth of mainstream and popular Hindutva ideologies has resulted in an escalation in exclusion, marginalization, and oppression of Muslims in the country. Accordingly, in these articulations, Muslims are always the outsider, always supportive of Pakistan and always the terrorist.

Indian-specific Hindu-led Islamophobic practices and violences have combined to form a nexus with the global “war on terror” discourses, which construct Muslims as always jihadist, anti-civilization (Christian or Hindu or Jewish),<sup>21</sup> and dangerous. The nexus has connected 9/11 to different “terrorist” attacks in India, to the London attacks of 2005, and to the Paris attacks of 2015, to Islamic groups considered “terrorist” such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban, and more recently to ISIS. Those fighting against occupations in Kashmir, Palestine, Iraq, and Afghanistan are all imagined to be part of a global jihadi network. Since the election of right wing Hindutva leader

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<sup>18</sup> On partition, see: Bose and Jalal; Butalia; and Zamindar,

<sup>19</sup> On Islamophobic violence in India, see: Basu; Fazal; Ghassem-Fachandi; A. Kumar; Menon; Menon and Nigam; Oza; and Rajagopal.

<sup>20</sup> On Kashmir and Indian occupation, see: Chatterji and Chaudhry; Kabir; Kak; and Peer.

<sup>21</sup> On these connections between India, Israel and the U.S., see: Chandra, ““India Will Change””; Oza; and Prashad, *Namaste Sharon*.

Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India in 2014 (the main perpetrator of anti-Muslim genocide in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002), violence against Muslims in Occupied Kashmir and India has increased tremendously. Modi seeks to work in tandem with the global nexus against the “war on terror” connecting violences against Muslims in India with those in Occupied Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, France, the U.K., Australia, the U.S., and Canada.

Sikhophobia excludes, marginalizes, oppresses and sometime kills those perceived as Sikhs, in India, Canada, and globally, and operates in sometimes parallel ways to the logics of Islamophobia. In India, there is a particular history of anti-Sikh ideologies that is separate from the history of anti-Muslim ideologies. While Sikhs are not conflated with Muslims, and are often read as allies to Hindus, the anti-Sikh genocide of 1984 and the continued state suppression of the Khalistani movement for the sovereign state of Khalistan, shapes how Sikh identities are formed and contained in postcolonial India.<sup>22</sup> In Canada, however, there are different yet overlapping histories of anti-Sikh and anti-Muslim violences. Sikhs and Punjabis were the first ones from South Asia to migrate to Canada. In terms of numbers, for over half a century, Sikhs and Punjabis maintained South Asian “dominancy” in im/migration to Canada. However, orientalist logics rendered all Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, all brown bodies, as “Hindoos,” and sometimes as “Mohammedans.” As shown in the Introduction, both the Canadian and U.S. settler states sought to curb migration of South Asians, specifically Punjabis, in the early twentieth century through deportations, detainments and restrictions. Further, the day to day lives of South Asians were monitored and they were met with everyday xenophobic violences. These violences cannot necessarily be labelled as Sikhophobic, as they overlap with xenophobia;

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<sup>22</sup> For more, see: Chopra; Das, *Violence and Subjectivity*; Das, *Life and Words*; and Nijhawan and Arora.

however, since the turban and beard were the main markers for brown men, these men were racially targeted because of their otherness.

Since the *Komagata Maru* incident, the settler state has developed better technologies to categorize, differentiate, and scrutinize different brown bodies on the basis of their religion, nationality, and ethnicity. Settler states can now differentiate (for the most part) Hindus from Muslims and Sikhs. Moreover, the settler state also categorizes Hindus differently, for example Hindus from India are treated preferentially over Tamil Eelam Hindus or Indo-Caribbean Hindus. However, Sikh bodies, like Muslims bodies, continue to be othered through an overlapping of Khalistani politics and post-9/11 “war on terror.” On the one hand, the settler state marks Khalistani bodies as terrorists, on the other hand, “war on terror” discourses construct and understand Sikhs as Muslims, and hence as “terrorists.”<sup>23</sup> In both cases, Sikhs, like Muslims, are constructed as barbaric, uncivilized and killable. Hence, it is important to understand Sikhophobia as an articulation of Islamophobia, but attention must also be paid to the particularities of anti-Sikh racism and violence.

I underline the violences of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia to illustrate the complexities of South Asian diasporic formations in Canada. Since all my respondents in Fort McMurray and Vancouver were Hindus, Sikhs and atheists (with the exception of one Pakistani Ahmadiya Muslim), it is important to understand how different forms of Islamophobia work in the making of South Asian diasporas. Violences against Muslims in India and Canada need to be better contextualized to understand how non-Muslim South Asians are complicit in anti-Muslim violences, intermeshed with complicities in settler colonialism and anti-Black racism. At the same time, Sikhs are positioned differently than Hindu South Asians in Canada. I further engage

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<sup>23</sup> For more, see: Dharmoon, “Exclusion and Regulated Inclusion”; Grewal, “Racial Sovereignty”; Kang; J. Puar; Puar and Rai; B. K. Singh; J. Singh; and Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities,”

with Islamophobia/Sikhophobia in Chapters 2, 3 and 5. In Chapters 2 and 3, I draw connections between the caste structures and Islamophobia in India to understand diasporic formations in Canada through the intersecting logics of race, caste, indigeneity and religion. Chapter 5 elaborates on the differences between mostly Hindu respondents in Fort McMurray and Sikh respondents in Vancouver which are mapped through Sikhophobia in India and Canada. South Asian diasporic formations are complicated, and further attention needs to be paid to the logics of Islamophobia and Sikhophobia. Theorizations of settler colonialism and anti-Blackness need to integrate transnational processes of Islamophobia to complicate past and ongoing processes of racialization, since these logics do not operate in isolation but rather are mutually constitutive.

### ***Bodies and Borders***

Colonial logics have produced racial and gendered bodies as well as arbitrary physical borders. For white settler states, these arbitrary borders have been the central feature of maintaining their settler-sovereignty on colonized lands and categorizing racialized bodies within varying hierarchies of citizenship.<sup>24</sup> Along with processes of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia, cartographies of exclusionary/inclusionary borders have been fundamental in settler-state formations. On the one hand, the settler states have created arbitrary borders to regulate indigeneity and separate Indigenous communities on the basis of these borders.

Jodi Byrd notes the inherent relations between settler state's border-making and settler colonialism: "The processes through which the borders of the US become ineluctable or natural is the same process through which American Indians becomes invisibilized and minoritized

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<sup>24</sup> On border and boundaries as racial and colonial mechanisms, see: Altamirano-Jiménez, "The Colonization and Decolonization"; Anzaldúa; Bannerji, *Thinking Through*; Dhamoon, *Identity/Difference*; Espiritu; Hogue; Lawrence, "Gender, Race and the Regulation"; N. Sharma, "On Being Not Canadian"; A. Simpson; and Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*.

within the United States” (““Been to the Nation”” 45). For instance, the borders between Canada and the U.S were central to regulating Indigenous borders and separating categories of Métis and Indians. Michel Hogue elaborates:

In western North American, nation-making hinged on subverting the sovereignty of Indigenous people and inquired reworking the social relationships that sustained earlier communities and replacing them with new sociolegal boundaries. (5)

Border and boundary-making has been foundational to white settler colonial processes. On the other hand, these borders regulate racialized bodies’ inclusion into the settler states and construct varying arbitrary categories such as those of the “skilled migrant,” “legal immigrant,” “refugee,” “asylum seeker,” “temporary worker,” “permanent resident,” and “illegal migrant.” These settler states are inherently illegal on colonized Indigenous lands and continue to exclude Indigenous peoples, Blacks, Muslims, and other racialized peoples from the violent processes of border-making. In this section, I explore the labelling of desirable and undesirable bodies and construction of borders to include some bodies and exclude others. Along with processes of settler colonialism, anti-Black racism, and Islamophobia, border-making remains one of the prime logics of white supremacy and colonialism.

Border-making processes are central to the maintenance of white settler states. Harsha Walia calls processes of border-making “border imperialism.” She writes:

The racist, classist, heteropatriarchal, and ableist construction of the legal/desirable migrant justifies the criminalization of the illegal/undesirable migrant, which then emboldens the conditions for capital to further exploit the labor of migrants. Migrants’ precarious legal status and precarious stratification in the labor force are further inscribed by racializing discourses that cast migrants of color as eternal outsiders: *in* the nation-state but not *of* the nation-state. Coming full circle, border imperialism illuminates how colonial anxieties about identity and inclusion *within* Western borders are linked to the racist justifications for imperialist mission *beyond* Western borders that generate cycles of mass displacement. (*Undoing Border Imperialism* 6, emphasis in original)

Walia demonstrates how the processes of racialized migration are produced and maintained through the structural violences of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. She expounds how these processes are embedded in technologies of heteropatriarchy, ableism, and state-defined notions of criminality. She highlights that the processes of mass displacements in the global South, and criminalization and labour exploitation of racialized peoples in the global north, are inextricably linked to capitalism and empire. The processes that facilitate displacement include: legacies of colonialism, poverty and impoverishment, wars and mass destruction, neoliberal exploits and climate change—all at the hands of western powers.

Moreover, they are all bound together in white settler states due to past and ongoing processes of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples. This is illustrated through the examples discussed in the introduction of the *Komagata Maru* and Tamil refugees. Yêñ Lê Espiritu in her work on Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. offers another instance of these pernicious continuities. By bringing together histories of U.S. imperialism, war, and genocide in the Asia-Pacific region and the U.S., Espiritu connects Vietnamese displacement to that of Filipinos, Chamorros, and Indigenous peoples, “making intelligible the military colonialisms that engulf these spaces” along with the pervasive construction of discourses of “refugee crises” and “rescue-and-liberation” (47-48). Further, the borders also limit Indigenous peoples’ movement through them, as Indigenous communities along the borders claim sovereignty on both sides of the border (Altamirano-Jiménez; Hogue; A. Simpson). Settler state borders affect the movement of all Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Moreover, the settler state uses the technologies of regulation deployed against Indigenous peoples on racialized peoples. In a similar manner, Mona Oikawa argues that the racial violence waged against Japanese Canadians during the internment is connected to and dependent upon the violences to which Indigenous peoples have been

subjected through processes of colonization (“Connecting the Internment”). Manu Vimalassery demonstrates the continuities between American “War on Terror” and Indigenous dispossession (“Antecedents of Imperial Incarceration”). In his theorization of connections between the U.S. prison in Guantánamo to incarcerate “terrorists” and the prison in Florida in the nineteenth century to imprison Indigenous peoples, Vimalassery notes that “There is a connection to draw out here, with the indigenous sovereign subject as the limits of U.S. imperialism, of settler colonialism as a process of incarceration overlaying indigenous sovereign space” (351-52). Thus, contemporary regulation of racialized bodies is an extension of settler states’ continued occupation of Indigenous lands.

Walia identifies four overlapping and interlocking principles of border imperialism: mass displacement and border securitization; criminalization of those deemed “illegal” migrants; racialized hierarchies of citizenship; and exploitation of migrant labor (5). The first foundational principle, Walia argues, is the simultaneous process of displacement due to capitalist and colonial exploitation and the “fortification of borders” (41). Both processes are generated and enforced by states of the global north. Connected to the first, the second principle criminalizes and prohibits migration, and constructs categories of “illegal” and “alien” (53). “Legal,” “model” and “desirable” migrants co-exist within the same structures where “illegal,” “criminal,” and “unwanted” migrants are excluded. Legality is constructed in relation to illegality, often through arbitrary yet violent mechanisms. Those who are deemed “undesirable” are criminalized, detained, incarcerated, and deported. Nandita Sharma calls these categories ideological as both “legal” Canadians and “illegal” migrants “work within the *same* labour market and live within the *same* society” (“On Being Not Canadian” 62). Similarly, Himani Bannerji shows how these

labels conceal the violences of capitalism and colonialism that constitute these categories as well as subsequent inclusions/exclusions (*Thinking Through*).

The third principle Walia highlights are the racialized hierarchies of migrant and national identity (61). Racialized hierarchies, like Islamophobia and anti-Black racism as discussed above regulate and inform the institutions of citizenship and belonging. In constructing and regulating “criminality,” Rita K. Dhamoon argues that the settler state maintains racial exclusion and Indigenous repression, and “re-entrenches norms of whiteness, nation building, and citizenship through the law” (*Identity/Difference Politics* 68). The fourth principle, is state controlled and structured processes of exploitation of labours of the migrants (67). Processes of capitalist accumulation and neoliberalization lie at the heart of these exploitations. Border imperialism, thus, keeps the workforce “commodified and exploitable, flexible and expendable” (71). Settler states rely on these mechanisms of border imperialism to maintain their whiteness and use varying gradations of racialized labour to continue the colonization of Indigenous nations and lands.

Canada, like other settler and imperial states, maintains border imperialist practices and structures. Since the inception of the Canadian settler state, the state has deployed many tactics to keep “undesirable”—often racialized peoples—away from the shore of its illegal borders. From settler practices like expropriating Indigenous lands, creating reserves, and regulating Indigenous identities, to anti-Black practices like the histories and legacies of enslavement, and de-facto prohibition of Black and African immigration; to anti-Asian exclusions like the Chinese Head Tax, the Continuous Journey Act, the expulsion of the *Komagata Maru*, and internment of the Japanese, to the ongoing racial exclusion of migrants; Canada, historically and contemporarily, continues to reproduce the nation-state through normative whiteness and

Europeanness, often through violent exclusion of racialized peoples. Contemporary immigration programs like the Live-in Caregiver, Temporary Foreign Workers, and Seasonal Agricultural Workers programs are all mechanisms to keep citizenship racially exclusive, yet ensure a steady supply of inexpensive racialized labour. In addition, Canada is complicit in large-scale mass displacements from the global South. For instance, more than 75 per cent of the world's mining companies are headquartered in Canada, and all these companies, across Latin America, Asia and Africa are implicated in gross human rights violations ("MiningWatch Canada"). Canada's participation in imperial wars, like its deployment in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, and Syria, has also rendered many people displaced and dispossessed. Similarly, Canada's international involvement through NAFTA, G-10, G-20, NATO, and the U.N. has been complicit in global displacements. Canada has actively maintained imperialist borders and practices within and outside of Canada.

The recent report, "Never Home: Legislating Discrimination in Canadian Immigration," by the Vancouver based migrant justice group No One Is Illegal Vancouver Unceded Coast Salish Territories highlights many of these keys aspects of Canadian border imperialism. The report finds:

Citizenship is becoming harder to get and easier to lose. Permanent residency for refugees, skilled workers and family members is restricted, but the migrant worker program is exploding. Enforcement, in the form of detentions, deportations and secret trials, is also on the rise. Pervasive sentiments such as "bogus refugees", "terrorists", and "foreigners stealing jobs" have justified the increasing exclusion and marginalization of migrants. If migrants are allowed in, it is with temporary, conditional or precarious status. ("Never Home")

The report provides several instances of Canada's exclusionary regime.<sup>25</sup> Drawing from the report, I provide below some of the more drastic and draconian aspects of Canada's border

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<sup>25</sup> It must be noted that the report focuses on immigration changes under the Conservative Party's Stephen Harper regime (2006-2015). It is yet to be seen what changes may come under Liberal Party's Trudeau regime.

imperialism. Not only did the percentage of immigrants who became Canadian citizens drop drastically (from 70 per cent to 26 per cent between the years 2000-2008), Canada also took more temporary migrants than permanent migrants. As the requirements for becoming a permanent citizen (including skilled worker class, family-class migrants and refugees) became more restrictive, the state created more avenues to exploit precarious migrant workers. Moreover, it became much harder for migrants under temporary permits to gain permanent residency. Canadian media frequently labeled refugees as “bogus,” “queue jumpers,” “terrorists” and “human smugglers” which resulted in a 30 per cent decrease in the number of accepted refugees. At the same time, Canada detained over 87,000 migrants and deported about 117,000 migrants. Furthermore, refugees, permanent residents and undocumented migrants faced surveillance, security certificates and secret trials,<sup>26</sup> incarceration, and deportation under the pretext of a threat to security, particularly targeting Black peoples and Muslims in Canada.

In the Introduction, I discussed the examples of South Asians aboard the *Komagata Maru* and the Tamils who came to Canada aboard the *Ocean Lady* and *MV Sun Sea*. These two cases, considered next to the plight of Roma, Afghani, Tibetan, and Tamil refugees, South Asian temporary foreign workers (many of whom work on the tar sands), and Islamophobic violence against Muslims and Sikhs, highlight how Canada’s citizenship remains racialized. As I argue in this dissertation, South Asians become complicit in the Canadian settler state project, yet here I seek to foreground the mechanisms of border imperialism that dictate *which* South Asians get to be “Canadian” and which do not. When the state restricts, controls, detains and deports racialized peoples in Canada, it demonstrates how difficult it is to theorize complexity and complicity. For

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<sup>26</sup> Issued by the Canadian state, security certificates detain non-citizens who are believed to be security threats to the nation. The detainees have no rights under the law and their cases are heard in secret trials without their presence. For more see: Razaack (*Casting out*; and “Abandonment and the Dance”).

every South Asian who makes it to Canada as a “desirable” citizen, there are many more who cannot obtain this status. Further, this desirability is often relationally constructed through the logics of anti-Black racism. Within this context, we must theorize and understand the continuities and complexities of determining complicities. It is important to keep in mind, as Lawrence and Dua, Byrd, and Tuck and Yang show, that calls for immigrant rights and borderless migration *must* center Indigenous decolonization. Without questioning settler state formations, any call for migrant justice and open borders invariably reproduces settler state hegemony.

### **On Racial Complicities, Settlers-ness, and Responsibilities**

As argued above, the relationship of im/migrants in Canada with Indigenous communities is complicated and enabled by colonialism, capitalism, and racial and gendered hierarchies.<sup>27</sup> The binaries of colonizer-colonized, Native-non-Native, self-other, and white-non-white gloss over the contradictory and unanticipated effects of coloniality, specially pertaining to racial hierarchies between Black, Indigenous and other people of colour. Colonial processes produced a range of “in-between” subjects who complicate and sometimes even subvert racial and cultural distinctions (Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*). Albert Memmi has elaborated on the different hierarchies of colonizers:

To different degrees every colonizer is privileged, at least comparatively so, ultimately to the detriment of the colonized. If the privileges of the masters of colonization are striking, the lesser privileges of the small colonizer, even the smallest, are very numerous. Every act of his daily life places him in a relationship with the colonized, and with each act his fundamental advantage is demonstrated. (11)

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<sup>27</sup> Parts of this section were developed in previously published works: Patel, Moussa and Upadhyay; and Upadhyay, “Pernicious Continuities,” “Whither Decolonization,” and “Un/settling Immigrants,”

Migrants of colour on stolen lands are often placed in this inbetweenness. While I am not arguing that people of colour are “small” colonizers on Indigenous territories, some may be and some not, I draw from Memmi to illustrate the multiplicities of varying hierarchies formed within settler colonial contexts that draw from other colonial tools of differentiation making. After all, many South Asians come from histories of British colonialism, where Thomas B. Macaulay, a colonial officer posted in British India (1834-38) and the author of *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), sought to create a class of “brown sahibs” who were brown in colour but English in taste, culture and education.<sup>28</sup> Through educating Indians in British education, Macaulay had intended for these “brown sahibs” to help the British better govern their colonies. This is not to say that the “brown sahibs” became colonizers in South Asia; although postcolonial rulers of independent India do come from legacies of colonial education, dictated by the nexus of caste, class, gender, religion, region, and ethnicity. Shefali Chandra further comments on this history: “A range of non-white actors deployed whiteness to cement a range of social inequities beyond the purview of colonizer/colonized, white/non-white, Europe/Other” (“Whiteness on the Margins” 132-33). I want to draw critical connections of colonial education between here and there. While in British India a class of “brown sahibs” was produced, in Canada the same colonizers sought to “kill the Indian in the child” through the residential school system. These pernicious histories illustrate the interlocking yet differential materialities of colonialism. Perhaps they point to the class of “brown sahibs” in Canada, who are rendered better Canadians than their Native-others.

In Canada, many scholars have demonstrated these intermeshed complicities of relationships between Indigenous peoples and people of colour. For instance, Renisa Mawani

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<sup>28</sup> On Macaulay and *Minutes on Indian Education*, see: Bhabha; Chandra, *The Sexual Life of English*; Alok Mukherjee; Prasad, “The English Day”; and Viswanathan.

shows how historically European efforts to deterritorialize and “civilize” Indigenous peoples and trans-Pacific flows of Chinese migration were overlapping temporalities that produced uneven and contradictory colonial geographies of racial power (*Colonial Proximities*). In challenging the early twentieth century discourse of whiteness and nation, Ena Dua demonstrates how South Asian male migrants constructed a parallel discourse in which they referred to themselves as colonialists and defined their project in Canada as one of constructing an Indian colony (“Exclusion through Inclusion”; “The Hindu Woman’s Question”; “Towards Theorising the Connections”). Sunera Thobani argues that despite the magnitude of their dehumanization and exploitation, we cannot minimize the fact that immigrants and refugees are also participants in and beneficiaries of Canada's colonial project, especially when they work towards achieving equality with Canadian settler subjects, thereby placing their political status above that of Indigenous peoples in Canada's racial hierarchy (*Exalted Subjects*). Moreover, Robinder Sehdev posits that people of colour are not sovereign in Canada as racialized immigrants do not have treaties with the Canadian state, but rather they have submitted to the state's authority (even as they contest it). Beenash Jafri complicates the idea of complicity, by drawing out the differences between complicity and privilege (“Privilege vs. Complicity”). She maintains that focusing on complicity illustrates the hierarchies of power, whereas a focus on privilege seeks to centre the privileged-self. Jafri posits that within white settler states, people of colour do not necessarily have many settler privileges, even if they are “settlers.” Thus, a focus on complicity enables crucial engagement with hierarchies that situate complicities for people of colour in settler states. These diverse theorizations show the entanglements of complicities of racialized peoples in Canada’s settler project.

Many Indigenous scholars theorize racialized complicities in the colonial projects. Writing within the Hawaiian context, Kanaka Maoli scholar Haunani-Kay Trask argues: “They [Asians] claim Hawai‘i as their own, denying indigenous history, their long collaboration in our continued dispossession and the benefits therefrom” (22). This denial is manifested in Asians self-identifying as “locals” and claiming belonging and rootedness in Hawai‘i. Trask acknowledges that these claims to Hawai‘i are often made in the face of extreme xenophobic and anti-Asian racism at the hands of white settlers. However, she contends that for Native peoples, Asian settlement is “the latest elaboration of foreign hegemony” (21), and further, these claims reproduce the U.S. as the mosaic of different cultures and races. Denying any complicities in the ongoing colonization of the Indigenous peoples in Hawai‘i, Asians are invested in calling themselves “locals,” just “want to be ‘Americans’” (20). Trask calls these “locals” “settlers of color.”

Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua demonstrate the interconnections between policies of immigration and colonial governance of Indigenous peoples (“Decolonizing Antiracism”). They critique anti-racist scholarship for centring racial exclusion by erasing Indigenous histories and struggles against colonization. People of colour, they argue, in spite of varying histories of migration, are “settlers of colour” as they live on lands that continue to be colonized: “Yet people of color live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands” (134). They demonstrate how people of colour are implicated by the colonial projects of the Canadian state through a wide spectrum of engagement with the state, from liberal claims of belonging, to multicultural acceptance, to anti-racist praxis to demand justice for racist acts of the state, to anti-border activism. All these forms of belonging and non-belonging in the Canadian state, they contend, point towards complicities

and people of colour's colonial relationalities with Indigenous peoples. In a similar manner, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang have also hold that people of colour are "settlers of colour." They argue that logics of colonialism explain:

... why certain minorities can at times become model and quasi-assimilable (as exemplified by Asian settler colonialism, civil rights, model minority discourse, and the use of 'hispanic' as an ethnic category to mean both white and non-white) yet, in times of crisis, revert to the status of foreign contagions (as exemplified by Japanese Internment, Islamophobia, Chinese Exclusion, Red Scare, anti-Irish nativism, WWII anti-semitism, and anti-Mexican-immigration. (18)

Tuck and Yang illustrate the convoluted relations of racial belonging and inclusion/exclusion in white settler states. They further posit that some racialized peoples aspire "brown settler" status even if they cannot claim whiteness (18). These desires demonstrate their investments in the settler state. Furthermore, Byrd reminds us that until Indigenous peoples remain colonized, "the project of liberal democracy, no matter how inclusive it becomes, will remain a lost cause" ("In the City" 26). Thus, processes of racialization and colonization under white supremacy grant non-Native people of colour the abilities to be complicit and to represent or enact settler colonial power.<sup>29</sup>

Byrd uses the term "arrivants" for people of colour in white settler societies. Arrivants, a term that Byrd borrows from African Caribbean poet Kamau Braithwaite, signifies peoples who were forced into the Americas through the violences of colonialism, and those who have moved by choice to the settler states (*The Transit* xix). The term "arrivant" complicates the binaries of white and Indigenous in white settler states and draws attention to the cacophonies of racism and colonialism. Significantly, Byrd deploys the term for peoples who are complicit within settler

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<sup>29</sup> Writing with the Caribbean context, Shona Jackson deploys the term settler for all formerly enslaved and indentured peoples and their descendants. Noting the power differentials between the three communities, she argues: "My goal is to illuminate the particular power dynamic of settler and native that continues to inform Caribbean social reality and identity formation" (*Creole Indigeneity* 3-4).

colonial processes in the Americas, as well as for those who may resist these processes. Trask, Lawrence and Dua, Tuck and Yang, and Byrd, all point out the limits of anti-racist and anti-colonial praxes of peoples of colour.<sup>30</sup> Byrd writes that the colonial and racial cacophonies:

... that produced the global North, particularly the United States, have created internally contradictory quagmires where human rights, equal rights, and recognitions are predicated on the very systems that propagate and maintain the dispossession of indigenous peoples for the common good of the world. (*The Transit* xix)

Both terms, “settlers of colour” and “arrivants,” signify the complicated and complicit relations of peoples of colour in settler states and their participation, wittingly or unwittingly, in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous nations.

Taking cues from the above theorizations, many Asian scholars working in the U.S. and Canada have taken up these concepts to further illustrate Asian complicities. For instance, writing from Hawai‘i and drawing upon Trask’s critiques of Asian settlers, Candace Fujikane theorizes “Asian settler colonialism” in Hawai‘i. She critiques Asian investment in American democracy and “multiculturalism” and calls for a broader methodological and epistemological shift in dominant discourses of Hawai‘i to center Indigenous resistance to the U.S. occupation. She argues that Asians (particularly Japanese, Chinese and Filipinos) are all settlers as they participate in the settler state, irrespective of whether they have power or not. Similarly, Dean Saranillio shows the specific characterizations of Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i and its distinctness from white settler colonialism (“Colliding Histories”; “Colonial Amnesia”; “Why Asian Settler Colonialism”). Building on Trask and Fujikane, Saranillio illustrates that Asian settlers’ investment in the U.S. occupation of Hawai‘i is produced through dispossession of the Indigenous peoples (“Colonial Amnesia”). Kanaka Maoli feminist Maile Arvin critiques Asian

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<sup>30</sup> Byrd (*The Transit*); Tuck and Yang; Jackman and Upadhyay and other scholars argue that these limitations are equally applicable to queer activism as well, making queer activism complicit in settler colonialism.

settler colonialism and calls upon Asians to “disavow the project, not the place, and for the place to be recognized as Hawai‘i nei, not America, and not a US state” (in Aikau et al. 92).

The diverse conceptualizations of people of colour as settlers and as complicit have generated critiques by non-Indigenous scholars.<sup>31</sup> Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright argue that settler of colour theorizations conflate migration with colonialism and claim that Indigenous nationalist projects are neo-racist, exclusionary and limiting. They further propose “decolonization as the gaining of a *global commons*,” thereby denying Indigenous claims to lands and self-determination (133, emphasis in original). They have been critiqued by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. For instance, Byrd contends that their arguments render indigeneity an “obstacle to the gaining of a commons” which should not only belong to Indigenous peoples (*The Transit* 204). According to Andrea Smith, calls against Indigenous nationalism posit Indigenous peoples as “locked in history as a foil against the complex cosmopolitan diasporic subject” (“Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism” 82). Further, Smith argues that Sharma and Wright fail to recognize the capitalist logics of constructing land as property, thus, migration is connected to, not conflatable with, processes of displacement of Indigenous peoples.

Saranillio contends that calling Indigenous nationalisms “neo-racist” reduces indigeneity as “paralyzing and dangerous, as an obstacle to alliance building and tantamount to expulsion” (“Why Asian Settler Colonialism” 284). Saranillio challenges the notions that grounding Indigenous decolonization creates dichotomies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. He argues that migration does not equate colonialism, however, when racialized migrants move to settler states, “they can bolster a colonial system” and align their interests with those of the

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<sup>31</sup> One of the dominant critiques comes from Nandita Sharma, see: Sharma (“Canadian Multiculturalism”; “Strategic Anti-Essentialism”); and Sharma and Wright.

settler state (282 & 286). He asserts that such critiques fail to recognize how power is convoluted and functions through “practices, ambitions, narratives, and silences” (288). On the question of power and oppression, Dhamoon writes that Sharma and Wright postulate an “Oppression Olympics framework,” where migrants of colour are made to contest for “the mantle of the most oppressed, without disrupting hegemonies of power” (“A Feminist Approach” n.pag.). Furthermore, Arvin argues that the contention should not be seen as a debate, since Sharma and Wright reject Native struggles and nations (in Aikau et al. 92). In obfuscating colonial differences, Sharma and Wright erase the colonial cacophonies and relationality between im/migrants of colour and Indigenous people. These insights highlight the complicities of many postcolonial and critical race scholarships that ground themselves by denying Indigenous struggles for sovereignty and decolonization.

Building on Indigenous theorizations of racialized complicities, I want to call for new and critical ways of understanding these complicities. I went to the field with a narrowly defined framework for my research; I had already assumed all racialized peoples are settlers within settler colonialism. Thus, I sought evidence to support my theory. Consequently, I was really only interested in asking few direct questions of my respondents: What do they know about Native peoples? What do they think about Indigenous peoples? Have they ever interacted with Indigenous peoples? Are you a settler? I asked these questions to explore how the Native-other is imagined, constructed, and understood. Further, I was interested in understanding how the South Asian-self is constructed vis-à-vis the Indigenous-other on stolen lands. I sought to theorize what complicity looks like within settler colonialism for racialized peoples by asking these direct questions. But I was mistaken; settler colonialism is not unequivocal and explicit in its functioning. As I demonstrate above, settler colonialism cannot be studied in isolation either. We

have to understand settler colonialism within relational, intersectional, and transnational frameworks. Similarly, neither is complicity so explicit and unambiguous. Complicity cannot be theorized in isolation. Complicity in one structure does not erase complicities in other structures of anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, border imperialism, and caste supremacy. Rather, they are always enabled by, and enable other structures of complicity. Complicities are complex and complexities make complicity.

The term “settler of colour” does pertinent pedagogical and political work. It has been used to analyze structural and hierarchical relations of people of colour with respect to Indigenous peoples with interconnected processes of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism. It allows for people to reimagine their commitments to the settler state and perhaps align themselves with struggles for Indigenous decolonization. The term, however, also has its limitations. Shaista Patel (Patel, Moussa, and Upadhyay, “Complicities, Connections, & Struggles”) argues that these questions “flatten structures of oppression and our histories into mere categories on questionnaires” (n.pag.). Day notes that the term folds all racialized peoples into “a generalized settler position through voluntaristic assumptions [which] constrains our ability to understand how their racialized vulnerability and disposability supports a settler colonial project” (“Being or Nothingness” 107). The debate around the term erases the interlinkages of race, nationality, religion, gender, migration, and caste. The term often conflates all experiences of race into one, specifically invisibilizing anti-Blackness, Islamophobia, border imperialism, and caste. Amadahy and Lawrence note that Black peoples and racialized settlers “do not have the political clout” to decolonize the settler state (130). Furthermore, I argue elsewhere that the term’s usage as a self-identity marker in academic and activist spaces has

become largely symbolic and performative, and often contentious, toxic and exclusionary, from all sides (Patel, Moussa, and Upadhyay, “Complicities, Connections, & Struggles”).

The term “settler of colour” has been more than formative in developing a personal understanding of my own privilege and complicities, as well as my academic and political work, within the settler state. Hence, I do not call for a rejection of the term. The argument cannot simply be closed by saying that all people of colour are not settlers of colour and hence the term is not valid. Such rejections have created binaries, and produced toxicities, and frictions within the academic theorizations on race and settler colonialism. Rather, I argue that theorizing complicities is difficult. Geographies of settler colonialism and white supremacy have ensured that Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour do not have many spaces to interact and come together. Further, it has created frictions and tensions between these communities that are often hard to negotiate. This is not to say that these communities have not interacted before, lived together, and fought together. Rather, there are models of these intimacies, proximities, and alliances to build in the contemporary moment. And the debates around the term “settler of colour” make this work even more difficult. The resistance to the term in academia as well as in activist spaces has closed off many avenues instead of creating or revitalizing spaces. We need to work with frictions to prevent the polarization that halts both work and analysis. Naming in itself is a very limiting political act as it may not be intersectional. This is the tricky aspect about “politics of identity” or “ally-identity politics.” While I understand the critique of performative self-identification as settler, I am also wary of not naming complicities. What happens when we do not name? What gets invisibilized when we stop explicitly naming and identifying our presence as non-Indigenous peoples on these lands? Naming is uncomfortable, but “uncomfortability is productive” (Arvin in Aikau et al. 90).

For people of colour expressing solidarities as settlers to Indigenous peoples, Dhamoon (in Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel) notes:

It is not Indigenous peoples who are anxious whether people of colour are defined as settlers. And while I think this moment serves to relieve white anxiety, for people of colour it has become about which side we are on, where do we place ourselves as non-Indigenous people who are trying to navigate racism and be accountable to Indigenous peoples in the context of white supremacy and settlement. It can be a very tense moment, but one that can also tend to mask over the ways settlement happens through patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia. (11-12)

Dhamoon illustrates the messiness and the contradictions in the naming and self-naming practices of settlerhood and argues that decolonization is actually at stake when the conversations becomes limited by naming settlerness. In a similar tangent, Saranillio posits that this is not a game of semantics, but is for settlers to understand their complicities and to be in solidarity with Natives peoples in achieving sovereignty (“Colonial Amnesia”). Writing about politics of solidarity, Richa Nagar demonstrates how, in the academy, solidarity is either reduced to academic knowledge production or rejected as not academic enough; in either case the materialities of the struggles are forgotten and effaced (*Muddying the Waters* 2). Taking heed from her work, the terms “settler” and “arrivant” need to be defined politically, ethically, and critically to ground the overlapping complexities and complicities in solidarity with decolonization of Indigenous nations and lands.

Within this context, in my project I refrain from identifying my respondents as “settlers of colour.” I continue to, nevertheless, identify myself as a “settler of colour.” However, at different points in the dissertation I draw attention to the ways some respondents have more access to being settlers than others. None of this detracts from theorizing complicities of racialized im/migrants in white settler states. To be clear, I am not arguing to posit people of colour as “innocent” in settler colonial processes. Sherene Razack cautions against a “race to

innocence” by arguing for more critical reflection of one’s own privileges and complicities in other systems of dominations (*Looking White People* ). Razack argues that people can posit themselves outside of power hierarchies and see themselves as “innocent.” Tuck and Yang elaborate on how the settler seeks innocence by “attempt[ing] to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (10). People of colour also claim this innocence in the colonization of Indigenous peoples (Lawrence and Dua; Tuck and Yang). Indeed, all non-Indigenous peoples on stolen lands irrespective of their race use such tactics.

Further, my intention is not to create a “third space” for South Asians in Canada as oppressed peoples, just as Fujikane is careful in not creating a “third space” for Asians as oppressed peoples in Hawai‘i, outside the binary of white and Kanaka Maoli (29). Yet, this is to challenge the white dichotomies of white and others, and bring multiplicities of white supremacy and colonialism into the analysis. Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel gestures to the futility of the settler-defining exercise and argues that “the ultimate goal is to create the need for a new word, or phrase to describe positive features of a settler-Indigenous relationship” (in Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 12&17). Similarly, Tiffany King calls for creating new grammars to understand these complicated processes (Patel, Moussa, and Upadhyay, “Interview with Dr. Tiffany Lethabo King”). We need to go beyond the term and find new ways of understanding racialized complicities and privileges. We need creative and ethical ways to develop relationships of solidarity with Indigenous nations in order to effectively support struggles for sovereignty.

Thus, in this dissertation I move away from the homogenization of all people of colour as settlers of colour and arrivants. For the scope of this dissertation, I am not interested in naming

who is a settler or not. Rather, I am interested in understanding how complicities are generated and maintained in the settler state, and critiquing the settler state more relationally, intersectionally, and transnationally. This dissertation is an exploration of these complicities. Understanding these complicities is the prime focus of each chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 explore complicities through the intermeshed logics of caste, race, indigeneity, and religion. In Chapter 4, I analyze gendered and sexual complicities by looking at formations of interracial and “colonial” intimacies between South Asians and Indigenous peoples. Exploring categories of class and labour, Chapter 5 theorizes labored complicities of South Asians in extractive industries of the settler state, which continue to dispossess and displace Indigenous peoples. To be clear, exploring the complexities of complicities is not a critique of Indigenous theorizations and understandings of racialized settlerhood. It is not a call to Indigenous scholars to “complicate” their understandings. Rather, this dissertation is a response to reciprocate their political and intellectual solidarities with people of colour. Further, it is a call to people of colour to acknowledge, understand, and unsettle their complicities.

### **On Traces as Methods**

The above discussion of complexities and complicities also illustrates the proximities and intimacies of racialized and colonized peoples in the Americas, both historical and contemporary. In this dissertation, I highlight the spaces of frictions, contradictions, and solidarities, specifically, between South Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Often the logics of settler colonialism obscure and efface these spaces as they challenge the settler state and its whiteness—the settler state continues to keep these communities apart and separated, and often pitting them against each other. In the field, as I discuss above, it is challenging to theorize,

or even locate, complexities and complicities. Direct questions like: “what is your relationship to Indigenous peoples?”, “what do you know about Indigenous peoples?”, or “do you know we are on Indigenous lands?” are methodologically and epistemologically limiting and reductive. Yet upon asking, I rarely received any answers from my respondents. Do these absences narrate stories of their own? Does lack of “evidence” and “objective data” undermine these omissions in narratives? Or does the lack of evidence provide spaces for alternate theorizations? The lack of “data” to make connections, does not mean that silences and erasures cannot be theorized. Along with analyzing what my respondents say, I also analyze what they do not say.

The silences exemplify the mechanisms of race and racial violence in the settler state. Silence also gestures to epistemological and methodological shortcomings in the knowledge production on settler colonialism, symptomatic of the settler state’s denial of its past and ongoing processes. An analytical reflection of these silences opens up spaces for theorizations against the technologies of the settler colonial state and society. These silences themselves perhaps tell us something about the connections I explore in this dissertation. Racial and colonial logics, Mawani argues, have “multiple genealogies and loci” (*Colonial Proximities* 18). Drawing from Mawani, I contend that the construction of indigeneity by racialized peoples cannot be understood in isolation as settler colonial mechanisms, because they are not solely constructed through processes of settler colonialism. While the Native body is distinct and particular to the local context in the Americas, my respondents constructed and understood indigeneity through an assemblage of other-Others. While tracing the Indian in South Asianness, it is important to note that South Asianness is not homogenous either. In the context of what has been charted in this chapter so far, the South Asian subject is often a savarna (upper caste) upwardly mobile Hindu Indian. Said differently, the Native-other is produced by urban, savarna, upwardly mobile,

non-Muslim Indians through a continuum of Indian-Others, which includes the Black-Other, Dalit-Other, Bahujan<sup>32</sup>-Other, and Adivasi-Other, as well as the Muslim-Other, refugee-Other, disabled-Other, class-Other, and non-citizen-other. Thus, the South Asian subject within white settler states is produced through erasures of questions of race, indigeneity and caste, here and there.

I draw upon Sara Ahmed's discussion of the stranger and strange encounters to understand how this assemblage of others is constructed. Ahmed argues that through “strange encounters” the “stranger” is shaped, recognized and maintained (*Strange Encounters* 3). There are ontologies of knowing the stranger, which allows one to recognize the stranger. She defines “stranger fetishism” as “a fetishism of figures” where the figure of the stranger is invested “with a life of its own insofar as it cut off from the histories of its determination” (5). This fetishism gives meanings to the figure of the stranger by objectifying the stranger. These processes of fetishism define the self against the stranger, and the othering makes the stranger “dangerous” to the self. The task at hand then, Ahmed calls out, “is to draw attention to the forms of authorization and labour that are concealed by stranger fetishism” (74). While Ahmed is talking about the functioning of racism, white supremacy, and multiculturalism, I use her theorization to underscore how even racialized people use similar mechanisms to understand the “stranger.” I consciously use the word “similar” rather than “identical” to highlight power differentials and to provide space for thinking about structures of stranger-making. Taking cues from Ahmed, I argue that for Indians on stolen lands, the Indian-other (Native-other) is constructed through processes of stranger fetishism, that allows for the Indian-self to already recognize the latter as the stranger. Ahmed contends “a ‘close encounter’ is always a strange encounter, where

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<sup>32</sup> Term used widely by Shudra people (lower caste) communities in India.

something fails to be revealed” (181). I argue that these modalities of othering are operationalized through gestures, silences, absences, and traces.

In the interviews I conducted, there were silences from my respondents in thinking about indigeneity here, and indigeneity and caste in South Asia. While there were overt gestures towards aspirations and proximities to whiteness and “model minority” status, simultaneously there were silent hints towards anti-Blackness. Questions of sexuality and desire were also hard to trace in these conversations. Further, there were silences on questions of colonialism, white supremacy, and racism by the respondents. There were silences on my part as well. While I asked the questions I wanted to ask, I was not able to ask them in more intricate ways. Rather, I relied on a multicultural framework to ask the questions, thereby often-constructing Indigenous and South Asian communities as diverse ethnic communities.<sup>33</sup> Further, I did not directly engage with Indigenous peoples in sites where I was analyzing South Asian complicities.<sup>34</sup> There are silences and absences in the archives as well—state, media, university, and personal archives alike. For instance, in Chapter 4, I explore the silences in the archives about intimacies between South Asians and Indigenous peoples. How do we understand these silences and what role do they serve in the operations of the settler state?

Gayatri Spivak argues that we should “measure silences” in theorizing ideological formations (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”). These silences demonstrate the mechanisms of hegemonic ideologies. Lisa Lowe, in theorizing the “intimacies of four continents,” asks why the intimacies formed through colonial and racial processes have been forgotten, silenced or obscured. Rather than filling gaps in histories and knowledges, Lowe is committed to revealing

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<sup>33</sup> In some instances I was able to have more open conversations around questions of Indigenous colonization. I explore these conversations throughout the dissertation.

<sup>34</sup> I expand on this in the following section.

“the politics of our lack of knowledge” (27). She contends that forgetting is an essential component of liberal ideological formations; forgetting effaces the violence that produce liberalism itself (27). She argues:

Modern liberal humanism is a formalism that translates the world through an economy of affirmation and forgetting within a regime of desiring freedom. The differentiations of ‘race’ or ‘nation,’ the geopolitical map of ‘south,’ ‘north,’ ‘east,’ and ‘west,’ or the modernization discourse of stages of development—these are *traces* of liberal forgetting. They reside within, and are constitutive of, the modern narrative of freedom but are neither fully determined nor exhausted by its ends. They are the remainders of the formalism of affirmation and forgetting. (39, emphasis in original)

Racial hierarchies in the making of the global north, global regimes of labour, gendered/sexual/classed development discourses, neocolonial/neoimperial/neoliberal wars in the global South, and transnational migration patterns all have traces of colonial and racial formations of liberalism and liberal forgetting, silencing, obscuring, and erasing of past violences. Lowe further adds: “Such violence leaves a trace, which returns and unsettles the apparent closure of the liberal politics, society, and culture that establish the universal” (6-7). Therefore, silences are actually traces: traces of other processes, relations and structures that inform and shape each other. I use traces because they are always there, they are not silenced or erased, rather they make visible the multitude forms of power that are not always readily visible, readable, or theorizeable.

In her work on sexuality in colonial India, Anjali Arondekar questions the faith in the promise of the archives. She calls for abandoning the “seduction of access” in the archives that holds the “possibilities of the future” (5). Instead of locating sexuality in the margins or theorizing its invisibility in the colonial archives, Arondekar argues to consider sexuality at the center of the colonial archives. Rather than finding the missing/hidden/silent object to theorize the subject, Arondekar asks to conceive the object as the subject in form of a trace. The trace

offers “new ways of both mining and undermining the evidence of the archive” (3). Drawing on Spivak, she further argues:

To read without a trace . . . is not a mandate against archival work, but rather a call to interrogate, without paralysis, to challenge, without ending the promise of a future. (4)

Traces in the archives, thus, offer ways to understand the limits of the archives. Traces also narrate stories that capture the varying intricacies and complexities. The archives are not empty but full of traces. While Arondekar situates her critique in the colonial archive, I draw from her and Lowe to understand silences and absences as traces in settler states. Past and ongoing processes of colonialism in Canada renders the archives, histories, stories, and experiences colonial. Silences and absences in the archives as well as interviews are all traces of the workings of settler colonial logics. For instance, Walter Mignolo shows how passing comments during conversations is knowledge that cannot be documented, yet that “remains with you and introduces changes in a given argument” (xi). Drawing from Mignolo, I use “passing comments” as traces.

Byrd offers more ways to understand traces within settler colonial contexts. Within cacophonies produced by differential racisms and colonialisms in settler states, Byrd theorizes how “Indianness” serves as a “transit of empire”— “transit as a concept suggests the multiple subjectivities and subjugations put into motion and made to move through notions of injury, grievance, and grievability” (*The Transit* xxi). As a transit, “Indianness” has created the conditions of the American empire, connecting European colonialisms and imperialisms. Within the transit, according to Byrd, “traces of Indianness” unmap processes of power and colonialism in the making and maintaining of the empire, “and yet because they are traces, they have often remained deactivated as a point of critical inquiry” (xvii-xviii). Further, the figure of the Indian shapes American and Canadian settler colonialism, even as the Indian is “nowhere and

everywhere within the ontological premises” through which the empire produces itself (xix). Traces of indigeneity construct the United States, and other white settler states, as liberal democratic multicultural nation-states. Mawani similarly offers methodologies of traces to “trace the spectral figures of indigeneity to foreground the interconnections between processes of dispossession aimed at indigenous peoples, the migration of British Indians, and the conflicting and seemingly incommensurable conceptions of time that underwrote them” (“Specters of Indigeneity” 371). Thus, following traces of indigeneity unsettles the settler state. Further, these traces shape the presence of racialized diasporas on stolen lands. By locating these “traces of Indianness” within Indian diasporas, I argue that the presence of Indians on these stolen Indian lands is structured through original and ongoing processes of colonialism, but also their racialized subjectivities are constructed vis-à-vis the presence, or sometimes absence, of the Indian-other. The racialization of “Indians” is not devoid from their presence on the lands of the other “Indians.”

I bring Byrd, Arondekar, and Lowe’s conceptualizations of traces together within the transit of settler empire(s) to simultaneously “exist relationally, multiply” (Byrd xvii). Traces of indigeneity reveal (liberal) politics of forgetting the violences, and conversely traces of liberalism uncover the powers which erase indigeneity through colonization. In this dissertation, I employ traces as a method to unmap and unsettle past and ongoing settler colonial processes. How can we trace these multiple taxonomies and loci, when they are “difficult to map?” How do we trace indigeneity, race, and colonialism? How do we trace traces?

I draw from Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris conceptualization of “sociology of the trace” to measure silences and trace the traces. Arguing against sociological quantitative and qualitative methodologies invested in the truth of the empirical and evidences, Gómez-Barris

and Gray propose a sociology of the trace which can blur the lines between data that can be observed and those that cannot be readily observed: “those things that are not easily found” (4).

They elaborate:

We are interested in the archives of traces and inscriptions, things often absent from the purview of disciplinary knowledge, not simply because we do not have the tools to see them but because imprints of power do not easily slide into proscriptive categories that definitely and indefinitely measure social inequality. (4)

Methodologies of traces centre violences and power structures that are erased or silenced due to their inherent entanglements. They suggest to study the traces: first, by challenging the constitution of social facts as evidence, instead of engaging with their historical and social specificities; and second, by understanding “social and cultural imprints” of all forms of power (5-6).<sup>35</sup> Rejecting the dominance of evidence and the empirical as forms of governmentality, they propose methodologies that centre imaginations, experiences and creativity. Thus, traces unmap other invisibilized and erased powers, processes and relations, along with dreams, possibilities and affects; not to provide the bigger truth or produce new knowledges, but rather to challenge normative and naturalized understandings of the empirical, experiential, and imaginal.

Further for Lowe, tracing allows for reclaiming “those significant moments in which transformations have begun to take place, but have not yet been inserted into historical time” (175). Taking directions from above theorizations of traces, in this dissertation I trace indigeneity in the diasporic formations of Indians in Canada. I trace transnational and intersectional processes of race, caste, indigeneity, gender, sexuality, religion and class on stolen lands that are invisibilized within white settler colonial logics, to unsettle diasporic communities. Unsettling

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<sup>35</sup> Gómez-Barris and Gray add further: “Whether these imprints may be obvious and provide material evidence of power’s whereabouts, such as a body with scars in the aftermath of a torture session, or whether the imprint of power is less evident, as in the normalization of states of exception, social science has often had difficulty describing, apprehending, and showing why social traces matter” (5-6).

does not necessarily mean to uproot, but rather to implicate diasporic complicities in the colonization of Indian lands. An analysis of traces also questions liberal formations within postcolonial, area, and diaspora studies that push Indigenous peoples and their ongoing colonization, in words of Byrd, “toward a vanishing point” (3). Trace as a method, hence, unravels and explicates settler colonial processes of silences and absences. In Chapters 2 and 3, I trace absences of caste in South Asian diasporic studies to trace the relations between caste and indigeneity in the making of racialized diasporas. Chapter 4 traces silences around intimacies between South Asians and Indigenous peoples, and the consequent invisibilization of desires and intimacies between these communities. Further, in Chapter 5 I trace questions of racialized labour on sites of extraction, where complicities of racialized labour in dispossession of Indigenous peoples is constantly erased and invisibilized.

### **Towards Racial Comparativism and Incommensurabilities**

In this chapter, I theorized a conceptual framework of pernicious continuities to understand different racial formations within white settler states. By exploring complexities, complicities and traces, I argued that processes of settler colonialism cannot be studied in isolation. Rather, to gain analytical understandings of South Asian relations to the white settler state and Indigenous nations, we need to theorize intermeshed histories of colonialism, capitalism and white supremacy. It is because of pernicious continuities that South Asians come to “settle” on stolen Indigenous lands. Further, I contended that we need to theorize these complexities to understand complicities, because complexities produce complicities, and complicities produce complexities. I also brought in frameworks of other structures of oppression and exclusion, such as anti-Blackness, Islamophobia and “border imperialism,” to engage with complexities and

complicities, and discussed the formulations of “settler-of-colour” and “arrivants.” Subsequently, I conceptualized traces as both a theoretical term as well as a method to unmap racial and colonial formations.

By way of conclusion, I discuss racial and colonial incommensurabilities as a key aspect of racial comparative theorizations. In recent years, there has been a turn towards the comparative within race, ethnic and diaspora studies.<sup>36</sup> Grace K. Hong and Roderick K. Ferguson's theorization of comparativism guides this project. They have called comparativism:

...a desire to identify and invent analytics through which to compare racial formations, in distinction to comparative race scholarship that simply parallels instances of historical similarity across racial groups in the United States. Such a project entails not only articulating commonalities between communities of color but imagining alternative modes of coalition beyond prior models of racial or ethnic solidarity based on a notion of homogeneity or similarity. (1)

Hence, the guiding logic in this turn has been to complicate and rupture homogenization of racial experiences, structures, process and violences, and to theorize comparatively these varying formations. Noting that these methods are not inherently subversive or crucial, Danika Medak-Saltzman and Antonio T. Tiongson Jr argue to not ground theories and methodologies that presume “congruence, symmetry, and commensurability,” but rather to work through “transnational, intersectional, relational, genealogical, and conjunctural” frameworks (5). Further, they call for scholars who incorporate indigeneity in their frameworks to reckon and understand complicities of all arrivants in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Iyko Day hopes for critical race and ethnic theorizations that posit indigeneity as “being, not nothingness” (“Being or Nothingness” 118). Byrd further reminds us: “If there is a basis for comparison across diasporic, immigrant, and indigenous experiences, then such comparisons

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<sup>36</sup> This body of work includes: Fujikane; Jun; Kurashige; Lowe, “The Intimacies of Four Continents”; Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*; and Miles and Holland. A limited body of work is focused on theorizing the shift towards comparativism, these include: Hong and Ferguson; Medak-Saltzman and Tiongson Jr..

need to be mindful of how the interdisciplinary frameworks employed are shaped, argued, and pursued” (“Arriving on a Different” 177). Taking directions from these works in this project, I go beyond the logics of similarities and commonalities between different racial and ethnic communities, identifying gaps in theorizations and scholarships,<sup>37</sup> mapping solidarities and alliances between different communities,<sup>38</sup> or erasing complicities. I challenge binaristic and isolated theorizations of race and ethnic structures (Indigenous vs. settler state, Black vs. non Black, South Asian vs. racist state) and argue that despite pernicious continuities, there are heterogeneous and intricate racial formations within settler colonial contexts, temporally and spatially. South Asians, while racialized in white settler states, are complicit in settler colonial processes. As important as it is to understand the complex ways South Asians are marginalized, it is more pertinent to understand their complicities. They are not equally marginalized or racialized as Indigenous peoples, rather their racialization is intermeshed within the processes of settler colonialism.

Further, drawing on Indigenous theorizations of colonial incommensurabilities, including Barker, Byrd, Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel, Lawrence and Dua, and Tuck and Yang, I argue that studying comparative racial formations, and those specifically seeking to theorize relations between Indigenous peoples and other racialized communities, need to accept, embrace and work through incommensurabilities. Even as incommensurabilities may leave many

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<sup>37</sup> Even though I argue this project is locating gaps in studies of South Asian diasporas in Canada, the project is not invested in the politics of filling gaps and silences. Rather, I am interested in the politics of said absences, and the workings of settler colonial logics in maintaining those absences, the haunted “absent presences.”

<sup>38</sup> Projects that ground solidarities between different communities, I argue, on the one hand, are extremely important and politically necessary, yet, on the other hand, they seek to simplify and erase the complexities. For instance, Tiongson Jr. challenges studies on Afro-Asian solidarities for their complicities in reproducing settler logics by either erasing indigeneity or reducing it to similar to other ethnic and racial groups. Further, as Rita K. Dhamoon argues that while unpacking racism is important work but “not least because of the possibilities of fostering ‘good relations’ among and between Others” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel 3), I am not committed to a project of unpacking silences to possibilities of shared political alliances, affinities and solidarities.

theoretical questions invalid, political strategies inept, alliances failed, and racialized presence on stolen lands complicit, incommensurabilities are necessary to rupture, unsettle, and decolonize any normative and linear understandings of indigeneity and settler colonialism. Tuck and Yang insist that incommensurabilities demonstrate the distinctness of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty in relation to calls for racial rights and other social justice projects. They elaborate:

Decolonial struggles here/there are not parallel, not shared equally, nor do they bring neat closure to the concerns of all involved – particularly not for settlers. Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable. (31)

Indigenous decolonization is incommensurable for South Asians “settled” in Canada. South Asians through their investments in the settler state, maintain their privileged positionality in Canada. Decolonization for South Asians means letting go of their aspirations in the continuance of the Canadian state. Rather, they need to invest themselves in the formation of Indigenous decolonized nations. Grounding these ethics, continuities and complexities, it is indispensable for South Asians to be committed to unsettling their complicities towards an Indigenous decolonial futurity on these lands that “we” are “settled” upon.

## Chapter 2: Troubling Brahminism: A Focus on Caste and Indigeneity in India

In June 2015, British Columbia Premier Christy Clark announced the celebration of International Yoga Day (IYD) on the Burrard Bridge, Vancouver (“Namaste”). Clark invited yogis from all over B.C. on June 21<sup>st</sup> to “to roll out their mats, practice their favorite pose.” The one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar event, “Om the Bridge,” sponsored by multinational corporations lululemon athletica, YYoga, and Altagas, would have closed the bridge for traffic for seven hours. It was intended to be the largest IYD celebration outside of India.<sup>1</sup> The event, however, generated much protest against itself (“‘Om the Bridge’ Cancelled”). One of the main reasons behind the protest was the perceived disrespect for National Aboriginal Day—June 21<sup>st</sup> has been celebrated as National Aboriginal Day by Indigenous peoples in Canada since 1996. While the event was eventually cancelled amidst protest,<sup>2</sup> I argue that the cancelled event unravels complex intricacies between processes that are often invisibilized within the Canadian multicultural framework, and deemed disconnected and isolated. It demonstrates links between the settler-state’s amnesia and denial about its continued colonial existence, white multicultural neoliberal appropriations of yoga, and processes of brahminical casteism<sup>3</sup> that shape South Asian diasporas

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<sup>1</sup> While IYD created its own controversies in B.C., it also was surrounded by controversies in India. IYD is an initiative of right wing Hindutva Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Modi has been criticized for Hinduizing yoga by Dalit, Muslim and Christian leaders, as well as others secular and progressive bodies in India. This intention of branding yoga through IYD is one of the many tactics used by Modi towards saffronizing and desecularizing the Indian state. Furthermore, the massive support that Modi enjoys in the diaspora is a testament to the deep rooted upper caste Hindu formation of the diaspora in North America. For more on Hindu diasporas, see: Bhatt and Mukta; Chatterji; Chaudhuri; A. Kumar; Lal “The Politics of History on the Internet”; Oza; and Prashad (*The Karma of Brown Folk*, *Uncle Swami*).

<sup>2</sup> After cancelling the event, Clark tweeted to claim that the event was meant to be “a great opportunity to celebrate peace and harmony – it’s not about politics” (Clark).

<sup>3</sup> I elaborate on brahminical caste structures throughout this chapter and the next chapter. For the ease of readability, I briefly explain in this footnote. The priest caste (brahmins) are the at top of the Hindu caste system. As I demonstrate in the following two chapters, the caste system is not only limited to Hinduism, but rather is practiced in other South Asian religions as well. However, the roots of the system derive from brahmin-centric caste system. Different terms like brahminical caste system, brahminism, and brahminical supremacy are used to describe this caste system. In this dissertation, I alternate between these different terms.

in Canada. I use amnesia to highlight how the settler-state continues to function in ways that invisibilize and erase indigeneity for its own purposes. By “white multicultural neoliberal appropriations” I mean how yoga—along with other cultural markers of South Asianness like samosas, Bollywood, Bhangra, bindis, spices, and saris—becomes a multicultural entity to be consumed, commodified, and appropriated by the white settlers in North America.

Yoga as an iconic-signifier of India, South Asia, Hinduism, and brown bodies, along with other South Asian cultural forms, highlights how certain markers of South Asianness have socio-cultural ascendancy over markers of indigeneity (and Indigenous peoples) within the multicultural Canadian state. This ascendancy produces a “superior” South Asian subject, who is arguably higher on the “cultural” and racial ladder than Indigenous peoples. However, I argue there are broader settler colonial logics at play in creating this ascendancy. South Asians are not a homogenous community. Rather, the imagined “superior” South Asian subject is brahmin-savarna (caste Hindus)<sup>4</sup> upwardly mobile Hindu Indian.<sup>5</sup> This subject is the “possessor” of yoga, aspires to whiteness, and attains proximity to settlerness by disassociating with the others—Indigenous and Black peoples as well as the caste-others. The appropriated, consumed, and

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<sup>4</sup> Savarna is a Sanskrit word for Hindus who are part of the Hindu four-tier varna system. Communities who not form the part of the varna system—Dalits (communities outside the varna system) and Adivasis (Indigenous peoples in India)—are called avarna. Varna is a Sanskrit word of colour or class. Hindu scriptures divided the Hindu society into four varnas: brahmins (priest caste), kshatriyas (ruling and warrior caste), vaishyas (agricultural and trader caste) and Shudras (broadly service providers to the above three castes). This system is different from social ordering of jati or caste system. However, the two systems are interlinked and coproduced (Subramanian Shankar). Caste is usually limited to talking about Shudras and Dalits. This invisibilizes the brahminical caste system. In this dissertation, I use to “caste” to unmask these brahminical formations in South Asia and the diasporas.

<sup>5</sup> To demonstrate the relations between yoga and upper-caste Hindu Indian is beyond the scope of this project. Hegemonic forms of yoga are deeply embedded within brahminical Sanskrit practices (this is not to deny other forms of yoga practices across caste, indigeneity and religion) (Krishnamurti “Flexing like a yogi”; Patankar). By extension, yoga within diasporic and white settler state context is also deeply brahminical. Prachi Patankar commenting against voices which claim yoga as Indian in the U.S. notes that: “Rooted in the chauvinistic Hinduism among some sectors of the upper-caste minority, these voices claim yoga as their homogenous culture—in ways that obscure the caste, class, and religious diversity and injustices among South Asians” (n.pag.). Drawing on Patankar’s analysis, I call for a more critical engagement with yoga within white settler states, which is attentive towards questions of race, caste, indigeneity, and religion.

celebrated Indianness in Canada is rooted in upper caste<sup>6</sup> Hindu India, brahminical India.

Writing about upper caste anti-colonial nationalism in colonial British India, Dalit writer M.S.S. Pandian critiques the conflated construction of Hinduness and Indianness, he argues: “What gets encoded here as Indian culture is what is culture to the brahmins/upper castes” (1736). As well, writing about transnational proximities between whiteness and brahminism, Shefali Chandra contends: “Hindu India serves as a primary conduit for transnational whiteness” (“India Will You Forever” 508).<sup>7</sup> Drawing from Pandian and Chandra, in the following two chapters, I demonstrate how above-mentioned socio-cultural ascendancy is constructed through colonial, racial, and caste logics.

The reader may ask, the title of this chapter says “a focus on India,” however, the chapter begins with a discussion of IYD in Vancouver? Inversely, why a chapter on India in a dissertation about settler colonial processes in Canada? By theorizing caste<sup>8</sup> and indigeneity in India this chapter lays the foundation to understand caste processes in the making of South Asian diasporas in Canada in the following chapter. Jodi Byrd contends: “Colonialism brought the world, its peoples, and their own structures of power and hegemony to indigenous lands” (*The Transit* xxvi). Similarly, racial and colonial logics, Renisa Mawani argues, have “multiple genealogies and loci” (*Colonial Proximities* 18). Building on Byrd and Mawani, I argue that

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<sup>6</sup> I interchangeably use the terms brahmin, brahmin-savarna, savarna, and upper caste to talk about peoples with caste privileges.

<sup>7</sup> Chandra argues that the celebration and appropriation of India in the U.S. is grounded in India as Hindu India through the Indo-European colonial intimacies, producing “ramifications for Islam as well as for caste” (“India Will You Forever” 492).

<sup>8</sup> The term “caste” has no equivalent in any of the South Asian languages. British colonizers borrowed the word from the Portuguese word *casta*—referring to “purity of blood” (Guha 21) Under the colonial empire, the term *casta* was used across the world—from Latin America to the Philippines—to negatively apply to people of mixed descent (22). Portuguese applied the term in India to refer what they understood as the social order of pure blood-line (23). European colonizers used caste as a framework all across the world. For more, see: Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans*; J. Kēhaulani Kauanui; Mehta; Menchaca; Salesa; and Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures*.

while anti-Native racism has its own genealogies in white settler societies, grammars of anti-Native racism function in relation to other taxonomies of difference making and oppression.

The two chapters together demonstrate that within South Asian diasporic contexts, the mechanisms of othering are grounded in logics of caste and indigeneity in South Asia. Further, heeding to calls from Dalit writers Thenmozhi Soundararajan and Sinthujan Varatharajah, the two chapters ground transnational and intersectional conversations on race, caste, and indigeneity, with a critical analysis of the racialized complicities within the Canadian settler state. Soundararajan and Varatharajah write:

Look. It's time that we South Asians of the diaspora call out caste. Every issue that we might want to understand better and address — whether it is indigenous rights of the First Nations, Aboriginal populations or Native Americans, misogyny, racism, feminism, labor rights, heteropatriarchy, immigration issues, settler or neo-colonialism, anti-blackness, Islamophobia, transphobia, environmentalism, militarism, or Hindu fundamentalism — will not be possible if caste is not dismantled. (n.pag.)

Thus, I seek to bring anti-caste thinking into conversation with anti-settler colonialism. The two chapters together have two main objectives: first, to explore questions and silences of caste and indigeneity within South Asian diasporic formations; and, second, to demonstrate how caste, race, and indigeneity converge together in settler states in the making of racialized diasporas. The focus on caste in the diaspora is primarily through first generation experiences of upper caste Hindus and Sikhs in Canada.

In this chapter, I use Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal (DBAT) critiques to understand structures of caste and indigeneity in India. Dalit is a political term used by erstwhile “untouchable” peoples who are outside of the traditional four-tier varna system. Bahujan is a term used widely by Shudra (lower caste) communities in India. Adivasi is used as an umbrella term for the Indigenous communities in India. Some Indigenous communities use the term Tribal to identify themselves. In Chapter 3, a critical engagement with a DBAT critiques and its

intersections with race, diaspora, and indigeneity in white settler states will enable me to theorize structures of brahminical supremacy and settler colonialism, and the relationships between them—which remain mainly unexamined within South Asian diaspora studies. I argue that Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, and Tribals as the Indian state’s others, offer epistemologies to challenge and unsettle the Indian state; and allow for transnational conversations on caste, race, and indigeneity across South Asia and places where South Asian diasporas have “settled.”

This chapter begins with a section exploring structures of brahminical caste supremacy in India. In the second section, I provide an overview of indigeneity in India to draw connections to indigeneity in Canada. Subsequently, in the third section, I explore DBAT critiques of the Indian nation-state and nationalism, through the themes of colonialism; castelessness of upper caste Hindus and invisibilization of brahminism; and brahmin-savarna formations and privileges. These critiques are not exhaustive or comprehensive, but rather are offered here as a way to understand the formations of caste and indigeneity in India. I conclude this chapter by exploring DBAT critiques of process of knowledge production.

### **Understanding Brahminical Caste Structures**

Contemporary caste structures in India are grounded in the ideologies of brahminism. As a “comprehensive and pervasive ideology” (Rodrigues 49), brahminism dictates and shapes all forms of political, social, cultural and economic processes, exploitation and violences in India. B.R. Ambedkar, champion of Dalit rights, writer and architect of the Indian constitution, expands on brahminism:

Inequality is the official doctrine of Brahminism and the suppressions of the lower classes aspiring to equality has been looked upon by them and carried out by them without remorse as their bounden duty. (“Caste, Class, and Democracy” 46)

At the top of this structure are the brahmins. However, Ambedkar notes that brahmins do not necessarily reproduce brahminism themselves, but they directly benefit from the system (Rodrigues 50). Intertwined with socio-religious notions of “purity” and “pollution,” and heteropatriarchy, caste is an everyday lived reality, not only in India, but also in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and across the diasporas (Jodhka and Shah). Caste is not limited to Hinduism, but also practiced in religions grounded in anti-caste ontologies like Buddhism and Sikhism, as well as within religions like Islam and Christianity. Moreover, caste is also replicated within atheist, secular and left and progressive formations. My engagement with anti-caste epistemologies focuses on Dalit epistemologies and theorizations within the Indian context.<sup>9</sup>

Dalit, a word derived from Sanskrit, means “ground down,” “broken into pieces,” and “crushed.” It was first used by Jyotirao<sup>10</sup> Phule in the nineteenth century. The term is widely used in South Asia as self-chosen political identity by communities erstwhile recognized as “untouchables” or avarna communities. Under the Indian Constitution, they are defined as “Scheduled Castes” (SC). According to Arjun Dangle, one of leaders of the Dalit Panthers,<sup>11</sup>

Dalit is:

... not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty of science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (Dangle qtd. in Arun Mukherjee, “Introduction” xiii)

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<sup>9</sup> Mainly because there is very little written about caste outside the Indian context.

<sup>10</sup> Phule was a Dalit activist, writer and social reformer in nineteenth century. He was a champion of Dalit and women rights.

<sup>11</sup> Dalit Panthers was formed in India in 1972 as a revolutionary anti-caste organization. It was inspired by Black Panther Party and the struggles of Black peoples in the U.S. On these links, see: Guru and Chakravarty; A. Mukherjee; and Rao, *The Caste Question*.

Dangle's conceptualization of Dalitness ruptures victim-centric definitions and renders Dalit as experiential and agential. Dalit is a community and identity "that are in the making" (Rao, *The Caste Question* 1). Thus, Dalit is not a caste, but rather an assertion of an anti-caste praxis that seeks to dismantle all forms of brahminical casteist violence and oppression.

Dalit feminists and womanists have theorized important and critical intersections between caste, gender, and sexuality.<sup>12</sup> They have shown how gender relations are fundamental to the broader ideologies of caste.<sup>13</sup> Caste structures are maintained through heteropatriarchal endogamic reproduction practices, controlling women's sexuality. B.R. Ambedkar highlights the centrality of endogamy (practice of marrying within the same caste) to caste:

Caste in India means an artificial chopping off of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy. Thus the conclusion is inevitable that endogamy is the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste. ("Castes in India" 84)

Endogamy controls both lower caste and upper caste women's sexualities, albeit in different ways, and the latter are complicit in violence against Dalit and lower caste women.

Dalit feminists show how Dalit women face patriarchy at two levels: patriarchy in the family and brahminical patriarchy outside the family. Caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of the brahminical social order and are closely interconnected. Dalit women's sexuality is controlled through varied means, as Dalit feminist Rekha Thakur notes,

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<sup>12</sup> See for example: Ambedkar Age Collective; Kamble; Irudayam, Mangubhai, and Lee; Malik; Pawar and Moon; Stephen; Thakur; and Tharu.

<sup>13</sup> The relations between caste, gender and sexuality, have been theorized by Jyotirao Phule, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar E.V. Ramasamy – three main champions of Dalit rights and freedom. Each of them has challenged casteist ideologies and patriarchies significantly. Phule articulated how gender and caste overlapped, and focused on 'softer' forms of gendered domination, like chastity and caste purity, that regulated upper-caste women (Chakravarti). Ambedkar further took this analysis and attacked the institution of marriage itself. For him inter-marriage was the most important way of annihilating caste, as endogamy seeks to maintain caste purity and control women's sexuality (Rege). The centrality of gender question for Periyar is evident in his Self-Respect Movement—SRM (Geetha). SRM critiqued the gender hierarchies inherent in the structure of the Hindu marriage, thereby subverting marriages. This attack on marriages involved questions of intimacy, pleasure and sexuality. Linking of caste with questions of gender and sexuality, and further with intimacy and desire, is inherently queer. Following the trajectories of Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar, Dalit feminist epistemologies posit queer challenges to savarna heteropatriarchies.

including rape and sexual exploitation by upper caste men, exploitation through devadasi customs,<sup>14</sup> through sex work, restrictions on inter-caste marriages, and different forms of labour.

Dalit writer Cynthia Stephen elaborates further:

I suggest that the widely held perception of the Dalit woman as the OTHER is the distilled impact of centuries-long alienation generated by ingrained patriarchal and Brahminical values at all levels in society, which in turn causes the high level of exclusion, invisibility and structural and domestic violence which is the experience of Dalit women. Thus even among women, she is perceived as OTHER ... What [is] clearly needed ... is an articulation based on the consciousness of the Dalit women themselves, their experiences of suffering, exclusion and *thrice-removedness* - isolation by virtue of gender, caste, and class – not to speak of religion, if one were a Muslim or a Christian Dalit. (n.pag., emphasis in original)

Rejecting savarna feminisms and their casteist complicities within brahminical patriarchies, Stevens calls for “Dalit Womanist” paradigm borrowing from Black/African womanisms. She calls for a Dalit womanist praxis that dismantles all structures of caste and patriarchy. Thus, Dalit feminist and womanist critiques, without equating the varying patriarchies, show how dominant brahminical discourses of caste and gender have led to masculinization of caste, and savaranization of womanhood—essentializing womanhood to upper-caste-ness (Rege 91).

Drawing intersections between critical race theory and critical caste theory, enables us to theorize caste in the diaspora and its relation to race. Like race, caste is not an identity or an essence, but rather is inherently a political subjectivity. Balmurli Natarajan argues that critical caste theory seeks to situate “caste within the larger goal of transforming the relationship among caste, casteism, inequality and power” (10), and unmask “the *ordinariness* of caste in Indian life” (25, emphasis in original). Similar to race, understanding caste as socially constructed allows us to ask how caste is produced, reproduced and maintained through power structures (21). Processes of brahminical supremacy, like white supremacy, work to normalize, naturalize

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<sup>14</sup> Devdasi are girls “dedicated” to worship and service of deities and temples; it is a form of sexual exploitation of Dalit girls.

and invisibilize power and privilege embedded in the violences and oppressions of caste hierarchies. Furthermore, Sinthujan Varatharajah notes how space is always caste-ified, similarly to how space is racialized (“Memories of Belonging” 8). He adds: “To caste-ify space thus means to project caste differences ... upon a real and imagined landscape, and act upon such presumed differences through unequal treatment of this particular space and its inhabitants” (8). Thus, caste, like race, normalizes violence temporally and spatially.

“Bahujan”—a Sanskrit word that means “people in majority”—is a term used widely by Shudra communities in India. Indian Constitution defines them as “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs).<sup>15</sup> Kanshi Ram, founder of Bahujan Samaj Party (Majority Peoples’ Party), first used the word Bahujan in 1984. Both terms, Dalit and Bahujan, have been used as umbrella terms for all those oppressed by the brahminical caste structure. Ram proposed, all Dalits, Shudras and other non-Hindu minorities, including Adivasis, to come together as they were more numerous than any dominant caste. The Dalit Panther Party, in their Manifesto in 1973, defined Dalit as:

Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women, and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. (“Dalit Panther’s Manifesto” 62)

They defined their enemies as: power, wealth, price; landlords, capitalists, moneylenders; and parties who indulge in religious or casteist politics, and the government, which depends on them (62). “Dalitbahujan,” a term proposed by Dalit writer Kancha Ilaiah (*Why I Am Not a Hindu*), is used to describe the status of not only Dalits but all “victims” of discrimination and oppression. Thus, many Dalit and Bahujan writers and activists use Dalit, Bahujan, Dalitbahujan or Dalit-Bahujan as umbrella terms for all those oppressed by the caste structures.<sup>16</sup> Sometimes these

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<sup>15</sup> The term is used by the Government of India to denote communities that are deemed socially and educationally disadvantaged. The Constitution guarantees 27% reservation for OBCs in public sector employment and higher education.

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Kamala Visweswaran uses “a hyphen in Dalit-Bahujan to signify a tentative alliance of thought and

definitions include Adivasis, religious and national minorities, poor, working class, and peasant communities as well.

At the same time, many writers have also pointed out the stark differences between these terms. For instance, Ambedkar was always cautious to theorize class in relation to caste, and always emphasized the specificities of Dalit social experiences and discrimination (Rao, “Stigma and Labour: Remembering Dalit Marxism” n.pag.). Ambedkar was also skeptical of alliances with Shudras; as Anupama Rao notes, for Ambedkar: “Shudras critiques of caste came from a desire for incorporation into the caste Hindu order, rather than from the position of symbolic negation” (n.pag.). Similarly, Dalit writer Anand Teltumbde shows how castes today cannot be understood along the lines of religion or tradition, as they are much more complex now with the intersections with neoliberal political economy. He notes:

The present day caste situation does not have much to do with the varna system except for deriving from it a broad ideological framework. Since the 1960s, the shudra castes have emerged into a dominant position in the production processes and have successfully translated this into the political and cultural domains . . . even if some of the shudra castes were in no better state than the dalits, their traditional social and economic ties with the landowning castes gave them a certain social edge, and they cannot be bracketed with the socially stigmatized dalits. (20)

Given the tension and fissures between these identities, I use Dalit and Bahujan as an assemblage of identities that are against the brahminical caste structures, without conflating these different positionalities, experiences and critiques into one. As with questions of caste in the diaspora, I argue, that study of diasporic formations needs to engage with questions of indigeneity in South Asia. In the following section, I provide a brief discussion of indigeneity in India.<sup>17</sup>

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political mobilization, while other writers see “Dalitbahujan” as a political achievement and still others refer only to “Dalit” to mark a separation from OBC politics” (257).

<sup>17</sup> I should note that majority of the scholarship on Adivasis, Tribals and Indigenous peoples in India is produced by non-Indigenous, upper-caste Indians. Unless otherwise mentioned, most scholars cited in this section are non-Indigenous.

## **Indigeneity in India**

Unlike claims made by dominant communities of being Indigenous to South Asia, there are communities all across South Asia that identify themselves as Indigenous to the lands. Across South Asia, it is not difficult to identify the systematic displacement, dispossession, and colonization of Indigenous communities, as they continue to face oppression and violence from the dominant society. They are not only at the lowest point in many socio-economic indicators, but also, they experience excessive demands from the neoliberal markets, reducing them to raw material collectors and providers. Colonial and postcolonial relations of power have created a stereotype of Indigenous peoples in a timeless harmony with nature and environment (Nathan and Xaxa).<sup>18</sup> Within the Bangladeshi context, there are over three million peoples who identify themselves as Indigenous, consisting of at least fifty-four different ethnic groups (“Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh”). These include the Chakmas, Marmas, Santals, Garos, Khasis and other tribes.<sup>19</sup> However, the government of Bangladesh does not recognize them as Indigenous peoples and claims that all peoples of Bangladesh are Indigenous, mono-national and mono-cultural (Chakma 1). In Sri Lanka, Indigenous peoples are called Veddas. There is no systematic census to estimate the population of the community (“Update 2011 - Sri Lanka”). Janjatis are the Indigenous peoples in Nepal. They comprise 36% of the Nepal’s population with over fifty-nine different communities (“Indigenous Peoples in Nepal”). In Pakistan, ethnic, Tribal and Indigenous identities have been invisibilized under the pretext of a united Islamic state, making these identities intertwined and inseparable from each other (Ali and Rehman 1). Postcolonial

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<sup>18</sup> Much similar to how indigeneity is rendered as with nature within the Canadian settler state.

<sup>19</sup> In fact, Bangladesh is one of the eleven abstentions from the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007.

formation processes of Pakistan have blurred the lines of indigeneity and tribalness for Baluchis, Pukhtuns and others. The Constitution established designated “Tribal Areas” across the country in 1973, however not much is theorized about indigeneity in Pakistan (14). Unlike Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan, there is a lot more known and theorized about Indigenous peoples in India.<sup>20</sup>

Debates around indigeneity usually remain within the hands of the Hindu-right forces as they seek to render Muslim and Christian communities as outsiders to India.<sup>21</sup> Indigenous communities usually self-identify as Adivasis—which literally means “original inhabitants” or “tribal people.” The term was coined in the 1930s, while fighting against colonial government, outside settlers and moneylenders intruding into Adivasi lands (Karlsson and Subba, “Introduction” 3). The term connotes political awareness and the assertion of rights. Some Indigenous communities in the occupied territories of North East India by the Indian state use the terms Tribal or Indigenous to identify themselves. “Tribal” is a colonial term that often carries negative connotations of “backward,” “primitive,” “uncivilized” and “isolated” peoples. Adivasi scholar Tiplut Nongbri notes: “The term “tribe” itself was a colonial construct born of the administrator’s need for classified information, which initiated the colossal task of mapping the population into “tribes” and “castes”” (77). However, many communities use the term to self-identify as such, and hence the term connotes self-determination and political consciousness.

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, see: Baruah; Baviskar, “The Politics of Being ‘Indigenous’”; Baviskar, *In the Belly of the River*; Devy and Dallmayr; Devy, Davis, and Chakravarty; Hazarika; Karlsson and Subba, *Indigeneity In India*; Nathan and Xaxa; Nongbri; A. Shah, “Eco-Incarceration?”; N. Shah; A. Shah, *In the Shadows of the State*; A. Shah, “The Dark Side of Indigeneity?”; B. D. Sharma; Skaria; Subba; Sundar, “Debating Dussehra and Reinterpreting Rebellion in Bastar District, Central India”; Sundar, *Subalterns and Sovereigns*; and Xaxa.

<sup>21</sup> Historical evidence suggests that Aryans migrated from Central Asia to India over hundreds of years. However, the Hindutva nationalists deny this history and claim India as their land of ancestors, unlike Muslims and Christians. Hindutva organizations’ call Adivasis “vanavasi” (forest dwellers)—denying Indigenous peoples’ claim as original peoples—and have attempted to assimilate Adivasis in their project of Hindu nationalism. For more, see: Baviskar; “The Politics of Being ‘Indigenous’”; and Thapar.

The Indian government officially recognizes some of these communities as “Scheduled Tribes” (STs) in the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India. However, the Indian state has consistently denied the concept of “Indigenous peoples” and maintained that all Indians are Indigenous to India (Karlsson and Subba, “Introduction,” 5). These communities are not homogenous by any standards. They make 8.6% of the Indian population, or over one hundred and four million peoples, with over six hundred and forty-five tribes registered (Census of India). They are divided along the lines of region, religion, language, class, caste and gender. The category Adivasi is also not synonymous with the state category of STs.

The accuracy and relevancy of the terms Indigenous, Adivasi, and Tribal have been long debated by academics in India.<sup>22</sup> Amita Baviskar argues that the notion of “tribe” in the Indian context is difficult to define, because of the inter-connectedness of the boundaries between Tribe and non-Tribe, both of which have existed side-by-side for centuries (*In the Belly of the River* 84). The controversy over identifying Tribes, with respect to caste, began during the British rule. Nongbri shows that the colonial state recognized Tribes as “differently organized from castes” and hence they had to be protected by the state (77). Baviskar notes how British anthropologists relied on “racial anthropometry” to argue that the tribes had distinct identities that separated them out from the rest of the Indian society, thereby fusing ideas of race with caste and tribe (“The Politics of Being” 36). The tribes were rendered not only lowest on the civilization scale, but also “a distinctive politics of gender and anachronistic thought made them the living remnants of Europe's evolutionary past” (Skaria qtd. in Shah “The Dark Side of Indigeneity?” 1809). While some of India's castes were made effeminate, in comparison to the masculinity of

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, many Indian (non-Adivasi) scholars like: Ghurye; Guha, *Environment and Ethnicity in India*; and Roy Burman. However, as I demonstrate in this section, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars find the concept useful and relevant in talking about Indigenous peoples in India.

the colonizers, India's tribes were made “childlike antecedents of the Britain's own masculinity” (Shah 1809). Whereas, colonial administrators were concerned with demonstrating isolation between Adivasi, and non-Adivasi communities, Indian scholars, Adivasi scholar Virginius Xaxa notes, have invested themselves in finding “close interaction of the tribes with the larger society or the civilization” (3589). Thus, in both colonial and postcolonial conceptualizations of Adivasis, Xaxa argues:

Tribes have come to be primarily studied in relation to features and characteristics of the larger society. The focus is on how tribes are getting absorbed into the larger society, the so-called mainstream, by becoming caste, peasant, class and so on. With such conceptualization, the identity of the tribal group or community is indeed put at risk. This is because of the way tribes have been conceptualized in anthropological literature and the reference with which tribal society in India is studied. (3589)

Ultimately the aim has always been to assimilate Adivasis into the folds of the nation, parallel to colonial formations in Canada.

The relation between Adivasis and the caste system has been very ambiguous. Baviskar argues that contemporary Adivasi identities are devised within a larger system of cultural dominance and subordination, and that they acquire different values according to the changing contingencies of power (*In the Belly of the River* 87). In all their manifestations, Adivasi identities have been shaped by their condition of subordination to the Hindu system. Baviskar, talking about Adivasi communities in the state of Gujarat, writes:

They have carved out an identity and an existence which distinguishes them from their counterparts in the plains, even as they have felt the tug of the Hindu mainstream. Their isolation in the forested hills, relatively distant from centers of power, has enabled them to maintain a distinct language, religion and material culture which sets them apart from Hindus, but they *have* been influenced by Hindu values of caste hierarchy. (231)

Similarly, Nongbri argues that while many Tribes share commonalities with caste, “they remain conceptually, culturally and politically distinct” (82). At the same time, Baviskar notes that with the processes of (often exploitative) interactions with the state apparatus, Adivasis have also had

to face attempts to fold them within Hinduism by the dominant society (83). Thus, the communities have never been in complete isolation and exclusion from the dominant communities around them.

The histories of Indigenous communities in India have been histories of colonialism and exploitation. Under colonial rule, the administrative machinery protracted into areas which had previously been outside the boundary of the local rulers; this threatened the traditional autonomy of many Tribal communities (Nongbri 75). These developments led to the breakdown of the Tribal modes of production, the introduction of taxes, alien land and forest laws and an alien system of justice. In addition, Nongbri notes: “these measures not only set the process of land alienation and privatization in the society but also marked the disruption of the tribe's relations with forests” (75). The series of resistance movement that rocked the central Tribal belt in the 19th and early 20th centuries had their roots in these processes (76). The postcolonial Indian state continued the same process of exploitation and domination, and we see similar resistance from Adivasi, and Tribal communities.

In the “wider interests of the nation,” the postcolonial state has exercised its prerogative of rapid exploitation of natural resources in Tribal areas, violating the interests of Adivasis. The acceleration of extraction has been maintained by increased administrative control of Adivasi lands and forests. Under the neoliberal regime, the state has dispossessed Indigenous peoples across the country, mainly through violent coercion. As a part of colonial dominance, the Indian government has waged a war against the Adivasis, in the name of fighting against the Maoist movement, since November of 2009.<sup>23</sup> Operation Green Hunt, the paramilitary offensive termed by the Indian media, actively engaged in the Tribal heartlands in Central India. This

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<sup>23</sup> For more, see: D’Souza; Roy; Sethi; A. Shah, “The Intimacy of Insurgency”; A. Shah, “Eco-Incarceration?”; and Upadhyay, “The Real Indian in India,”

impoverished region has a considerable Maoist presence—with or without Adivasi support—and is extremely rich in mineral and forest resources. The central and state governments have signed several hundred resource-extraction agreements with multinational companies. While the war is against the Maoists in the region, there is a very blurry line between the Maoists and Adivasis from the state's point of view. Maoists have been very active in these regions for a long time, and have on different occasions collaborated with Adivasi communities in their struggles.

In North East India, Indigenous communities identify as Tribals and many do not use India-centric terminologies. “North East” refers to the region in the eastern Himalaya and Brahmaputra valley of India-Myanmar border. It comprises seven states within the Indian state: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. The term “North East,” Sanjoy Hazarika notes, is an Indian state construct which homogenizes “a bustling terrain sprouting, proclaiming, [and] underscoring a million heterogeneities” (34). Further as Sanjib Baruah argues, “It was a hurried exercise in political engineering: an attempt to manage the independentist rebellions among the Nagas and the Mizos and to nip in the bud as well as pre-empt, radical political mobilization among other disconnected ethnic groups” (4). The region has had a very violent and troubled relation with India, as Baruah notes, that is not foldable within the normative claims of Indian democracy (xv). Since the formation of the Indian state, this region has been at the centre of several political movements demanding differing degrees of autonomy, including complete independence. Many of these movements claim to have never been of India and are in armed struggles against the occupying army of the colonial state. The Indian state continues to violently occupy these territories. One of the extreme measures used to maintain the state presence in the region is the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). Under this legislation, enforced for over five decades now, all security forces are

given unrestricted power to carry out their operations. AFSPA has resulted in extensive practices of detention, torture, rape, and looting by army personnel (Menon and Nigam 141).

Indigeneity is central to many of these self-determination struggles. According to the 2001 Census, over 25 percent of the population in this region is Tribal, and in four states Meghalaya (85.94%), Mizoram (94.45%), Nagaland (89.14%) and Arunachal Pradesh (64.27%), Tribal peoples are in the majority (Census of India). At the same time, it is important to note that the tension in the area between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples does not always correspond to that between Tribal and non-Tribal peoples.<sup>24</sup> Rather logics of colonial and postcolonial tiered citizenship have given the choice for communities in the region to either seek recognition as STs or to accept de facto second class citizenship (Baruah 11).

Adivasi, like Dalit, is a politically loaded term in India. The Indian state has consistently maintained the position that the concept of “Indigenous peoples” and the related international framework are not applicable in the Indian context. It is claimed that all Indians can be defined as “Indigenous.” The contested identity of being Adivasi has become a collective political identity, to distinguish oneself from the majority and claim particular rights. Despite the complications and contradictions involved in conceptualizing indigeneity, politically it is very useful for Adivasis fighting for their rights and justice. Baviskar argues that Adivasis are “trapped in dichotomies not of their making,” and thus cannot be criticized for their politics of self-determination (“The Politics of Being ‘Indigenous’” 41). Adivasi subjectivities, as Ajay Skaria puts it, are about shared experiences of dispossession and displacement in the name of

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<sup>24</sup> Highlighting the colonial and postcolonial multiplicities of the region, Baruah notes: “Seen through the prism of the global political economy, the migration of indentured labour to the tea plantations of Assam was part of the same nineteenth century migration that took Indian labour to plantations in various parts of the British Empire, such as Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, and South Africa. Whether a person landed in a tea plantation of Assam or in a plantation in Guyana or Mauritius was largely a function of which labour contractor he or she signed up with” (11).

“development” (281). Nongbri, further, argues that the questioning of the category “diverts our attention from the real problems that afflict the tribal population” (87). Xaxa illustrates further:

The adivasi consciousness and the articulation of indigenous people status is not so much about whether they are the original inhabitants of India as about the fact that they have no power whatsoever over anything (land, forest, river, resources) that lies in the territory they inhabit. This is despite being the original inhabitants of India in relation to the others. The consciousness and the articulation are basically an expression of the yearning to have or to establish a special relation with the territory in which they live. (3595)

Thus, the concept is used to describe structural aspects, i.e., that Indigenous peoples are non-dominant people with cultures different from that of the majority. While the concept is layered with complications and contradictions, a lot can be achieved by recognizing that Adivasi is a term that has emerged out of political struggles.

On a transnational scale, the histories and geographies of nation-states are varying; the realities of Indigenous peoples are not that different. Instead of arguing for the in/validity of the concept, I seek to employ it as political identity(s), which have evolved out of particular socio-political and colonial struggles. The United Nations' Working Group on Indigenous Populations has played a pivotal role in creating a globalized political space for Indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (passed in the United Nations in September 2007) provides the framework for Indigenous rights globally (“Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”). In the Declaration, “peoples” are considered and treated as differently from “minorities.” Under international law, self-determination is a right of peoples and not minorities, thus, Haunani-Kay Trask argues, Indigenous peoples have a right of self-determination under colonial domination (“Indigenizing Human Rights” 217). Further it entails that Indigenous peoples must be recognized according to their own conceptions of themselves. Indigeneity should not be defined through the values and perceptions of the dominant sections of the society. Indigenous peoples use this, Trask illustrates, “in their local struggle for protection

of their lands, languages, resources, and most critically, their continuity as peoples” (221).

Through the Declaration, Indigenous rights have been globalized. As Stuart Hall reminds us, theoretical deconstruction is not synonymous with political displacement. As Indigenous peoples continue to struggle for self-determination globally, it is important to keep the limitations and critiques of indigeneity in praxis and to remember that indigeneity is not something which can be discarded or evaded by non-Indigenous peoples.

### **Towards Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal (DBAT) Critiques**

In the above two sections, I briefly outlined themes of caste and indigeneity in India, and explored political formations of Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal (DBAT) subjectivities.

Collectively Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, and Tribals form more than 65% of the Indian population—Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) are 16.6 %, 8.6%, and 41.1% of the Indian population, respectively (Census of India).

While being the “majority” in India, through pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial times, these communities have been rendered oppressed and marginalized. They practice diverse religions, speak many languages and come from different parts of India. These identities and critiques are not identical or homogenous. They do not have the same political struggles or face the same oppressions. Neither do they have significant political alliances, nor do they grieve to the state collectively. In fact, their struggles are often contradictory to each other. But I employ them together as an assemblage to understand how they are India’s other and are foundational to understanding the Indian state as well as Indian citizenship formations. As I seek to create a framework for discussing diasporic formations on stolen lands, it is important to note that along with DBAT critiques, it is also critical to theorize on Muslim bodies and their structural

marginalization from the Indian state and Indian diasporas. In Chapter 1, I outlined logics of the Muslim-other and Islamophobia at play in Canada and India. Furthermore, I briefly engaged with occupation of Kashmir as key to understanding Indianness as Hindu, and Muslimness as other in India. It is important to note that DBAT and Muslims identities are not mutually exclusive and have significant overlaps. Yet logics of caste, religion, and nation keep these communities separated. Prathama Banerjee notes how violences in the name of religion, like religious conversion, beef, and birth-rate, are grounded in logics of caste (n.pag.). Conversely, Shefali Chandra, mapping colonial and transnational proximities between whiteness and caste Hinduism, argues that these proximities are rooted in logics of Islamophobia, past and ongoing (“‘India Will Change’”). Thus, we can see the complexities of caste and religion in the making of savarna Hindu-Indian subject by rendering Dalits, Bahujans, Adivasis, Tribals and Muslims as other, the Indian-others.

Valerian Rodrigues notes on Dalit-Bahujan thought:

... in spite of its [Dalit-Bahujan thought] ambivalences and inter disagreements on certain issues and concerns, [it] advanced a coherent and wholesome body of political ideas which while engaging centrally with the nature and purpose of public life, markedly differed from mainstream political discourse. Despite the discontinuities in their political expression, these ideas have been revisited and reasserted over and over again by the votaries of this viewpoint. Further, these ideas are not necessarily bounded by the nationalist framework ... but strove to advance a universal design of what the good life could be, stamping such a design and markings of its own. (Rodrigues 46)

Grounding the above-mentioned complexities, contradictions and the intersections, in this section I formulate a DBAT framework to understand hegemonic brahminical formations within the Indian state and its diasporas.<sup>25</sup> While I employ these critiques together, I am not proposing a

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<sup>25</sup> DBAT critiques are widely employed within political and activist organizing. Alternate media portals like *roundtableIndia.co.in* and *savari.com* use DBAT critiques as a foundational framework in their articles. Outside of the Indian context, there is a very small body of literature on caste in the diaspora, but none on Bahujans, Adivasis and Tribals.

conflation of them, strategic or essential—rather I show how in different ways the terms have been thought together and tensions between them. Dalit writer Rahi Gaikwad argues that: “The Dalit bahujan articulation is an anti-caste discourse, which never assumes a national stature” (n.pag.). Drawing from Gaikwad, Rodrigues and others, in this section, I explore DBAT critiques of the Indian nation-state and nationalism through the themes of colonialism, castelessness of upper caste Hindus and invisibilization of brahminism, and caste privilege. These critiques are not exhaustive or comprehensive, but rather are offered here as a way to understand the formations of caste and indigeneity in India and in Indian diasporas.

On the question of colonialism, many Dalit writers have critiqued the centrality of anti-colonial nationalism in the formations of the postcolonial Indian nation-state. Jyotirao Phule argued that the British rulers had become accomplices to brahminism and brahminism was strengthened through colonialism (Rodrigues 50). Further, he believed that brahminism was more difficult to fight against than colonialism (51). Shefali Chandra argues that whiteness was coopted within the caste structure (“Whiteness on the Margins”148). While many hold an ambivalence to colonialism, many Dalit scholars and activists maintain that colonialism and the spread of the English language was beneficial for Dalit and Bahujans. For instance, Dalit writer Chandra Bhan Prasad argues that colonialism played a “liberating role” for Dalits, as the colonial order challenged the hold of brahmins over education and created some spaces for the education of Dalits (*Dalit Diary* 130). Prasad, since 2004, in fact has been celebrating Thomas Macaulay’s birthday as English Day and worshipping the goddess of English.<sup>26</sup> Macaulay, the British colonial officer in India, discussed in Chapter 1, is known for propagating English education in

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<sup>26</sup> Prasad elaborates: Goddess of English “holds a pen in her right hand which shows she is literate. She is dressed well and sports a huge hat - it's a symbol of defiance that she is rejecting the old traditional dress code. In her left hand, she holds a book which is the constitution of India which gave Dalits equal rights. She stands on top of a computer which means we will use English to rise up the ladder and become free for ever” (qtd. in Pandey).

colonial India and for his rejection of all “Eastern” knowledges and languages. While critiqued by nationalists and postcolonial scholars alike, for Prasad, Macaulay has become an unlikely hero. Prasad argues:

On this potentially landmark day, we will turn autonomous of our inheritance conditioned prudence. We will deactivate our roots-based preferences – caste, language, religion, culture, food habits and lifestyle. We will realize that nostalgia is a psychological weapon of the dominant. For at least a few hours, we will sign off from the wisdom we had never asked for. (“The English Day”<sup>4</sup>)

Prasad, thus, ruptures the focus on colonial violences in South Asia by positing caste violences as foundational to understanding the Indian state.<sup>27</sup> This critique destabilizes linearities of nationalist and postcolonial narratives of anti-colonialism, and links the postcolonial formation of the Indian state and brahminical supremacy as interwoven and not solely as a consequence of colonialism.

However, this understanding sits uncomfortably with many postcolonial South Asian scholars who have critiqued the violences and legacies of colonialism. For instance, Ania Loomba reduces Prasad analysis as “polemical and problematic” and accuses him of embracing “the new world order” (197-98). What Loomba misses is that in this embracing, Prasad is critiquing savarna upper caste scholars for invisibilizing caste in the formation and maintenance of the nation-state, as well as within their scholarships. Prasad’s celebration of Macaulay and English unsettles the “victimized” savarna and asks them to question their caste positionalities and complicities. Dalit feminist Susie Tharu adds: “In fact there is such a close fit between traditions and modernity, brahminism and secularism, that they signal a natural continuity in the

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<sup>27</sup> Prasad writes elsewhere: “Through his initiatives, Lord Macaulay was to re-craft a new intellectual order for India which threatened the dominance of the Brahmins and questioned the relevance of the Varna/caste order. This was to give Dalits a large breathing space ... Should we know our past the way we like to, or we know the past as it existed? Or should there be any distinction between History Writing and Story Telling? Those who condemn Lord Macaulay for imposing a ‘wrong’ education on India do never tell us what kind of education which Macaulay fought and eventually destroyed” (*Dalit Phobia* 99 & 115).

new and altogether persuasive frame that the narratives sets up” (266). Dalit critiques also offer a challenge to modernity, as they refuse to get incorporated “into either term of the binary of nationalism/ colonialism and secularism/communalism” (Nigam 4256). It links the process of creation of modern and secular and brahminical supremacy as connected and not as a byproduct of the earlier (4260). In fact, M.S.S. Pandian writes that modernity has always been used to other the lower castes (1738). Pandian argues:

Being one step outside modernity alone can guarantee us a public where the politics of difference can articulate itself, and caste can emerge as a legitimate category of democratic politics. Being one step outside modernity is indeed being one step ahead of modernity. (1740)

Thus, caste structures and its violences existed before colonialism ever began, and the two structures mutually shaped and enabled each other.

Pandian critiques upper caste centric/led anti-colonial nationalist formations in colonial British India. He argues that the savarna Indian nationalism was established “by working through the binaries of spiritual/material, inner/outer and valorising the inner or spiritual as the uncolonized site of national selfhood” (1736). Savarna nationalism marginalized the “subaltern” castes and social groups, Pandian contends, as it constructed binaries of spiritual and material which erased the varying processes of violence and exclusion (1736). Savarna nationalists used this binary to construct themselves as spiritually superior to non-savarna communities as well as the colonizers. Adding to Pandian’s critiques, Shefali Chandra notes the multiplicities of intersections between race, caste, gender and sexuality in these nationalist hierarchical formations; she argues how spiritual morality was deployed to stake “caste and sexual difference from other Indians” (“Whiteness on the Margins” 131). Further, these binaries rendered any conversations on caste in the material/public realm “an illegitimate project” (Pandian 1737). For

brahmin-savarna sensibilities, then “caste always belongs to someone else; it is somewhere else” (1735).

From colonial times to now, this division of the public and private realms has been a foundational method through which brahmin-savarna subjects have maintained their caste identities and power. Ramesh Bairy T.S. notes that caste is presented by savarnas in a:

... neat spectrum, a *private* value-practice for the urban, educated, middle class, ‘upper caste’ subject, a *public* identity of the ‘lower castes’ and/or circumscribes caste to the electoral political space and blurs out its continuing and resilient role in the distribution of life chances in contemporary India. (n.pag., emphasis in original)

This spectrum allows for the brahmin-savarna subjects to project castelessness in the public realm by limiting their caste identities as private, domestic, and cultural (Deshpande). However, the Dalit and Bahujan subjects are forever marked as the casted-other in the public realm, as an(y) assertion of a caste identity to challenge brahminical supremacy, in any of its forms, makes them casteist. This spectrum further relies on the binaries of modernity and traditionalism, and secularism and religion, urban and vernacular, where savarna subjects can embrace modern and secular outlooks, and Dalits and Bahujans are rendered as traditional and backward. Vivek Dhareshwar elaborates: “The secular subject had, of course, tried to expunge caste from its milieu by confining it to the anthropological domain, namely, “traditional” India” (125). This allows for the “secular” savarna subject to escape their complicities by either articulating caste as a corrupt problem that requires a policy change (122), and claiming that caste is increasingly becoming irrelevant in modern India (125). Thus, Brahmin-savarnas do not experience caste (118). It is through these casted logics that the discourses of merit and individuality efface upper caste power and privileges (Bairy n.pag.). Moreover, Satish Deshpande argues that the upper

caste identities and mobilities are framed as choice, whereas lower caste identities and choices are forever engraved (32).<sup>28</sup>

Bairy, Dhareshwar, Deshpande, and Pandian all demonstrate how caste is made invisible for brahmin-savarna subjects and hypervisible for Dalits and Bahujans. Further, they note how the reduction of caste to Dalitness is structural and not accidental (Dhareshwar 118). They argue that caste can only be understood by analyzing the invisibility of caste in the formation of upper caste experiences, positionalities and privileges, as “castelessness holds the key to caste” (Deshpande 33). Thus, drawing from Bairy, the objective should be to understand “the ways in which Brahmins of today negotiate with their Brahminness” (n.pag.), or savarnas negotiate their savarna-ness. Grounding caste-experiences helps to discourage sociological or anthropological studies of caste (Dhareshwar 121), and ontologically questions caste (122), and objectification of the caste-other.

For caste to continue expanding requires a violent assertion of caste privilege by brahmin-savarnas (Natarajan and Greenough 31). Privilege is thus an important site of study of caste. On caste-privileges, Nissim Mannathukkaren writes:

The crucial recognition that is missing is that caste oppression is systemic (and more insidious than other oppressions because of the religious sanction it enjoys), and that every one of us, the privileged, participates in it through many unearned benefits conferred by birth. (n.pag.)

This privilege grants castelessness and anonymity to those with upper caste positionalities (Deshpande 36). Mannathukkaren agree that there is “a colossal failure to acknowledge the psychological wages of caste, accruing to upper castes” because of their power and hegemony in every realm of Indian society (n.pag.). Dalit feminist Asha Kowtal notes how caste privilege

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<sup>28</sup> Similar parallels can be drawn to colonial and racial constructs of Indigenous and Black bodies. I explore these constructs in other chapters.

enables a “seamless way to project oneself as ‘progressive’ without acknowledging the historical wrongs” committed by savarnas (n.pag.). Even as every caste is implicated in maintaining caste, Soundarajan and Varatharajah note, caste structures offer privileges to brahmin-savarnas, and these privileges need to be understood in order for caste to be dismantled (n.pag.).

Mannathukkaren thus calls all savarnas: “Let us, similarly, in an upper caste-dominated society, acknowledge the vast undeserved space we occupy. Let us cede what has to be ceded” (n.pag.).

Focusing on the making of upper caste subjectivities and privileges opens up newer ways of understanding the structures of caste that are grounding in logics of inclusive/exclusive inequities and violences.

### **DBAT Critiques of Knowledge Production**

In this chapter I brought together Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal critiques to understand caste and indigeneity in India. The chapter began with a section exploring structures of brahminical caste supremacy in India. In the second section, I provided an overview of indigeneity in India to draw connections to indigeneity in Canada. Subsequently, in the third section, I offered DBAT critiques of the Indian nation-state and nationalism, through the themes of colonialism, castelessness of upper caste Hindus and invisibilization of brahminism, and brahmin-savarna formations and privileges. I conclude this chapter by exploring DBAT critiques of process of knowledge production.

Caste hegemony and privileges, as noted above, exist in all realms of Indian society, including the academy. Many Dalit, Bahujan and savarna scholars have noted the absence of caste analysis in the Indian academy, as well as within South Asian diasporic scholarships. For instance, Kancha Ilaiah argues: “Postcolonial brahmanical sociology constructed theories that

accepted anti-productive brahmanical caste as pure castes' and the productive Dalitbahujan castes as 'polluted castes'" ("Towards the Dalitization of the Nation" 274). Dalit writer Gopal Guru has shown how the Indian academy continues to reproduce the violent binaries of theoretical brahmins and empirical Shudras. This is not just limited to the Indian academy, but other South Asian academies as well as South Asians academics in North America, and elsewhere in the diaspora. Guru argues further: "There are historical reasons that gave a structural advantage to the top of the twice born [upper castes] in consolidating its privileged position in doing theory. Historically accumulated cultural inequalities seem to have reinforced Dalit epistemological closure" (5005). These cumulative advantages have led to the epistemological isolation of Dalits in the academy (5006).

Guru has very clearly shown that "epistemological charity" of non-Dalit academics reproduces orientalism towards lower caste communities, and indeed is condescending and always within the structures of caste hierarchies (5008).<sup>29</sup> Guru draws the links between knowledge production, labour, questions of caste and class, and of "freedom":

Freedom is also necessary to seek detachment from the immediate for illumination at the general level. If one does not enjoy that freedom and is completely trapped in the ceaseless struggle for survival, one is completely handicapped in developing any reflectivity. Ultimately it is those with economic security who can pursue philosophy and theory in the formal sense of the terms. (5005)

Further, in the context of producing knowledges on caste in western academies, Sinthujan Varatharajah asks: "How do we prevent the discussion from reinforcing racist and Orientalist assumptions of the cultural superiority of European 'progress' and 'enlightenment' over non-

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<sup>29</sup> Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith, similarly notes, colonial formations and racial hierarchies in the academy in white settler states. Questioning "ownership of theory" by non-Indigenous scholars, they call for Indigenous-centric theorizations and a recognition that "different forms of theorization can produce forms of analysis that take up political issues in ways that have important consequences for communities of every sort" (7).

European ‘backwardness’? How do we prevent genuine anti-oppression movements from being misused to serve neo-colonial agendas?” (“Caste across the Kalapani” n.pag.).

The above critiques of knowledge production by Dalit writers raises many ethical and political questions for savarna and non-Indigenous scholars working on caste in South Asia and its diasporas. S. Anand warns all the non-Dalits who are eager to play progressive parts, like myself, in the Dalit cause, to not be “unintentionally tripp(ing) on our own undying caste selves.” I need to acknowledge my upper-caste brahmin positionality and privileges. How do I engage in conversations around caste when my body, even if I do not “identify” as Hindu, is situated in the same hierarchies and structures of violence? I am conscious of power relations produced at the intersection of caste, gender and class, which enable knowledge production on caste; as well as my position in “the urban” and in the diaspora. How do I engage with questions of caste hierarchies and violence, where my body, my history, my geography, and my mere presence are always complicit? How do I talk about caste without appropriating Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi voices and epistemologies, if that is even possible to do? I raise these questions to ground my epistemological and methodological praxes in anti-casteism. It is the caste structures of power and domination that I am committed to dismantling, decasteing, and annihilating. By challenging self-privileges embedded in this structure, and following Gayatri Spivak’s argument of decolonizing the self through unlearning privileges by considering them as a loss, I am interested in questioning the structure and the silences which are continually reproduced within it (in Landry and MacLean 45).<sup>30</sup> Further, Ambedkar has called to “change the Touchable Hindu”:

It is usual to hear all those who feel moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables by uttering the cry, ‘We must do something for the Untouchables.’ One

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<sup>30</sup> Spivak elaborates: “Our privileges, whatever they may be in terms of race, class, nationality, gender and the like, may have prevented us from gaining a certain kind of Other knowledge: not simply information that we have not yet received, but the knowledge that we are not equipped to understand by reason of our social position” (in Landry and MacLean 45).

seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying, 'Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu.' It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the Untouchables. If there is to be a mission, it must be to the Untouchables and if the Untouchables can be cured, untouchability will vanish. Nothing requires to be done to the Touchable. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him. Is this assumption correct? Whether correct or not, the Hindus like to cling to it. The assumption has the supreme merit of satisfying themselves that they are not responsible for the problem of the Untouchables. (qtd. in Anand n.pag.)

Following Ambedkar, I seek to investigate the ideologies and structures that produce and sustain the “touchable” Hindu and not the “untouchable” in the diaspora. Further, along with the construction of the “touchable” diasporic Indian, this subject is also assumed to be Indigenous to India, erasing the presence of Adivasis and Tribals in India, and the diaspora. Thus, analysis of caste needs to be situated within transnational conversations of caste, race, indigeneity, colonialism and knowledge production.

### **Chapter 3: Indians and Other Indians: Transnational Intersections of Caste, Race, and Indigeneity**

After requesting an appointment with Mohit multiple times, I was finally given an appointment at his house. Mohit, I was told several times by my friend, worked at a senior managerial level in the company. His wife, Raghini, also worked at a managerial level. This is a rare “accomplishment” for Indians in the tar sands.<sup>1</sup> My friend reminded me several times that I needed to respect Mohit and Raghini’s time and keep my interview brief and non-controversial. When I arrived at the decided time, Mohit was not ready for the interview. I was seated in the living room by his mother-in-law. He arrived twenty-five minutes later. As he was going through emails on his Blackberry, remotely interested or intrigued by my presence, I was told I only had twenty minutes as he has other commitments (whereas we had agreed to meet for an hour). A major Gujarati Bollywood star (Paresh Rawal) was in town. The Gujarati community had spent a hefty amount in getting Rawal to Fort McMurray. Rawal, at that time, was running for Indian central (federal) elections (to be held the year after in 2014, I met Mohit in 2013) with the right wing Hindu party (B.J.P.). Rawal had garnered much support within the conservative Hindu diasporas in Canada and the U.S., tracing the interconnections between caste, religion, and right-wing politics within the Hindu diasporas.

Mohit started with asking me the regular “brown uncle” questions to figure out my social positioning, that is my caste background. Unwilling to give my last name, I dodged his questions about my last name and family background a few times (knowing very well what his intentions were). But I finally had to give my last name “out” as the conversations were not moving

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<sup>1</sup> Many respondents in Fort McMurray noted how “glass ceiling” exists within the tar sands economy. There were very few people of colour employed in higher managerial positions. But as many pointed out, this had nothing to do with race. I expand on this further in Chapter 5.

towards the interview. Immediately he “recognized” my name as a brahmin caste name from his region. Caste and regional affinity changed his attitude towards me. All of a sudden I was a privileged guest in his house, I was introduced to Raghini and his mother-in-law as a brahmin from his region, as gharwale—someone from the family. Mohit and Raghini both had an arranged endogamous marriage. I was offered tea with snacks and a privilege to interview them both for over an hour (we went much beyond the initial twenty minutes he allocated to me). I was also invited for dinner the next evening to meet their son and an invitation to be “family friends.” All this happened because of our similar caste backgrounds. My caste was a way into his world, which indeed was our shared caste-world. While my interactions with other respondents followed the same caste affinity logics, the caste underpinnings in the meeting with Mohit and Raghini were exceptionally obvious. This example demonstrates the modalities of caste, class, and gender, and how these modalities shape diasporic formations and relations to maintain caste hierarchies. As well, that I was able to talk to him because of my caste shows us how caste is intrinsically connected to knowledge production, even in diasporic locations.<sup>2</sup>

I begin this chapter by sharing an incident from field work which explicitly shows the perversity of caste in South Asian diasporic spaces. This chapter is a continuation of the previous chapter where I formulated a critique of a savarna Hindu-Indian subject through structures of caste and indigeneity in India. This chapter is an exploration of transnational intersections of race, caste and indigeneity to understand South Asian diasporic formations in Canada. By bringing together an anti-caste analysis with anti-settler colonialism critiques, the two chapters collectively address questions and silences of caste and indigeneity in the making of South Asian diasporas in Canada; and demonstrate how caste, race, and indigeneity converge together in

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<sup>2</sup> I should note, however, that I had the most in-depth and critical conversations with Mohit and Raghini about race and colonialism.

settler states. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I use Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal (DBAT) critiques to understand the structures of caste and indigeneity in India. In this chapter, I build on DBAT critiques to theorize structures of brahminical supremacy and settler colonialism, and the relationships between them—which remain mainly unexamined within South Asian diaspora studies. In theorizing caste within South Asian diasporas, I draw upon my fieldwork in Fort McMurray and Vancouver theorization to centre first generation upper caste Hindu and Sikh caste formations. It is not the intention of the dissertation to suggest that caste works uniformly and homogeneously across all geographies, religions, class, and generations within South Asian migrant communities. Further, in theorizing indigeneity transnationally, across Canada and India, I do not seek to conflate indigeneity across geographies into one. As noted in the previous chapters, indigeneity is time and space specific, and particular attention needs to be paid in theorizing indigeneity locally. However, the chapter also draws parallels to how indigeneity is global and transnational.

In the Introduction, I had quoted Jodi Byrd's question: “How can ‘American Indian’ exist if they are always under erasure, always deferred by ‘Indian Americans’?” (*The Transit* 71). Adding to Byrd’s question, I further ask: how can the “Dalit Indian,” “Bahujan Indian,” “Adivasi Indian,” “Tribal Indian,” “Muslim Indian” etc. exist in the United States and Canada, if “Indian American” and “Indian Canadian” is always dominant and premised on these exclusions? What about the non-Indian South Asian? Who is the “Indian” in Canada? Who is the “Indian” in India? Lastly, who is the “Indian” in the Indian? In this dissertation, I argue that the Native-other is produced by urban, savarna, upwardly mobile, non-Muslim Indian through a continuum of Indian-Others, which includes the Black-Other, Dalit-Other, Bahujan-Other, and Adivasi-Other, and the Muslim-Other. Taking cues from Sara Ahmed's work on “stranger fetishism,” I argue

that for Indians on stolen lands, the Indian-other (Native-other) is constructed through processes of stranger fetishism, that allows for the Indian-self to already recognize the latter as the stranger (*Strange Encounters*). The South Asian subject within white settler states is produced through erasures of questions of race, indigeneity and caste, here and there. “Here and there,” is a key transnational logic that shapes the making of the Native-other by South Asians in Canada. Anti-Native racism has its own genealogies and taxonomies in white settler societies, yet these grammars function in relation to othered technologies of difference making and oppression. Through these taxonomies other others are interchangeable, homogenous, and disposable. It creates, albeit contradictorily, seamless narratives of “progress” and “backwardness,” “modern” and “traditional,” “merit” and “state benefits.” While, on the one hand, the upper caste, upwardly mobile, non-Muslim savarna Indian diasporic subject is othered in white settler states, on the other hand, this subject is constructed through an assemblage of other others.

This othering does not happen automatically or in a vacuum. The savarna subject does not instantly recognize the Native-other as the caste-other. Rather, Bonita Lawrence pointed out to me, this happens through the mediations of the settler state. By investments and inclusion in the Canadian settler state, the racialized savarna subject learns who the Native is through the discourses of the settler society. The racialized migrant cannot know the Native-other, except through initiations of the settler state. Coming full circle, knowing the Native-other through these settler discourses then affirms their inclusion in the state, and makes the racialized migrants the “better” Canadians. Their anti-Native racism guarantees them a preferred and higher status in the settler state than the Indigenous-other. By recognizing the caste-other in the Native-other, the savarna subject can ascertain their positionality and privilege in the settler society. This is how the structures of brahminical caste supremacy and settler colonialism come into contact with

each other. While mutually exclusive, in the settler contexts they shape and reinforce each other. And hence, the need to study their interactions and formations together in the settler states.

This chapter begins with a section exploring caste in South Asian diasporas to argue how South Asian diasporas are always and continuously caste-d. In the second section, I engage DBAT critiques with indigeneity and race in Canada and the U.S., to formulate a critical understanding of racialized diasporic formations and processes of knowledge production. The subsequent section offers examples from narratives of Indians in Fort McMurray and Vancouver to explore caste and indigeneity in the making of the diasporas. I conclude the chapter by arguing for an urgent need to bring indigeneity, race, and caste into conversation with each other.

### **Caste-d Diasporas**

Reflecting on his years abroad studying, B.R. Ambedkar, in the early twentieth century, noted:

My five years of stay in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable and that an untouchable wherever he went in India was a problem to himself and others. (qtd. in Rath 12)

Unlike Ambedkar's experience, in the last century, with increased South Asian migration to North America, Europe and elsewhere, casteism has only spread across all South Asian diasporic locations. Within Indian diasporic contexts, caste hegemony is ever present, increasing, and akin to caste structures in India, always invisibilized. Contemporary socio-cultural and economic processes in the diaspora have changed caste formations and relations but not eroded them.

Vivek Kumar asserts: "The Indian diaspora is not a monolithic whole" rather it is divided along caste lines ("Understanding Dalit Diaspora" 116). Indeed, South Asian diasporas are already caste-d, and continually caste-ing. Ironically, laws of Manu—Hindu scriptures that dictate caste hierarchies—forbade upper caste Hindus to travel outside the land of their birth. According to these laws, savarna Hindus would become polluted just being outside of India. S. V. Ketkar

(1909) had noted in early twentieth century: “If Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem” (qtd. in Ambedkar “Castes in India” 79). Consequently, a century later, V. Kumar argues that as people migrated they moved with their caste values and structures as well (“Globalisation and Empowerment of Dalits in India” 59). Thus, savarna Hindus in the diaspora ignore the fundamental contradiction in their own lives and continue to replicate caste structures in all diasporic locations.

Homogeneous constructs of South Asian-ness in North America are used to mask savarna Hindu Indian hegemony, as exemplified with the example of International Yoga Day in Chapter 2. In the previous chapter, I quoted M.S.S. Pandian on encoding of brahminical culture as natural culture. Thenmozhi Soundararajan provides examples of “cultural” caste hegemony in the making of South Asian diasporas:

For second-generation NRIs [Non Resident Indians], flashing caste becomes a part of their cultural street cred with other communities. Some do it intentionally to elevate their identity while others operate from a misunderstanding of their own roots and blindly accept the symbols of their culture. Punjabi rappers throw down lyrics about being proud Jats. Tam- Brahms [Tamil-Brahmins] show off their sacred thread, recreate Thiruvayur in Cleveland, and learn Bharatanatyam while using their powerful networks to connect and succeed in the diaspora. Ultimately, we trade and calcify what is seen as proper Indian culture. But hidden within that idea of ‘proper’ lies the code for what is aspirational and ultimately upper caste. (n.pag.)

Soundarajan notes how caste is replicated in the diasporas through eating habits, music, clothing, and dance, all “coded” as Indian concealing caste practices and violences. Further, these variations are often celebrated as “diversity” within the multicultural framework. “Diversity” within South Asian diasporas in Canada, and globally, is well reflected and represented within academic literatures. This body of work, albeit India-centric, examines the diasporas across their gendered, racial, classed, sexual, ethnic, religious and national (including status) identities and

differences.<sup>3</sup> While I recognize the diversity of these analytical categories, I argue that diversity is constructed, limiting and limited in itself. There is a marked invisibility of caste analysis within this literature.

Furthermore, presence of Dalits in the diaspora does not increase diversity, but rather these communities seek to fracture and destabilize the diaspora. If diasporas disrupt the nation—both “home” and “host” nations—and if questions of gender, sexuality and religion fissure both South Asian diasporas and the “home,” I argue that the presence of caste-other is already always, continually, simultaneously, fissuring “home” and (perceived caste) homogeneity of diasporas.<sup>4</sup> Caste structures and hierarchies remain a fundamental organizing factor of/within South Asian communities in the diaspora. Further, Dalit writer Yogesh Maitreya argues that Dalits in the diaspora are thrice-discriminated against: as nationally Indian, as racialized, and as Dalit amongst savarna diasporas (n.pag.). Caste structures and hierarchies illustrate, using Lily Cho's phrase, “politics of unsuitability” (*Eating Chinese* 78),<sup>5</sup> and rupture any linear, uncasted and upwardly mobile narratives of South Asians.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes but not limited to: Bald; Bald et al.; Basran and Bolaria; Desai; Gopinath; Grewal, *Transnational America*; Gupta; Hirji; Lal, *The Other Indians*; Maira, *Desis in the House*; Maira, *Missing*; K. E. Nayar; Prashad, *Uncle Swami*; Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*; J. K. Puar; Rajiva and Batacharya; Rana, *Terrifying Muslims*; N. Shah; Shalini Shankar; and Varma and Seshan. Some of these texts mention caste but none of them engage with caste considerably.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars of diasporas maintain that diasporas disrupt the nation. For instance, Kalra, Kaur, and Hutnyk argue that diaspora “disable[s] the nation in its attempt at defining a homogenous community coterminous with a territory ... Transnational ties and ethnic links combine to create new social formations which divert attention away from the nation” (34). Queer theorizations of diaspora similarly argue for queered ruptures of the nation. Gayatri Gopinath argues that queer diasporas rupture the nation and heteronormativity by “exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality” (11). While I do not argue against Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk, and Gopinath’s conceptualization, I ask what such disruptions, “disablements” and diversions signify when casted South Asian diasporas maintain the caste structures in home and in diaspora. Caste, I argue, always and continuously disrupts the home and the diaspora.

<sup>5</sup> Within the context of Chinese diasporas in Canada, Cho notes that “old” Chinese restaurants owners/workers in small towns in the Prairies do not fit into the image of upwardly mobile, educated and savvy Chinese immigrants. Centering the Chineseness of these restaurants, Cho “hang[s] on to the politics of [their] unsuitability” and demonstrates the ruptures in the new Chinese immigrant subjectivities (26).

Within the more “mainstream” critical literatures on South Asian diasporas, the diasporas are imagined and rendered as “touchable.” This violent erasure is symptomatic of how savarna South Asian diaspora imagines itself. For instance, many of my South Asian diasporic students understand caste to be “there,” “back home,” in their parents’ countries, in Sri Lanka, in Punjab, in South Asia etc., and “here” becomes un-casted, “liberal,” “tolerant,” “progressive,” and “multicultural.” Insular and homogenous caste communities are imagined as organic and “inevitable,” rather than as systematic exclusionary processes of diasporic formations. Contrary to these un-casted imaginaries, caste is everywhere and as diasporic communities grew so did caste distinctions. Caste shapes social relationships and hierarchies within the South Asian communities in the diasporas. Notably, caste does not work as linear continuum from “back home”; rather, we see varied and particular emulations of caste structures in the diasporas. Soundararajan notes: “while caste is everywhere in the diaspora, there is a damning silence about naming caste. And in the silence there is violence” (n.pag.). Silences are present in not only the popular imaginations and mainstream narratives of the diaspora, but within critical academic discourses, progressive social justice oriented activism, organizing, literature, performances and arts as well.<sup>6</sup> Varatharajah describes silences on caste in the diaspora and writes:

‘Jāthis’ culture, or caste culture, is rarely ever pronounced in diasporas. It is reluctantly spoken about and almost never uttered by its name. In diaspora we have learnt to carefully dance around the words caste and untouchability. We waltz around them, step around them and beat around them. We live in the delusion that not articulating these words erases the issues – as if silencing them helps us to unsee them. (“We Have Cleansed Our Eyes and Tongues” n.pag.)

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<sup>6</sup> It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide examples of silences on caste, but for instance most progressive South Asian spaces in Toronto never engage with questions of caste; be it oral history projects (like Brown Canada project by Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, and projects by South Asian Visual Arts Center), or performance and art projects by South Asian artists, or South Asian literatures (to name a few: Bharati Mukherjee, Shani Mattoo, Shyam Selvadurai, Shauna Singh Baldwin, Anita Rau Badami, M.G. VasANJI), or activist and community organizing within South Asians.

Varatharajah's work on locating and mapping caste in the Eelam Tamil diaspora sheds more light on methodologies of caste in the diaspora. On the question of silence, he asks: "Can there equally be an adequate picture drawn on caste identities when casteism has been rendered invisible in diasporic discourses and practices?" ("Memories of Belonging" 6). Hence, logics of casteism engender processes of social silencing.

The silences and absences of caste in the diaspora raise questions on the functioning of caste. How does caste function across national, religious and ethnic identities within South Asian diasporic communities? What role does varying processes of migration play in caste relations? How do racism and economic marginalization inform caste? How do secular and multicultural ideologies maintain the upper-caste privilege of forgetting caste? How do logics of caste produce un-casted imaginaries produced in the diaspora?<sup>7</sup> I raise these questions to highlight the systematic functioning of caste in South Asian diasporas. The caste-other also disrupts the cyclical logics and narratives of migration: most immigrants from South Asia come from middle class educated professional backgrounds, hence they are savarna. Contemporary socio-cultural and economic processes in the diaspora, similar to processes within South Asia, have changed caste formations and relations but not eroded them. Upper caste communities in the diaspora have tried to maintain their caste privileges.

However, in diasporic spaces, white supremacy has its own logics of privileges and power. Dalit feminist Anu Ramdas elaborates:

...there is no Brahmin supremacy in societies that do not have a fully functional caste society. The Brahmin supremacy has territorial limits within the subcontinent. Outside of

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<sup>7</sup> More questions include: Are "race" and "caste" different conceptually? How can race and caste be effectively theorized together? How does diaspora help strengthen the caste system back in South Asia? How do processes of neoliberalism, globalization and rise of diasporic nationalist ideologies (like Hindu-Indian, Sinhala-Sri Lankan, Sunni-Pakistani etc.) connect the diaspora "here" to "home" in ways that strengthen the violence of caste hierarchy? It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer these questions. I raise these questions to highlight the systematic functioning of caste in South Asian diasporas.

it, the Brahmin is simply another Brown person. To reclaim his superior status in the diaspora he has to be within South Asian groups at all times. He loses it the moment he is outside such Indian/SAsian groups or the occasional whites fascinated with the Browns...He is faced with the improbable task of institutionalizing caste as a global order for Brahmin supremacy to be given a chance outside of India's borders. (n.pag.)

Ramdas hints at the improbability of brahminical supremacy within white supremacist settler states. While caste relations and hierarchies cannot be fully realized within non-caste societies, I argue for looking at the intersections of these two different forms of supremacy. The racialized savarna diaspora seeks to maintain and reproduce caste relations to protect their savarnaness in diasporic locations. Lack of structural support makes caste consciousness central to maintenance of caste. P. Pratap Kumar asserts "the dynamicity of caste and its function in modern society is more to entrench caste consciousness of a superior status even in the absence of its core elements" (225). Caste consciousness is as significant as caste maintenance in the diaspora. At the same time, caste is not just a question of consciousness, but rather it is a structure of violence, oppression, and power that savarnas seek to produce and reproduce to maintain their supremacy.

The limited literature on caste relations in the diaspora mainly focuses on caste in what is called the "old diaspora"—i.e., South Asians in the Caribbean, Uganda, South Africa, Mauritius, Fiji, and in South East Asia who were taken under the various colonial labour exploitative systems like indentureship, kangani<sup>8</sup> and maistry. According to Vinod Sartape, laborers recruited for indentured systems were mainly from Dalit and Bahujan communities; and caste relations in these places have undergone drastic transformations (15). In the context of indentured diasporas in the Caribbean, Fiji,<sup>9</sup> and Mauritius, it is predominantly argued that conditions of indentured labour made it difficult to reproduce caste hierarchies, primarily because endogamy could not be

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<sup>8</sup> Under this system, predominantly Tamils from India were taken to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Malaya (Malaysia).

<sup>9</sup> Sartape notes that 33 per cent of Indians taken to Fiji were Dalit (197).

maintained (Ganesh 175). The conditions of indentureship on colonial plantations, institutions of patriarchy and endogamy destabilized caste hierarchies. However, in these societies caste functions as a cultural variable rather than as social stratification, “since the ideological, rather than the structural-functional, dimension takes precedence (Jain qtd. in Ganesh 175). For instance, through religious practices, eating habits, languages, and cultural engagements, brahminical practices are still maintained in these societies, even when the hierarchies may not have survived the violences of indentureship. N. Jayaram has shown how high-caste Indians in these societies had a comparative advantage in terms of their post-indenture mobility, through which there is continuity as well as change in caste structures. Words like “chamar” (person of a lower caste) and “jutha” (food and drink that are “polluted” by partial completion)<sup>10</sup> are still prevalent and used as terms of abuse. Caste will continue to exist as long as “Hindus maintain a systematic method for reckoning ideal rankings within the social hierarchy” (Jayaram 169). In the context of non-indentured diasporas in Africa (like Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa etc.), caste has remained one of the most important structural organizing factors in the diaspora, as endogamy was not structurally challenged (Sartape 19).

Within the “new diaspora,” mostly in the global north, caste and caste hierarchies remain as prevalent as they do in South Asia. But as caste remains unspoken, the role of caste in present diasporic formations remains unexamined. Rather, diasporas are imagined to be de-casted or without any caste relations and hierarchies. For instance, Ganesh argues:

Caste itself is not prominent in the diasporic experience . . . In the initial phases of emigration, caste distinctions tend to get erased or downplayed, due to external structures in an alien environment not being conducive, as also due to the precipitation of

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<sup>10</sup> Jutha comes from casteist practices of pollution and social exclusion in South Asia. However Aisha Khan has argued that within the context of Indo-Caribbean in Trinidad, jutha is an “integral part of everyday life, where the purity/pollution paradigm does not necessarily disappear but were the ritualized aspect is no longer salient without the structure to it. In other words, the formalized, systematized, deliberate quality gives way to daily practice under different conditions to other kinds of significance” (261-62).

national/cultural cons as an Indian, and furthermore, due to the overriding compulsion of surviving and succeeding in a new country. (174)

Ganesh contends that caste-based associations in the diaspora are largely cultural activities based (184). Moreover, Sahoo claims that Dalits “have shown great upward mobility and are not discriminated against and do not form a separate diaspora” (qtd. in Ganesh 175). Such arguments efface the violent processes of savarna diasporic formations. The ideological specter of caste is present in different aspects of the diaspora, and while explicit state-sanctioned hierarchies and violence may be absent, socio-cultural, economic and spatial logics of caste ideologies are violent and oppressive enough. Caste segregated temples, gurudwaras, and churches can be found in every major diasporic location. Often these were established facing aggressive violences from savarnas. While upper caste associations and organizations are heavily present in the diaspora, the past few decades have also seen a growing presence of Dalit, Ambedkarite, Ravidasi, Buddhist, and other lower caste organizations. In fact, several diasporic Dalit groups have been actively campaigning against caste oppression in various international spaces, and have added a critical voice to the global struggles against casteism and racism.<sup>11</sup>

From scarce mainstream media reporting it is estimated that over 200,000 Dalits live in Canada. Cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal are home to the majority of these communities.<sup>12</sup> Within Punjabi communities, Ravidasis, Valmikis, Ambedkarites, and Buddhists have a significant presence. These communities have their own social, political and religious organizations and spaces. However, they remain invisibilized within the dominant jat Punjabi diasporas. Outside of the Punjabi communities, there is also a significant presence of Tamil

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<sup>11</sup> Purvi Mehta has documented critical aspects of Dalit diasporic organizing in her work.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the lack of information and literature on caste in Canada, in the following sections, I draw on scholarship on caste from the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. In the recent years, there have been some newspaper reports about Dalit presence in Canada (C. Chan; G. Singh).

lower caste in Toronto. It is believed that other South Asian communities would also have significant Dalit population.

The relation between caste, gender and sexuality is manifested in the diaspora with respect to marriage—heterosexual marriage.<sup>13</sup> In fact, caste as a reality is encountered mostly when marriage outside of caste comes into question. The literature on caste in the diaspora shows that inter-caste and interracial marriage remains “a deviation” to the supposed norm of marriage “within caste.” Endogamy informs heterosexual intimacies (and increasingly queer intimacies) from caste-based arranged marriages to online dating. Steve Taylor and Manjit Singh demonstrate how desires to settle in the U.K. by jat Sikhs were to “maintain or increase the izzat (honor) of the immediate family, and simultaneously the izzat of the wider kinship and (jat Sikh) caste group” (51). Further, the contemporary jat Sikh migration has maintained patterns of caste domination (52-53) as well as intra-caste endogamic practices (55). Within the classroom, my experiences of teaching caste speak to this interconnectedness of caste, sexuality and queerness. In the classroom, every year in the lecture on caste in South Asia, I am asked by at least one student: “What is your caste?” and “Will you marry someone from a lower caste than you?”<sup>14</sup> These benign questions on marriage, caste and presumed heteronormativity demonstrate the intersections between structures of casteism, heteronormativity and patriarchy. They show how the caste-other and the sexual-other are always outside the realms of the savarna-straight-self: they violently erase caste and queerness from the “normative.”

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<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, in India and the diaspora, many same-sex couples also desire same-caste or within savarna caste relationships (Pathak). In diasporic locations, in recent years, there has been an increase in same-sex marriages within South Asians. However, on social media these are often savarna marriages or savarna-white marriages, demonstrating how even same-sex relationships work within the structures of caste and race.

<sup>14</sup> They ask these questions presuming that I am straight.

Writing about relations between caste and class within the South Asian diaspora in Australia, Amit Sarwal argues, “even if caste as an institution cannot be practiced publicly or caste consciousness has not survived, this consciousness has very subtly merged into class consciousness and a demonstration of social status in relation to others” (14). Sarwal differentiates class-consciousness based on mobility and caste consciousness based on notions of purity and pollution (4). While caste maintenance is about consciousness, it must be noted that caste is a structure of oppression and power. But I take from Sarwal how caste consciousness others people who do not belong to the same caste, linguistic group or economic level. He specifically argues: “In fact class, caste and race are so intertwined among Indian-Australians that this logic is used to condescendingly look down upon the Aborigines and some other immigrants...” (7). However, he does not further elaborate on this or situate indigeneity more critically within the context of Australia. As I note in the introduction of this chapter, this othering and recognizing the other is not automatic, but rather produced through the intermediations of the settler state. Through settler discourse the racialized immigrant learns adapts to the logics of Native exclusion. Otherwise, how can those who have not encountered the Native-other previously, understand them as the other? This absence in the literature on intersections of caste, race, and indigeneity forms the crux of this chapter. I explore these intertwining logics in Canada in the next section.

In the U.K. there has been increased Dalit activism on political and legal fronts, resulting to a greater visibility of caste and the demands to challenge the caste system.<sup>15</sup> In April 2014, Dalit activists in the U.K. succeeded to force the British parliament to outlaw discrimination on the basis of caste despite massive lobbying by Hindu upper-caste groups and India’s

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<sup>15</sup> See: Biswas; Dhanda (“Anti-Casteism and Misplaced Nativism”; “Punjabi Dalit Youth”); Varatharajah, “Caste across the Kalapani”; Waughray; and Waughray and Thiara.

displeasure.<sup>16</sup> This law, the first of its kind outside of South Asia, has rendered caste a transnational phenomena—recognizing the caste violences that play out in the diasporas. While this law is a welcomed gesture towards dismantling caste, it highlights the convoluted processes of inclusion and exclusion in white nation-states.

Several savarna British Hindu groups and right-wing politicians argued that caste discrimination did not exist outside of South Asia. Anti-caste mobilization was dismissed by arguing that discrimination affects only a small group, and that it operates only in private relations. In fact, it was argued that legal amendments would not solve caste discrimination, rather the amendments would reproduce caste hierarchies. Moreover, Hindu Council made a case for reverse discrimination:

... there are a growing number of attacks and abuses against Brahman priests both in India and in the West. The perpetrators are often from within the wider Indian community and fuelled by Christian evangelical elements. There is a worrying trend in India and beyond to vilify the Brahman caste blaming it for the social and economic problems seen today. (qtd. in Biswas n.pag.)

Sinthujan Varatharajah notes that upper caste Hindus employed “model minority” status and asserted socio-political power to get their voices heard (“Caste across the Kalapani”).<sup>17</sup> While they were dominant voices, they still were not able to stop the legislation. However, Varatharajah highlights the complications of such laws in the Empire. Careful to not render the U.K. as “modern” or “progressive,” Varatharajah argues:

Britain’s encounter with the caste system was not passive: the policies of the Empire shaped caste while simultaneously being shaped by it, with both historic and contemporary consequences . . . However, we should remember the intimate relationship between caste and the Empire, and hence its descendant, the U.K. (n.pag.)

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<sup>16</sup> In September 2015, an Adivasi Christian woman, who was employed as a domestic servant by a savarna family in the U.K., won against her employers under the anti-caste oppression provisions of the Equality Act (Dalwai). That an Adivasi woman can use her “servant caste” and “lower caste” status to seek justice, speaks to how indigeneity and caste function intersectionally in India and in the diaspora.

<sup>17</sup> I explore the concept of “model minority” in Chapter 5.

Drawing from Edward Said (“Orientalism Reconsidered”), Meera Dhanda further illustrates in the British context: “The legislation ... [is] a reflective and critical ‘decentred consciousness’ [that] should generate ‘political’ and ‘practical’ activities that are ‘marginal, and oppositional with reference to the mainstream’” (“Anti-Casteism and Misplaced Nativism” n.pag.). Thus, Varatharajah, Dhanda and others make a case for fighting caste transnationally, with an intersectional approach; and activists in Canada and the U.S. being doing this work.<sup>18</sup>

This section mapped knowledge production on caste formations in the South Asian diasporas. In the next section, I draw from Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal critiques outlined in Chapter 2 to discuss diasporic formations and knowledge production.

### **DBAT Critiques, Diasporic Formations, and Knowledge Production**

In the above sections, I demonstrate how South Asian diasporic theorizations have mostly ignored engagement with DBAT critiques. Further, in this dissertation I note how South Asian diasporic theorization of colonialism have been largely silent on questions of settler colonialism. In this section, I explore academic literatures that bring together questions of “here and there” by looking at the intersections of caste, race and indigeneity. There have been specific parallels made between Indigenous peoples in the Americas to the Adivasis in India as well as between race and caste by centering Black and Dalit bodies. Centering DBAT critiques I briefly explore the gaps in knowledge production on these engagements.

For indigeneity, limited scholarship on parallels between Indigenous peoples in Canada and India is framed mostly within the context of global Indigenous rights, rather than critical

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, in June 2014, a resolution was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives against caste discrimination in the U.S.

engagement with questions of colonialism. Such analysis renders Indigenous peoples as “backward” and “helpless” victims at the hands of oppressors and avoids critical engagements with questions of modernity, coloniality, and complicity. For instance, comparing on-reserve First Nations communities in B.C. and Hill tribes Assam H. Srikanth notes:

Both the FNs in Canada and hill communities in northeast India consider themselves indigenous people and view other peoples who migrated to their territories after the British colonization as outsiders. Economically, these communities are not part of the modern capitalistic system and demographically they are national minorities . . . Although touched by the forces of modernity many of these characteristics features of a tribe are absent in both the sets of community and, culturally, they can be distinguished from more advanced communities. (189-90)

This analysis invariably produces the dichotomies of civilized-uncivilized, without questioning structures of colonialism that renders Indigenous peoples dispossessed and displaced.

In a tangential vein, in his brief discussion on Indigenous peoples in Australia and India, Dipesh Chakrabarty, in an afterword to *Indigeneity in India*, writes about the “politics unlimited.” According to him, oppressed peoples have “to adopt every means at hand in order to fight the system that puts them down” (“Politics Unlimited” 242). This politics has no limits. Comparing struggles of Indigenous peoples in Australia and India, he argues that politics of indigeneity in Australia has never become politics unlimited, where as in India, Adivasis have been able to practice unlimited politics. He elaborates:

In Australia, a liberal-democratic-capitalist structure was well-ensconced and perceived as capable of delivering goods and services through its welfare measures before the aboriginals were granted the right to vote in 1967 . . . [This] ensured that the battle on this score did not have to reconstruct the figure of the aboriginal as a de-territorialized, global subject . . . [Whereas] India pushed for popular rights and democracy – by granting universal adult franchise soon after independence, for instance, or by involving peasants and tribes in mass-movements . . . Unlike the Australian aboriginal then, the Indian *Adivasi* is now indeed a global subject. (243-44)

In critiquing liberal rejections of indigeneity, Chakrabarty reproduces a liberal framework to unconvincingly compare indigeneity, without a critical engagement with processes of

colonialism (past and ongoing) in Australia or India. The analysis of political practices of Indigenous peoples in Australia and India is beyond the scope of this chapter, however, I highlight Chakrabarty's argument to underscore the centrality of coloniality and occupation of Indigenous lands in both the states. At the same time, it is important to differentiate the multiple forms of coloniality in these geographies. As shown in the previous chapters, settler colonialism in Canada is different from colonialism of India. Further, even colonization of Indigenous peoples in India is much different than colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

In *Imaginary Maps* (2001), Gayatri C. Spivak and Mahasweta Devi make links between Indigenous struggles around the word. The book, a collection of stories written by Devi in Bengali and translated into English by Spivak, is dedicated to all the Indigenous peoples of the world. In a conversation with Spivak, Devi seeks to make connections between colonization, indigeneity, and invisibilization of Indigenous struggles in North America and South Asia:

I do not know my western readers. I found such lack of information about the Native Americans. Why should American readers want to know from me about Indian tribals, when they have present-day America? How was it built? ...entire tribes have been taken away. Their land has been taken away. But I say to my American readers, see what has been done to them, you will understand what has been done to the Indian tribals. Everywhere it is the same story. They reclaimed the forest, converted it into agricultural land, yet they were dispossessed. (in Spivak iv)

While Devi makes important links, she invariably renders Indigenous peoples of Americas as victims of the past, where the genocide is complete, all lands are already taken away and the settler colonial project are finished. But, as we know through Indigenous peoples, that is far from reality. Further, evoking genocide as complete, is settler-state's method to erase indigeneity and deny ongoing processes of colonialism. Similar to Chakrabarty above, this analysis also equates colonialism there to settler colonialism in Canada. They are, as argued above, very distinct.

There is much longer and complex history of engagements between race and caste—Blackness and Dalitness. In Chapter 1, I explored complicities of South Asians in anti-Black racism. In this section, I investigate parallels between Blackness and Dalitness to unravel the intricacies. In 1873, Jyotirao Phule wrote about the abolishment of slavery and the connections between slavery and caste: “The depressed and down-trodden people of India feel especially happy at this auspicious development, because they alone or the slaves in America have experienced the many inhuman hardships and tortures attendant upon slavery” (xlv). Ambedkar further drew these intertwined links, he wrote:

Slavery does not merely mean a legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purposes, which control their conduct. This condition obtains even where there is no slavery in the legalized sense. It is found when, as in the Caste System some persons are compelled to carry on certain prescribed callings which are not of their choice. (“The Annihilation of Caste” n.pag.)

These works and connections have deeply inspired generations of Dalit activism, scholarship, and cultural production, and vice versa. For instance, in chapter 2 I noted the relations between Dalit Panthers and Black Panther Party.

There have been more concrete links between anti-colonial struggles of South Asians and Blacks, in the Americas, in South Asia, in Africa, and globally. The shared struggles against colonialism and white supremacy were urgent projects that many shared. W.E.B. Du Bois noted the common struggles:

The color line will mean not simply a return to the absurdities of class as exhibited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but even to the caste of ancient days. This, however, the Japanese, the Chinese, the East Indian and the Negroes are going to resent in just such proportion as they gain the power; and they are gaining the power, and they cannot be kept from gaining more power. The price of repression will then by hypocrisy and slavery and blood. (“The Evolution of the Race Problem” 155)

Likewise, Martin Luther King, Jr., on his visit to India in 1959, wrote: “We call it race in America; they call it caste in India” (280). Thenmozhi Soundarajan beautifully captures Black-

Dalit intimacies writing on her experiences of growing up Dalit in the diaspora, and calls her community “Black-Indians,” She writes:

I do not know exactly what age I understood I was untouchable, for it was always around me. But I knew exactly when it was that I became a Dalit. It was only when I was 17 and picked up a book about Ambedkar that had grown dusty in our family library that a lightning rod singed my soul. I read his work alongside my Dad’s battered copies of works by Black activists, Stokley Carmichael’s *Black Power* and Malcolm X’s *Autobiography*. Through their words, I found the courage and conviction to be able to address the profound lack of information and access to Dalit history in the diaspora. I was part of a powerful tradition of resistance. (n.pag.)

Similarly, Black writer Jamall Calloway has made parallels between white supremacy and brahminism and the oppression of Blacks and Dalits. He writes: “like the structures of white supremacy, like the effects of apartheid, like Palestinian hatred, caste operates independent of the presence of an upper caste person” (n.pag.). These examples demonstrate different forms of solidarities between Dalits and Blacks.<sup>19</sup>

Contemporarily, South Asian scholars working within the fields of South Asian diasporic studies, postcolonial studies, critical race studies, transnational feminisms, Third World

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<sup>19</sup> Other Black activists like Langston Hughes, Bayard Rustin, Horace R. Cayton, Jr., James Lawson, and Mary McLeod Bethune expressed akin affinities to the Indian anti-colonial struggle (Anirvan Chatterjee). Similarly, many Indians fighting British colonialism of India noted these links, like Mohandas K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ram M. Lohia, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and K.A. Abbas (n.pag.). Historically it was important for South Asian freedom fighters to forge solidarities with Black struggles globally. However, it should be noted that the nationalist movement was mainly led by men from upper caste backgrounds. For Dalit, Adivasis and other Bahujan communities in colonial South Asia, fighting the colonial empire was as important, or in some instances less important, than fighting caste structures. These struggles against caste were largely ignored by the leaders of the (upper-caste) nationalist movement.

Further, it does not necessarily mean that Indian anti-colonial leaders were not susceptible to anti-Black racism, because many were. While it is important to document these histories and solidarities, it is also critical to think about caste in South Asia and the diasporas. Racial solidarity amongst Black and other communities of colour is as needed now as it was in the past, but we also need to think about how race and caste intersect in very real ways to sustain ongoing relations of oppression and subordination. Solidarities between Dalits and Blacks offer a better pedagogy for solidarity, and need to be distinguished from upper caste solidarities with Black communities. We need to be careful to not conflate these different solidarities with each other. The connections and alliances formed between Black and Dalit communities, both historically and contemporarily, challenge and unsettle both white supremacy and brahminical supremacy. To be in solidarity with Black communities in United States, and elsewhere, means for South Asians to be anti-casteist as well. Further, in the North American diasporic context, it is important to remember that the lands upon these solidarities have been forged are lands that have been stolen from sovereign Indigenous nations, and remain colonized.

feminisms, and queer studies have also grounded their work in Black theories of race and colonialism. Using works of Black theorists like Franz Fanon, Angela Davis, Aimé Césaire, Alice Walker, Paul Gilroy, bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Patricia Hill Collins, Walter Rodney, Kimberlé Crenshaw, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Baldwin and many others, South Asian scholars, have effectively theorized race transnationally. An exhaustive and complete overview of this South Asian scholarship on race is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, I want to raise questions about what it means for South Asian savarna and non-Indigenous scholars to use Black scholars to theorize race and colonialism.

In similar veins, critiquing dominant postcolonial theories, Arun P. Mukherjee notes:

The dominant discourse of Postcolonial and Subaltern theories, which are often the frameworks used by Western academics to teach Indian literature, mostly Indian English Literature, not only refused to notice the high caste status of these writers but present them as resistant voices, representing the oppression of ‘the colonized.’ (“Introduction” xiii)

Shefali Chandra adds to the critique: “by foregrounding the white/brown binary-South Asian postcolonial studies has diverted our attention away from the multiplicity of racial formations that proliferated through the colonial encounter and spawned new regimes of power beyond the colonial impetus” (“Whiteness on the Margins” 149-50). Thus, Mukherjee and Chandra locate erasures of caste in postcolonial knowledge production. Invariably, they also hint at the relations between caste and racial positionalities and limitations to knowledge production. Further, I question the reduction of race to Blackness. Is the Indigenous-other not racialized? Positing Blackness as the markers of the racial and colonial violences, erases Indigenous peoples. The racial and colonial effacement of the Indigenous-other in these theorizations is telling of the settler colonial modalities inherent in theorizations of raciality and coloniality. I do not intend to

just critique these important bodies of scholarship.<sup>20</sup> They are foundational to understanding South Asianness in a transnational world. However, I am interested in processes of knowledge production that enable appropriating Blackness, invisibilizing Dalitness and erasing indigeneity. I explore questions of complicities within anti-blackness in Chapter 1, here I highlight the shortcomings of these solidarities and the erasure of caste and indigeneity.

Kamala Visweswaran has also noted how Indian sociology in its investment in anti-colonialism, failed to address caste inequality or discrimination (*Un/common Cultures* 134). She argues that “scholarship on caste tends to remain entrenched within area studies, becoming difficult to track within African or South Asian diaspora studies” (11). She offers examples of W.E.B. Du Bois’ writing on caste and B.R. Ambedkar’s understanding of caste through race, to read their interventions for understanding new forms of solidarity (11). Drawing upon the Dalit movement’s theorizing of casteism as a form of racism, and scholarship in the U.S., which used caste to explain American race relations, Visweswaran calls for critically engaging with the intersection between area studies and ethnic studies. She writes:

The emergent nexus between ethnic studies and area studies allows for a form of affiliative interdisciplinarity with the potential to read cultural displacement, transpositions, and reversals between community and the state, and between disciplines... What I am calling “affiliative interdisciplinarity” identifies tension between intellectual traditions such as area studies and ethnic studies—the first a product of the Cold War, and second a product of its critique—but allies these traditions in pursuit of a conjunctural analytic that can track the emergence and circulation of culturalist argument through local, regional, and national registers. (12)

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<sup>20</sup> In lieu of #BlackLivesMatter social movement, many South Asians in the U.S. have written about South Asian complicities in anti-Blackness and solidarities with Black struggles. However, this emerging body of writing (written mostly by savarna writers and activists in the diaspora) has also been silent on questions of caste and the relations between caste and anti-Blackness violences within South Asian communities (see: Shah; Kolhatkar; Lakshmi; API Resistance; Tulshyam; and Sasha W.). Soundarajan argues: “I think sometimes South Asian organizers use black organizing as a release valve for their caste privilege. ...For most South Asians in the diaspora, it’s a lot easier to talk about Blackness because then the people at the top of the race hierarchy are the white supremacists and you don’t have to look at the caste privilege that exists not just for your own identity but in your family as well. ...It’s [easy] to say “Ferguson matters” even as [you] ignore all of the massacres that their Savarna infrastructure has unleashed onto [Dalit] communities” (qtd. in Ahmad).

I use Visweswaran's model of "affiliative interdisciplinarity" to bring DBAT critiques in conversations with questions of race and indigeneity within white settler states. This, Visweswaran argues, would "enable us to study transnational circuits and regional processes comparatively, where the United States and India are linked circuits for understanding refugee and conflict diaspora flows, state minoritization and racializing strategies, and subaltern forms of resistance and citizenship" (13). While Visweswaran's focus is not on relationality between (academic) positionality and theories of race and post/colonialism, I use her work to ground my explorations of positionality and knowledge production on questions of caste, race and indigeneity.

Using Visweswaran's model of affiliative interdisciplinarity "to apprehend the transnational and historic alliances between different peoples with similar experiences of oppression," (132-33) I highlight an instance in her work on transnational connections between indigeneity and race. In her chapter "'Wild West' Anthropology and the Disciplining of Gender" on the emergence of white women ethnographers in later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she argues how white women exploring the "wild west" were complicit in American settler ideologies and how they situated themselves within the settler colonial project (22). The chapter is important as it draws attention to how an understanding of gender within anthropology was formulated with white women's encounters with the Native-others. It is within this context that Visweswaran highlights the example of ethnographer Frances Densmore. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Densmore wrote a pamphlet *The Pleas of Our Brown Brother* where she portrayed the Natives peoples as "wild children" who ought to be saved by white men.

Visweswaran quotes lengthy passages from the pamphlet, which included the following:

The Mowgli of North America was still a child and with the trustfulness of childhood he welcomed the stranger, calling him Brother... For five centuries there has been a

struggle. Spanish adventures, French priests, English soldiers and American civilization tried to bring the American Mowgli back to man and he defied them. Cheated and deceived, he kept the haughty dignity that is his by right of inheritance; beaten back step by step he flung out his defiance, and bore his defeat with proud stoicism. (Densmore in Visweswaran 36)

It is hard to miss Densmore's reference to the "Mowgli of North America." Visweswaran adds:

Densmore's recourse to the civilizing mission of Kipling's *Jungle Book*, along with her description of the "American Mowgli" who emerges from the jungle, functions as a cross-validation of British and American imperialism even as it obliterates the specific material effects of westward expansion and "manifest destiny." (37)

Here I ask what would the analysis of "American Mowgli" look like if we made questions of indigeneity, here and there, central to theorizing race and colonialism. Mowgli is not just Indian. Mowgli is Adivasi. British colonialism was both eastward and westward. American and Indian imperialisms, albeit not similar, are products of British imperialism. The "Indian" remains complicit in both these processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples.

In the next section, I draw examples from my fieldwork to elaborate my arguments for transnational conversations between caste, race and indigeneity. I argue that the role of caste, race, and indigeneity needs to be centered in studying diasporic formations.

### **Caste in the Field, Fields of Caste**

As I outline in the previous chapters, South Asians I spoke to in Fort McMurray were primarily upper caste, upwardly mobile, educated and "skilled," Hindu Indians—from different urban centres in India.<sup>21</sup> They were all cis-gendered and in heteronormative (endogamic) marriages. All interviews were conducted in English, but my participants spoke a range of languages including Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, and Urdu. South Asians I spoke to in Vancouver were

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<sup>21</sup> With an exception of one Ahmadiyya Muslim Pakistani male.

upper caste Sikhs.<sup>22</sup> They were all Punjabi who came from rural parts of the state of Punjab. While I conducted the interviews in a combination of Punjabi, Hindi and English, they were more comfortable in Punjabi. They were all cis-gendered and in heteronormative (endogamic) marriages. In terms of class, while they all retired from working class jobs, now they have “some” access to a certain middle class upward mobility. Everyone was either a naturalized Canadian citizen or a Permanent Resident.

It is by no means coincidental that all my respondents have upper caste backgrounds. Diasporic communities are not “naturally” upper caste, rather they are imagined as upper caste. In Fort McMurray, the social and professional circles that I was privy to were constructed through shared upper caste Hindu backgrounds (with the exception of one Pakistani). That my main contact in Fort McMurray was a childhood friend from Delhi who happens to be (practicing) brahmin is not happenstance either. Our shared urban middle class upbringing in Delhi had lots to do with caste. And even though I grew up as a mostly atheist Hindu and he a mostly practicing brahmin, and politically we diverged after high school, our friendship is a testament to how caste works. Obviously, our relationship is more than a strategic caste “alliance” and I do not want to reduce affective affinities to caste. Rather, I highlight how intersections of caste, class, and gender are important parameters for sociability, friendships, relationships, and networks in casted India. My experiences in the field reveal how caste sociability structures diasporic locations.

My friend and his wife (engaged in a heteronormative endogamous arranged marriage) were my prime leads in the city. They introduced me to their social and professional friends. And

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<sup>22</sup> I should note Sikhism comes out of anti-caste ontologies and was established as a staunch critique of brahminism. However, as I note in Chapter 2, Sikhism also has reproduced brahminical caste hierarchies. Thus, even as many jat Sikhs may identify with anti-caste tendencies within Sikhism, they are complicit in casteist violence.

it was through this network that I was able to connect to South Asians in Fort McMurray. Even if most of the respondents did not mention their caste backgrounds openly to me, it was assumed by them that I was one of them—because I was referred to them by my friend. However, many did openly talk about their caste backgrounds and how important it was for them to maintain certain social circles; that are their savarna social spaces. In my interviews and interactions with my respondents, it was clear that as an upper caste, middle class, appearing cis-straight-male, Ph.D. student I was allowed to be privy in their lives. My social positionings helped me have access to them and their indulgence in letting me interview them for the benefits of my education. Caste affinities guaranteed privileges, which may not have been easily given if my caste identity was not readily identifiable and recognizable. Furthermore, none of my respondents entertained any ideas of the presence of Dalits in Fort McMurray. My meeting Mohit and Raghini, as discussed in the introduction, illustrates how caste functions.

In Vancouver, my experiences were different, yet dictated by caste and gender. As an outsider to the jat Punjabi community, I did not have similar networks to rely on, as I had in Fort McMurray. I reached out to most of my respondents through community elders—through poets, writers, activists and academic networks. I should note that at least two of these community elders repeatedly brought up my brahmin background in conversations. One of them, in particular, kept referring to me as *panditji* (priest)—a marker for men from the brahmin caste (associated with learnedness and religiosity of the person). I did not share similar positioning in Vancouver as I did with respondents in Fort McMurray. Language (we communicated through a medley of broken Punjabi, Hindi and English), education, and urban middle class background did make the meetings a little more challenging, in terms of conversations and access to the

community. However, at the same time, like in Fort McMurray, caste, class, and gender also gave me privileged access in meeting and interviewing the respondents.

In Vancouver, unlike Fort McMurray, I was aware of a large presence of Dalit Punjabi communities. In the summer of 2013, I was introduced to a Dalit activist a few times in community settings. In our brief conversations he had mentioned how he knew many Dalit families who had lived in many different parts of B.C. for a long time. However, he mentioned how many of them were not part of lumber and fishery economies. These jobs, he pointed out, worked through familial networks, in other words, caste networks, and hence were not available for Dalit workers. I had heard a similar analysis from an upper caste immigrant rights activist in Vancouver who grew up in Prince Rupert. He had also mentioned how these jobs were not easily available to South Asian Muslims as well. Thus, the coveted lumber and fishery jobs remained mostly in the hands of upper caste Sikh and Hindu South Asians. In the summer of 2014, when I went back to Vancouver for further research, I got back in touch with the Dalit activist. I tried contacting him the whole summer to get contacts for Dalits who worked in lumber and fishery industries. I called him multiple times that summer, but only got through to him a handful of times. Each time he promised to fix a meeting soon, but he never followed up. I am not sure why he never followed up with me, but I think my position as an upper caste academic was understandably not something he wanted to engage with. I share this story to point to the processes that let me meet other savarna peoples in lower mainland and not Dalits. Like Fort McMurray, caste networks in Vancouver work in similar ways. This obviously tarnishes my analysis and my critique of caste. Yet, as I argued in the previous chapter, my political objective in this chapter is not necessarily to “give voice” to Dalits. Rather, I seek to investigate the ideologies and structures that produce and sustain the “touchable” Hindu in the diaspora and the

complicities of these subjects in ongoing processes of settler colonialism. My brahmin privilege in the academy, and the broader society, in India and in the diaspora, enables my research and writing. My project is obviously shaped through these varying privileged positionalities, which guide me to unsettle myself and those who share these privileges on stolen lands and in India.

While caste structures are as prevalent with Sikh communities as they are in Hindu communities, there are significant differences in the functioning of caste in these communities. Since I focused primarily on brahminical caste structures in the above discussion, for the purposes of this chapter I focus primarily on caste within Hindu Fort McMurray communities. I do draw from my conversations with Punjabi respondents in Vancouver, however I limit my theorization on solely Hindu caste formations. With the complications of anti-Sikh violence prevalent in Canada and India, conflation of Sikh and Hindu caste formations erases the logics of Sikhophobia. Furthermore, the differences in class positioning of respondents in Vancouver and Fort McMurray, caste formations in upwardly mobile Hindu dominant Fort McMurray are much more pervasive and violent. I draw on these observations in this chapter and the following chapters.

In this dissertation, I argue that while caste may not be an obvious factor in the analysis of settler colonialism, any analysis of Indian, and more generally South Asian, diasporas is incomplete without a critical and intersectional analysis of caste dynamics. Caste plays pertinent, and violent, roles in the making of the South Asian diaspora, across religious, regional, national and linguistic boundaries. Along with gender and class, caste is a structural reality that cannot be ignored or invisibilized. While my engagement with the functioning of caste are limited here, it goes without saying that the class privileges that my respondents shared and their “model minority” aspirations cannot be sustained without their caste positionings.

Where is the line between indigeneity, caste, race, and blackness, here and there? In my interviews, I observed how these categories are conflated to construct the *other*. As I argued earlier, while the Native body is distinct, however, my respondents constructed and understood indigeneity through an assemblage of other others, namely, the Black-Other, Dalit-Other, Bahujan-Other, and Adivasi-Other, and the Muslim-Other. Through these construction of the self and the others, the latter are rendered interchangeable (whereby grammars for recognizing one-other are conflated with grammars for another-other), homogenous (all other others are imagined to be the same), and disposable (none of the others matter or are needed).

Indigenous peoples here, Indigenous peoples back there, lower caste people there, Black people here—are imagined through very similar terminologies. But these constructs are employed primarily through silences. The challenge then is how to trace these silences across race, caste and indigeneity, both temporally and spatially. I trace four discursive techniques that my respondents often used in reference to talking about indigeneity, experiences of racism, or Canada in general, where I argue that they relied on notions of caste and indigeneity back in India. These techniques are: notions of “backwardness,” their impressions of reservations, experiences of “things being bad back home,” and the negation of racism here by invoking casteism back home.

One of the main ideas invoked about indigeneity there was that of “backwardness.” My respondents often relied on discourses on indigeneity in India to talk about indigeneity in Canada, thereby equating Adivasis to Indigenous peoples in Canada. Constructing binaries of “modernity” and “tradition,” my respondents brought racist ideas about all Indigenous peoples being “backward,” “uncivilized,” and outside of modernity. These ideologies are then reinforced

about Indigenous peoples here. When I asked Manish, a chemical engineer in Fort McMurray, on what he felt about shared terminologies of “Indian,” he responded:

It’s just a terminology probably. It does not really matter. The thing is that...they tend to be more attached to the nature. Which we also were at some point of time. They are pretty much similar to the Adivasis we have in India. That’s the only similarity that I can see. They lead their life with the basics. Like we do in our villages. But other than that they have some culture, some tradition, some colors and things like that. That’s how I see it. I do not see any much of a difference.

This quote amplifies the traces I have attempted to theorize in this chapter. While the Indigenous-other in Canada is constructed by South Asians through settler colonial logics, the other is not solely constructed through such techniques. Rather logics of “backwardness” and “uncivilized” are universal tropes used for Indigenous peoples in Canada and India alike. Thus, for Indians from India, the Indigenous-other in Canada is the stranger they recognize from the Adivasi-other in India. This recognition and conflation of the Indigenous-others, I reiterate, is facilitated through the settler state’s construction of the Indigenous here as the other. Further, through these transnational constructs, the savarna racialized subject posit themselves as the preferred group over the Indigenous-other.

In the context of Australia, as I note above, Sarwal demonstrates how class, caste and race are intertwined among Indian-Australians that allows them to look down condescendingly upon the Aborigines (7). Within the Canadian context, Sadhu Binning,<sup>23</sup> poet, writer, and community activist based out of Vancouver, elaborated further in a conversation:

The Punjabi and Indian community largely come from a society where there was a hierarchy of caste system and those people who came here were majority of them were from the class that owned the land. And that was the reason that they made it here. Otherwise people from U.P. [Uttar Pradesh] and Bihar would come to Punjab because they cannot afford the trip here. These people can come here because of the land there. And their understanding of things is something that they felt they are above everybody else. If you talk to people in the sawmills and other places, they did not really respect the Native peoples in general. They saw them as, as the media projected them, drunkard

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<sup>23</sup> I discuss Binning’s short story “The Eyes in the Dark” in Chapter 4.

people...people who would be laying on the streets, women who were prostitutes, and nothing else.

Racial differences between the self and “backward”-Indigenous-other, here or there, were also constructed through differences in “cultural values.”<sup>24</sup> Through these constructs, the savarna racialized subject ascertain themselves as the preferred group over the Indigenous-other.

Following the multicultural discourses about South Asians and their “strong cultural values,” most respondents, in Fort McMurray and Vancouver, reflected on their “superior” community values with a sense of pride. For Mohit and Raghini in Fort McMurray, I discussed their story in the introduction, it was the superiority of “Indian culture” that enabled them to get independence from the British Raj, unlike Indigenous cultures, which were not strong enough to resist the colonizers. Again, as I ask in the previous sections, where are the Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi, and Tribal others, when this Indianness is constructed within a multicultural framework?

Another recurring theme was that of quota, reservation and positive affirmation. In India, the state regulates several reservation (positive affirmation) policies in education and public sector jobs for peoples identified as DBAT communities. In principle these policies seek to undo the injustices that DBAT communities face, historical and contemporary. However, these policies are politically contentious and volatile. While “benefits” of these policies to DBAT peoples, in the face of oppression they face, are debatable, savarnas view them as anti-upper caste Hindu policies. They see themselves as victims at the hands of DBAT peoples. For many people from privileged backgrounds this is one of the prime reasons to migrate out of India, often labelled as “brain drain” in popular discourses. Ganesh has noted: “Their emigration to North American is attributed to their marginalization in India, being deprived of having a say in

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<sup>24</sup> Khan notes that in the context of the Caribbean, Indian immigrants also viewed themselves as possessing “ancestral civilization” and culture, as compared to the Afro-Caribbean who lacked such attributes (248).

the politics of the country. The reservation policy is a favorite object of criticism” (181). In my conversations, spontaneously without inhibitions because of assumed shared affinities, many of my respondents brought up caste as a barrier “back home.” For most of the respondents, reservation policies for Dalits and Adivasis were a barrier to upper caste peoples for “good” education and job opportunities. The openness about prejudice, anger and frustrations towards DBAT communities was very revealing. Even without provocation, their willingness to share their biases and casteist outlooks illustrates how rampant casteism is within these Indian diasporic communities and how integral it is to their claims to citizenship and assimilation in Canada.

I juxtapose the perceptions of reservations in India to that of welfare in Canada. One of the major racist perceptions prevalent within my respondents was how Indigenous peoples are monetarily dependent on the state through government subsidies, tax cuts and allowances in Canada. The following extended quote from a respondent reveals the racism, and their sense of injustice and frustration. Kritika, who works in a bank in Fort McMurray, commented:

They don't have to pay taxes. They live in their reserves. And I have seen many women who just get pregnant and then get their child benefits. And the government does give them some kind of bonus every 6 months, I think. And that's a huge amount – sometimes about \$6000 or \$7000 or sometimes \$10000. That's free money for them. And they don't even need to pay taxes on it. They get that twice in a year. They're more than happy to spend it. They would have that [money] in their pocket for just a day and it's all gone the next day. That's how they live. It's not just that the head of the family gets it. It's for every individual. Say for instance there's a 19-year-old guy who gets [this money] – he doesn't know what he can do with it and spends it all. So that's what I have seen mostly. You get a tax benefit card that way you don't have to pay your taxes. And then if you buy any vehicles or anything, you don't have to pay GST. So these are the good perks that they get. Being in Fort Mc where everyone else is being taxed at a very high rate – the people who walk in with no taxes or anything kind of feel so (aaah!) different. I feel very frustrated – why do we have to pay so high taxes and they just do nothing.

This extended quote from Kritika elaborates on the perversity of state-produced and state-sanctioned discourses about Indigenous peoples. While Kritika claims this knowledge through

her experiences in the bank, it is not hard to dismantle the fallacies she produces. By exaggerated numbers and tales, Kritika passionately illustrates the perceived injustices in the system. Needless to say, these are the kinds of “injustices” and positive affirmative policies for Dalits and Adivasis in India, that made her move to Canada. She is quick to highlight how as a hard, educated and assimilable worker, she faces discriminations in terms of high taxes in Fort McMurray. Similarly, Sanjeev, an engineer in the tar sands, pointed to how this creates imbalance, as “obviously other communities don’t get that.” It is critical to situate perceived notions of “welfare Indians” within the context of settler colonial state but also to contextualize how upper caste diasporic Indians view themselves as victims at the hands of reservation and positive affirmation policies both in India and Canada. At the same time, many respondents were proud of their merit and hardworking skills, which are imagined vis-à-vis the Indigenous other, as they do not need special privileges from the states.

Connected to the point of reservations is the discourse of how “things are bad back home.” A major assimilative trope for my respondents is to engage in comparisons between Canada and India and to put Canada on a higher pedestal than India. Many conversations employed stereotypes about pollution, population (increasing numbers of DBAT and Muslims), corruption (corruption is often blamed on caste), safety (from DBAT and Muslims) and (caste) politics. While this may reflect perceived social, cultural and economic materialities, the methods of comparison often negates and invisibilizes structures of power and oppression that allows Canada to be “better.” This is illustrated by this quote from Ritesh, who worked as an engineer in Fort McMurray:

They [Indigenous peoples here] get so many privileges that we don’t have being an Indian. We go through so much trials, tribulations and struggles to get through out there and it’s not a very friendly government in India. Everywhere there is a political issue and not much support even for a basic amenity. But in this country that is not the case. At

least the basic amenities are met. Irrespective of the type of community, all those benefits are equal to all in the eyes of the Canadian law – that's something, which must be appreciated.

Ritesh here is blaming caste politics in India for his “trials, tribulations, and struggles.” Canada, on the other hand, offers a level playing field to all its citizens, away from the all the lack of basic amenities in India. At the same time, he points the advantages that Indigenous peoples get here, which he does not, in India or Canada (while claiming some sorts of indigeneity in India and entitlement in Canada). Like Kritika and Sanjeev above, Ritesh's reactions also reflect the privileged positionalities of the respondents and highlight how their class and caste status insulates them from processes of racialization and exclusion from the nation-state, and how Canada becomes the desired “first world” experience. While many feel they belong to India, they also feel Canada is home and can be a “better” home than India. Caste is central to this conceptualization. Even though upper castes have hegemonic privileges in India, they see themselves as victims of “biased” caste politics.

Connected to this is the conceptualization of Canada as racism-free. I expand on this further in Chapter 5, but for the purpose of this chapter, I highlight how some respondents, conveniently invoked caste violences in India to dismiss racism in Canada. It is interesting that these respondents mentioned their own complicities as perpetrators in caste violence. They did so, on the one hand, to universalize discriminatory practices, but on the other hand, to invisibilize, or rather normalize, racism in Canada. As Rajvir, a mechanic from a sawmill in Prince Rupert, noted:

In India, I would discriminate against SC people and SC people would discriminate against me. This would go one back and forth. Same is here only. I told you that the world is same only. Overall the human tendencies are the same. So they don't like something they don't like it.

Similarly, Gurpreet, who worked in a sawmill in Quesnel, said about racism here:

That is still there. It's not going to leave anytime soon. We also do the same in our country. We don't mingle with people from lower caste backgrounds. We do discrimination on the basis of caste. Here people do not discriminate as much as we do there. There we make each other's lives miserable. Here at least the people here are straightforward. If anybody has racism towards us, they do not hide. They will be racist on our faces.

Both Rajvir and Gurpreet point to similarities between caste and racial structures and violences. Hinting at transnational and intersectional connections between these structures of power, both point to the universality of oppression. While these are substantial critiques, however, they both mobilize these critiques to invisibilize or normalize racism here in Canada and casteism in India. As they are both perpetrators and victims of discrimination, they argue that discrimination inevitably exists. This takes away both their complicities and pains from discriminatory violences.

To elaborate on the triangulation of indigeneity, caste (read as Dalit), and race (read as Black), it is important to note the intersections and interactions between anti-Native racism and anti-Black racism in the quest to whiteness. There were two different yet linked examples of anti-Black racism that I encountered through my respondents. While I did not directly ask my respondents about Black peoples, I argue Blackness is always haunting in ways communities of colour negotiate their identities in Canada and the U.S. Their 'model-ness' thus was also constructed by dehumanizing the Black-other. More specifically, anti-Black racism came up through vague references about safety in the United States. A respondent in Fort McMurray, talking about how safe and secure Canada is, mentioned: "Personally I don't want to live in US – I have seen and heard so many stories about the US. Personally when we have travelled there you kind of feel so insecure living there. Here you are free to walk anywhere." Another respondent, her husband, added: "In the big cities you know there are always shady areas. Also

in Canada but they are more prevalent in the States. Depending on where you are you really have to be alert where you are travelling etc. Being in States, as compared to being in Canada, you won't have a safe mentality to settle there unless you are in relatively good community. Some areas we really need to be very watchful." These references to "safety" and "shady areas" subtly hint towards Black-dominant inner-city neighborhoods and reproduce the racist stereotypes of violence associated with these neighborhoods and Black communities.

These examples demonstrate how anti-Black racism is integral to claims of citizenship and quasi-assimilable aspirations for communities of colour who seek to disassociate and distance themselves with Black communities. Nevertheless, as I argue in other chapters, a sole focus on anti-Black racism within communities of colour is a limited analysis of the methodologies of white supremacy. Without a critique of settler colonialism, any engagements with anti-Black racism is incomplete, or vice-versa. To be clear, I am not privileging or hierarchizing settler colonial technologies over violences against Black communities, but as I demonstrate in previous chapters, anti-Black racism needs to be conceptualized within settler colonial modalities. Thus, I am highlighting how questions of settler colonialism and anti-Native racism are central in analyzing lived experiences of *other* communities of colour, and the latter's quest to whiteness.

I should note that it was only the respondents from Vancouver who acknowledged caste violences in India. None of the respondents in Fort McMurray mentioned any forms of caste hierarchies they may have been complicit in. In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how Vancouver respondents are more aware of violences against Indigenous peoples in Canada than respondents in Fort McMurray. I argue that unlike the Fort McMurray respondents, the Vancouver respondents are not necessarily as privileged and upwardly mobile and have stark differences in

their experiences in Canada. For the Vancouver respondents, proximity to the Native-other produced a different sense of belonging in Canada, as they knew more intimately that they were on Native land. Similarly, their rural backgrounds from Punjab, and class experiences in Canada, perhaps gives them a different understanding of their complicities in caste hierarchies in India, albeit that does not necessarily make them any less casteist. In addition, they are more aware of racist violences against them. In other words, they are able to understand violences at a more intimate level than the more upwardly mobile “model minority” Indians in Fort McMurray. To be clear, as I note in other chapters, Sikhs have different racial, religious, and caste histories. Their lived experiences shape their understandings of intertwined logics of caste, race and indigeneity, however these understandings do not necessarily translate into progressive praxis.

### **Rethinking Complexities**

In March 2015, a controversy broke out about Western University’s President Amit Chakma earning double his salary (which amounted to \$924,000) in 2014 (“Earned \$924K Last Year”). At a time when universities in Canada are undertaking massive neoliberal changes, and the upper administration is making dubious amounts of money while student fees continue to rise and teaching and research gets more and more precarious, Chakma’s news hit the media hard. He instantly came under attack and became the symbol for everything that is wrong with the academic industrial complex. Under threats from Western community, he decided to return half the money (“To Give Back Half of \$924K Salary”). As the story unfolded, I followed it rather bemusedly. Amit Chakma is Chakma – Chakmas are Indigenous peoples in Bangladesh who continue to face colonial violences from the state. There was no space in the analysis of this case for recognizing indigeneity. Yet, I want to ask: how are we to understand the neoliberal

multicultural academic industrial complex and the presence of racialized “model minorities”? Especially when the racialized body is Indigenous? Given how the majority of Canadian university presidents are white, with the exceptions of the upper caste Hindu Indian president at the time of writing in University of British Columbia (Arvind Gupta), upper caste Tamil Sri Lankan woman president of University of Calgary (Indira Samarasekera) and Egyptian president of York University (Mamdouh Shoukri). So in Chakma’s context, is there a space to acknowledge his different positionality than the other upper caste presidents or white presidents? How do we talk about the complex intersections of race, caste and indigeneity here? At the same time, how do we challenge and resist his complicity in racist, colonial, neoliberal universities?

To be clear, when talking about the presence of Indigenous bodies from Bangladesh and India in Canada, I do not seek to conflate and universalize indigeneity. Indigenous there does not mean Indigenous here. The quest for Indigenous decolonization here is for the Indigenous peoples here only. Indigenous peoples from elsewhere, like racialized migrants, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, can become complicit in the ongoing processes of colonization here. While it is important to recognize these differentiations, I am also interested in dismantling the caste structures, and hence the need to identify the savarna subject and its others. This may not be of much urgency within the context of Indigenous decolonization here, yet the complexity is important to note the multiplicities of difference-making and functioning of power. These complexities then dictate the complicities and incommensurabilities. To dismantle varying structures of power and oppression, a complex analysis is required to see the intertwined processes of violence and to forge critical solidarities.

I conclude this chapter by bringing Chakma’s story in conversation with the example of yoga. I started the previous chapter by complicating yoga’s appropriation by looking at

intersections of race, caste and indigeneity. How do we then understand certain forms of South Asianness, within “multicultural” context, that get recognized, glorified, celebrated, commoditized, appropriated, or orientalist? Invariably all these forms are connected to caste structures and its violences. They are savarna forms. Be it Bollywood, dances (from bharatanatyam to kathak), bindis, saris, music (from Carnatic to bhangra), food (north Indian to south Indian), and festivals (Diwali, Holi etc.), almost everything that is recognized as Indian or South Asian in Canada has its roots in savarna Hindu culture. And while, caste discrimination may all fit well within orientalist lenses, savarna culture never gets depicted as the violent side of the same coin. I have argued in this chapter that complicity within settler colonial processes for South Asians cannot be fully theorized or understood without analyzing DBAT formations within the diasporas. Decolonizing Indigenous – South Asian relations would also require dismantling the caste system.

#### Chapter 4: Unsettling Colonial Intimacies: Erotics, Violences, and Solidarities

Rashid: So after we met at speed-dating, I did some research on internet about the Aboriginal people.

Bailey: That's really sweet. I don't know a lot about your culture but I am very excited to try some Indian food.

*As they take their first bites...*

Bailey: It's spicy!

Rashid: Oh yeah? I ordered mild versions for you.

*Both slightly laugh...*

Rashid: So I was reading about all the problems you guys are having on your reserves.

Bailey: Well...when the world keeps telling you that you are less than...then the people start to believe them. A lot of my people have given up...lost hope.

Rashid: Why don't you just leave?

Bailey: Because it's our home!

*Rashid looks confused...*

Bailey: Plus...it's not that simple.

Rashid: Ok but clearly you need to find some kind of solution. I mean all I see is all Aboriginal people are on the streets.

*Bailey looks shocked...*

Bailey: I need a glass of wine.

Rashid: Oh... you think you should?

Bailey: Should what?

Rashid: Isn't that part of the problem ... *(as he snatches the wine menu from her)*

The internet said your people are predisposed to alcoholism.

*Bailey frowns and snatches the menu back.*

This excerpt is from a conversation between Bailey, a Mohawk woman, and Rashid, an Indian Muslim man, on their first date at an Indian restaurant in Montreal, from the twelfth episode (“Bridesmaidzilla”) of Tracey Deer’s *Mohawk Girls*, a TV series on Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. In the previous episode, the two had met at a speed-dating event, where Rashid asked Bailey out. In this brief exchange between the two Indians, we witness what otherwise could have been an intimate experience, albeit a cis-heteronormative one. Instead we see an encounter which follows the white settler state’s multicultural script—a script where the dialogues for two strangers (in this scenario, for two different Indians) are pre-written and pre-

determined. These scripts for the scripted-Indians reveal the colonial and racial logics at play. One Indian comes from peoples who are predisposed towards alcoholism, and the other Indian comes from a culture of spicy food. The viewers already know which Indian is which, the Indians in the script know which one is which, and what the other's Indianness signifies. Meanwhile, the multicultural settler state can claim to be "neutrally" out of the relationship, its past and ongoing colonial structures have continued to keep Indigenous peoples and South Asians apart from developing intimacies. However, I am cautious to not equate and conflate the scripts for the two communities, and their heterogeneities. One Indian, after all, is on the stolen lands of the other Indian. The above scene encapsulates the racial and cultural tensions between Indigenous peoples and South Asians in Canada. At the same time, it also gives us a glimpse, perhaps a hope of intimacy, desire, and love, albeit cis-heteronormative intimacies.

More than a century prior to *Mohawk Girls*, on August 26, 1907 in Victoria, B.C., the *Victoria Times Daily* reported that a "Siwash"—a racial slur for northern Pacific coast Indigenous communities—woman left her family (husband and daughter) to elope with a Hindu man ("Eloped with Hindu"). The story appeared at the center-top of the front page of the daily. This is the only archived piece of information available to me. Besides the elopement of a Siwash woman and a Hindu man in 1907, and the "intimate" encounter between Bailey and Rashid, in 2014, there are limited references in popular culture, memory, media, or academic, and literary texts about the intimacies between the two different Indians. Yet in the span of over a century, it is reasonable to assume that Indigenous peoples and South Asians would have come in contact with each other frequently, all remain "unnamed" intimacies. Love, intimacy, and desire between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, of all genders, sexualities, and bodies, may have lasted anywhere between a few minutes to a few decades, or less, or more. However, only

traces remain of these intimacies. Do these stories and the traces allow for gender, sexual, and queer understandings of Indians and their intimacies?

In this chapter, I propose to call interracial intimacies between variously colonized and racialized peoples, more specifically Indian–Indian intimacies, as “colonial intimacies.” I provide a theoretical framework to understand colonial intimacies and trace intimacies as desires, violences, silences, and solidarities between Indigenous peoples and South Asians in Canada. I do so by drawing upon Cree writer Tomson Highway’s short story “The Lover Snake” (2013 [1985])<sup>1</sup> and Punjabi writer Sadhu Binning’s short story “Eyes in the Dark” (2014).<sup>2</sup> Tracing historical regulation and prohibition of interracial intimacies in white settler states and drawing from examples of Indigenous-Asian intimacies in Asian Canadian literatures, I demonstrate how colonial intimacies are shaped through processes of settler colonialism and its anti-black racism formations. In academic and non-academic literatures, the historical focus on regulation has primarily focused on heterosexual interracial intimacies.<sup>3</sup> The intimacies in the short stories by Highway and Binning demonstrate the violences of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity through the intersections of raciality, coloniality, and indigeneity. My analysis seeks not to deny forms of agency and desire, but rather, it seeks to highlight how Indigenous peoples and South Asians encounter each other within the white settler state, and how these intimacies are pre-scripted; though not necessarily in totality of any form as pre-scripting is not a rigid guarantee of how the intimacies will play out. I further formulate colonial intimacies as “haunting intimacies”

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<sup>1</sup> I am thankful to Kiran Sunar and Tomson Highway for pointing me towards the story. My gratitude also goes to Harshita Yalamarty and Fraser MacPherson for reading, re-reading and “deciphering” the story with me/for me.

<sup>2</sup> I am thankful to Sadhu Binning for pointing me towards this story, as well as for the many conversations we have had over last two years. This project would not have been possible without his insights, experiences, writings, and stories. I am indebted to Sadhu for his critical reflections on South Asian presence within the settler state.

<sup>3</sup> With the key exception of Nayan Shah. I draw from his work in the next two sections.

to look at violent silencing and erasing of Indigenous women, queers and Two-Spirit peoples' voices, desires, and intimacies.

Investigating the stories, I further argue that even as South Asians are complicit within settler colonial violences, spaces for “decolonial love”—I draw from the works of Junot Díaz, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Chela Sandoval, and Leanne B. Simpson—and solidarity are not foreclosed. Rather these intimacies lie in a continuum of possibilities and impossibilities (Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes*), between reproducing violent structures of oppression and fostering decolonial solidarities. It is the possibilities of the latter that makes the anxious settler-state invested in keeping colonized and racialized peoples apart.<sup>4</sup> Thus, these intimacies can potentially be critical sites of dismantling the settler state and work towards decolonization. In Chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrate centrality of caste in understanding gender and sexuality within South Asia and the diasporas. Caste plays a significant and violent role in dictating and regulating intimacies in South Asia. Thus, inter-caste intimacies are a critical site for dismantling caste hierarchies and violences. In the context of this chapter, I explore questions of race, indigeneity and coloniality in the making of “colonial intimacies” and I do not directly engage with caste and inter-caste intimacies. However, insights from the previous chapter shape the theoretical formulations in this chapter.

I begin this chapter by tracing the historical regulation of interracial intimacies in white settler states through various state violence and legal mechanisms like the Indian Act, anti-miscegenation laws, and anti-immigrations laws in Canada and the U.S. Drawing from this overview, in the next section, I formulate a theoretical framework to understand colonial intimacies. I explore examples of Indigenous-Asian intimacies in Asian Canadian literatures in

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<sup>4</sup> I elaborate on colonial anxieties and fears about interracial intimacies in the next section.

the following section. The subsequent two sections engage with the above mentioned short stories by Binning and Highway. In the following section, I provide a brief introduction to Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit theorizations of love, intimacies and desires. Subsequently, I look at the making of “haunting intimacies” and questions of silences and solidarities. I conclude the chapter by looking into spaces and possibilities of “decolonial love.”

### **Interracial Intimacies, Colonial Regulation and Anxieties**

In Chapter 1, I outlined Lisa Lowe’s theorization of “intimacies of four continents” (*The Intimacies of Four Continents*). Decentering popular understandings of intimacy as romantic and sexual relations within the domestic spheres, Lowe proposes to theorize intimacies materially through the global processes of colonialism and capitalism (18). Lowe offers a “political economy” framework which shape material intimacies (less legible forms of intimacies such as alliances, affinities, and proximities) between variously colonized and racialized peoples (18). However, it is important to unsettle the binary between the “material” and “domestic” spheres, as they are interdependent and mutually constitutive. Noting the interrelations between the two spheres, Lowe elaborates:

We must situate this ideal of intimacy—sexual and affective intimacy within the private sphere of the bourgeois household—within the material conditions of colonial relations. Bourgeois intimacy was a regulation ideal through which the colonial powers administered the enslaved and colonized and sought to indoctrinate the newly freed into forms of Christian marriage and family. (30)

The capitalist demands of the settler colonial economies created the “intimacies of four continents.” The dominant understanding of intimacy as “domestic” came up through the formation of European “modern” subject on the backs of colonial, capitalist, racial and gender

processes of exploitation and oppression.<sup>5</sup> “Domestic” and “material” intimacies are coproduced, and both were integral to colonial processes of managing both public and private spheres of colonized peoples’ lives, which included marriage, family, and sexuality (30).

These intimacies produced varying racial, gender, and sexual formations for the maintenance of white settler economies. Roderick A. Ferguson notes these complex intersections in the forming of intimacies: “Nonwhite populations were racialized such that gender and sexual transgressions were not incidental to the production of nonwhite labor, but constitutive of it” (13). Interraciality was a threat to the maintenance of white supremacy and capitalism in these settler states. Jared Sexton contends that interracial sexuality is foundational for racial differences and hierarchies, “the field for its production, contestation, and containment” (*Amalgamation Schemes* 15). Thus, racial, gendered, and sexual formations within the Americas are intrinsically connected to colonial and capitalist processes. With the emergent racial formations in heteropatriarchal white settler states, the states began to invest in the regulation of interracial and crossracial intimacies to maintain their dominance. In this section, I analyse colonial anxieties against interracial intimacies and regulations of the “domestic” sphere of intimacies to understand the critical interweaving of gender, sexuality, race, Blackness and indigeneity in the making of white settler states. I draw from Indigenous feminist critiques of the Indian Act and blood quantum theories, Black critiques of anti-miscegenation laws in the United States and critical race feminist critiques of immigration prohibitions and anti-miscegenation laws. I do so not to equate differing intimacies; rather I seek to historicize interracial intimacies in the U.S. and Canada, and to demonstrate how the settler state has always been obsessed with disciplining and regulating erotics and desires.

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<sup>5</sup> While this chapter focuses on “domestic” intimacies between Indigenous peoples and South Asians in Canada, Chapter 5 examines the formations of “material” intimacies more closely.

In the Introduction, I illustrated how Indigenous feminists theorize heteropatriarchal processes and violences as one of the primary tools of colonization used by white settler states. Anishinaabekwe/Nehayowak writer Tara Williamson, in drawing connections between colonialism and gender violence, further elaborates on this relation:

The violence that is perpetrated against Indigenous women is the same violence that is perpetrated against the land in the tar sands is the same violence that sexually assaulted our parents and grandparents in residential school and is the same violence that displaced and tortured our nations during the first invasions. It's all colonization. It's all about power. (n.pag.)

Bonita Lawrence further illustrates the links between Native women's sexuality and colonialism (*"Real" Indians and Others*). Analysing the Indian Act, Lawrence argues that the settler state imposed definitions of Indianness in ways that were negative and discriminatory against Native women (50). In the nineteenth century, the settler state entrenched heteropatriarchy in the Indian Act through series of legislations and acts; and by 1874 the Indian descent was determined exclusively through the male lineage (50). These gendered violences were embedded in the Act till 1985 when Bill C-31 reinstated peoples who lost their Indian status due to the racist and heteropatriarchal tenets of the Indian Act. Lawrence argues:

If one takes into account the fact that for every individual who lost status and had to leave her community, all of her descendants (many of them the products of nonstatus Indian fathers and Indian mothers) also lost status and for the most part were permanently alienated from Native culture, the numbers of individuals who ultimately were removed from Indian status and lost to their nation may, at the most conservative estimates, number between one and two million. (55-56)

The Indian Act was a tool of gendered settler violence as it aggressively disciplined Indigenous women's sexualities and prohibited interracial intimacies. By systematically stripping official colonial Indian status of Indigenous women who refused to be governed by the heteropatriarchal settler-state, the Indian Act foreclosed the possibilities for intimacies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (and more specifically between Indigenous and racialized peoples).

Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson demonstrates the effects of the Indian Act in the Mohawk nation at Kahnawà:ke. By 1985, Kahnawà:ke had assimilated and incorporated some of the doctrines of the Indian Act, as Simpson observes: “Kahnawà:ke enforced Canada’s rules with respect to the women who married non-Indians, because the rules had become useful to some, men in particular, and perhaps because the power of white men was still threatening” (61). She traces the origins of the blood-quantum code in Kahnawà:ke to the Indian Act and Bill C-31. Before Bill C-31, in the 1970s, many community members were organizing on the questions of intermarriage with whites and membership policy resulting in the passing of the Moratorium on Mixed Marriages in 1981, where if Mohawks married non-Indians they lost status within the nation (62). Moreover, in 1984, the Mohawk Law on Membership was passed, which required all children born to Mohawk parents after 1948 to possess at least fifty percent blood quantum to be recognized as Kahnawà:ke (62). When Bill C-31 was passed in 1985, many in the community saw it as a threat to Mohawk sovereignty. In spite of the dominance of heteropatriarchal logics with the Mohawk nation and the settler state, Simpson illustrates the anti-settler state praxis within the nation. Many Mohawk peoples embody a “politics of refusal,” as Simpson elaborates:

They deploy it as a political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one’s distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized. Refusal comes with the requirement of having one’s *political* sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the questions of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing. (11, emphasis in original)

Bailey, the Mohawk woman in search of love, from *Mohawk Girls*, is an example of a Mohawk woman refusing heteropatriarchal laws imposed by her nation as well as the settler state by seeking out non-Native partners. Her desires and sexuality are beyond the boundaries prescribed on her body through centuries of gendered colonialism.

Connected to the regulation of interracial intimacies are the questions of blood, purity and Indianness. Writing about Hawai‘i, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui asserts that settler tools such as the blood quantum based racial classifications have sought to replace Indigenous notions of family, blood and ancestry; and in the process have drastic and damaging consequences for Indigenous peoples (3). She contends that blood quantum is a settler colonial project that seeks to dispossess and displace Indigenous peoples. On the question of “mixed race” or multiraciality, Kauanui asserts that whiteness is “a project of disappearance for Native peoples,” which engenders inauthenticity (10-11). Inauthenticity is produced through simultaneous processes of assimilation and dispossession (11). Joanne Barker argues that blood degree measures serve as “mechanism for a certain kind of racialization that is about making Native peoples the colonial-imperial (colonized-imperialized) subjects of U.S. power” (*Native Acts* 82). Further, this mechanism produces notions of in/authenticity, whereby tools of status and membership operate as an inclusionary/exclusionary logic on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality (83). Thus, we can see how the regulation of interraciality, even as we recognize the agency of Indigenous women, is a method to exclude Indigenous people from their nations and lands, and thereby, dispossessing them of their indigeneity. Through heteropatriarchal colonial tools such as the Indian Act, blood quantum and blood degree measures, and antimiscegenation laws (I come to these laws later in the section), settler states have sought to control Indigenous women’s bodies, sexualities and desires.

Similar to the regulation of Indigenous women’s sexualities, albeit at much different scale and intensity, Asian women’s sexualities have also been at the center of the formation and continuance of the Canadian settler state through the imposition of immigration controls on Asian women. Studying early twentieth century public debates on whether or not Chinese,

Japanese and South Asian women should be allowed into Canada, Ena Dua shows how processes of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, or what she calls “exclusion through inclusion” (“Exclusion through Inclusion”). The majority (politicians, journalists, bureaucrats and the public) of those who participated in these debates argued against the inclusion of Asian women. However, Dua notes, a small minority of people debated in favor of letting Asian women into Canada on the pretext that their presence would curb interracial intimacies between Asian men and white women. Dua's research on these debates between 1910-15, illustrates how South Asian women in Canada have been racialized and gendered, as well as how anxieties about interracial intimacies were central to their racialization and sexualization (“The Hindu Woman’s Question”). Those arguing against the immigration of South Asian women feared that South Asian women’s presence would enable South Asian men to settle in Canada—which would subsequently increase the population of non-whites in Canada (111). Meanwhile, those in favor of South Asian women’s immigration argued on the grounds of the nation-state’s maintenance of racial and sexual purity. Dua elaborates: “Underlying the argument that South Asian men deserved the right to have families was the fear of the sexuality of South Asian men—particularly the fear of sexual relations between South Asian men and white women” (112). Thus, South Asian women’s sexuality was at the center of their inclusion and exclusion within the Canadian state.

Within the U.S. context, anti-miscegenation laws were applied to Asian immigrant communities from the late 1880s to mid-twentieth century. Susan Koshy argues that these laws reaffirmed Asians as foreigners and as racial and sexual others. Anti-miscegenation laws were thus used to turn “sexual acts into racial acts,” thereby rendering white bourgeois sexual practices as normative and universal (*Sexual Naturalization* 1-2). These laws were applied to

Black, Native, Latino, and Asian communities, as well as for a period, white women who married Asian men were denaturalized. In due course, forty-one states had adopted anti-miscegenation laws: all these states prohibited any intermarriages with Black peoples, fourteen states banned white-Asian intermarriage, and seven had banned white-Indigenous intermarriages (3-4). I should note here, Koshy argues that patterns of white-Native and white-Mexican miscegenation differed significantly from that of white-Black miscegenation, and “the first two cases enabled some degree of social assimilation and provided mixed-race offspring restricted access to the privileges of whiteness,” whereas, white-Black miscegenation was “denied the legal protections and privileges of matrimony” (6). This analysis reduces the materialities of settler colonial logics. As noted above, miscegenation and multiraciality are settler colonial tools of appropriating Indigenous lands by dispossessing Indigenous peoples. Social assimilation and white privilege for multiracial Indigenous peoples comes at the cost of the denial or invisibilization of their indigeneity. Further, logics of anti-Blackness have been foundational to the state regulation of intimacies, as Sexton reminds us: “... white supremacy and antiblackness are fundamental relational processes unfolding between antimiscegenation and its necessary failure” (25).

In both the U.S. and Canada, interracial intimacies were regulated and discouraged by the settler state. Comparing anti-miscegenation laws in the U.S. and the Indian Act in Canada, Debra Thompson argues that both cases first, provide examples of the state’s “regulation of the intimate sphere” to maintain strict heteropatriarchies; second, demonstrate how the state’s “regulation of sexualities of certain identities” maintains sexual and racial normativities, and consequently, constructs “abnormalities”; third, are results of differing colonial and racial logics—in Canada, the state accumulated Indigenous lands through erasing indigeneity, and in the U.S., the state

invested in preserving racial hierarchies in order to exploit Black labour; and finally, both laws were state sanctioned (353-71). Further, such legislations were used to police transgressors of sexual intimacies and to regulate women's sexualities, including white women's sexual behavior (362-63). Contrary to Thompson's third argument, I contend that settler colonial modalities worked in similar ways in Canada and the U.S. to accumulate Indigenous lands and exploit Black labour. Rather than erasing slavery in Canada and settler colonialism in the U.S., I argue that it is through settler colonialism that the settler states have maintained their dominance over Indigenous and Black bodies; prohibiting interracial intimacies is part of that dominance. Therefore, settler colonialism and its anti-Black formations help to contextualize antimiscegenation and interracial intimacies.

In the above section, I focused on the curtailment of interracial intimacies by analyzing the structural nexus of racial-colonial-gender processes, through social, political, economic and legal means. While all the above laws and regulations sought to curb interracial intimacies predominantly between white and non-white peoples, I contend that the states were guided by ideologies of limiting all forms of intimacies between variously racialized and colonized peoples.<sup>6</sup> Lowe observes that colonial archives on interracial intimacies between differently colonized and racialized peoples are filled with fears and anxieties of "mixture and unstable boundaries" (*The Intimacies of Four Continents* 34). While maintaining racial purity was at the core of these logics, there were other overlapping tensions as well. Renisa Mawani argues that colonial state's anxieties around interracial proximities were more concentrated towards preventing crossracial relationships, as such encounters could possibly manifest into anti-colonial alliances (*Colonial Proximities* 15). Mawani notes regulations of interracial

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<sup>6</sup> On colonial anxieties, see: Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*; Mawani, *Colonial Proximities*; Mawani, "In between and out of Place"; J. Lo; and Bhabha.

heterosexual relations were connected to biopolitical fears of “racial purity, the future of white and Indian lives, and their regeneration” (168). These fears and apprehensions produced “illiberal reactions” from the settler state (14). For the colonizers these intimacies were dangerous and these groups needed to be kept divided and separate (Lowe 35). These anxieties, thus, had different implications for different bodies. In this section, I will explore how anxieties of land (for Indigenous peoples), labour (for Blacks) and citizenship (for Asians) were central to the regulation of interracial intimacies.

Despite of varying state prohibitions and interventions variously colonized and racialized peoples have forged intimacies over time in North America. Does that make these intimacies inherently anti-racist and anti-colonial? Jared Sexton, exploring questions of interracial sexuality, argues that interraciality “stands as a condition of possibility and a condition of impossibility for multiracialism” (8). These possibilities and impossibilities are what I explore in this chapter. Ferguson, Shah, Mawani and Koshy, have all argued for anti-racist and anti-colonial possibilities of interracial intimacies and relationships. For instance, Ferguson calls to see such non-normative intimacies as “offering ruptural—i.e., critical—possibilities,” which could engender “intersecting antiracist, feminist, class and queer struggles to emerge” (18). Similarly, Mawani notes: “Just as racial heterogeneity and interraciality produced shifting constellations of power, these conditions also created fissures and potentialities for anticolonial resistance and subversion” (*Colonial Proximities* 8). Below I explore these im/possibilities through some examples of South Asians intimacies with non-whites and non-South Asians from stories that have been documented within academic literatures.

Koshy notes how Chinese, Japanese, South Asian<sup>7</sup> and Filipino men actively married white women, and when opposition to such marriages increased, many started marrying Mexican and Indigenous women (8). South Asian interracial intimacies with Black and Puerto Rican women have been documented by Vivek Bald. He writes:

The networks that Indian Muslims formed—networks that were embedded in working-class Creole, African American, and Puerto Rican neighborhoods and entwined with the lives of their residents—represents a different pathway into the United States. All of the places where the peddlers and seamen put down roots—and Harlem more than any other—were receiving-stations for migrants and immigrants of color, particularly those displaced by white-supremacy in the U.S. South, and the military and economic pursuits of Britain and the United States in the Caribbean. (9)

Bald argues that interracial relationships and multiracial communities were a central part of South Asian experiences in the first half of the twentieth century. “They were dense, heterogeneous spaces,” for racialized groups of people who could not access the American dream, and enabled different forms of integration for different migrant communities (227).

Challenging heteronormative assumptions in theorizations of interracial intimacies, Nayan Shah offers non-heteronormative (albeit cis-men oriented) histories of colonial intimacies. By looking at “law as an archival repository, a form of knowledge and reasoning, and strategy of governance” (9), Shah illustrates alternative formations of intimacy, domesticity, and public erotics. He documents over a hundred cases of illicit sexual contact between South Asian, white, European immigrant, Chinese, and Indigenous men. Here, I offer two stories of contact between South Asian and Indigenous men from Shah’s work. The first story is of Tara Singh and Hector McInnes, a Native American from Sierra Nevada mountains. Singh was arrested in Sacramento in 1918 (75-78). Allegedly Singh had befriended McInnes and gave him money for food and

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Koshy uses “Asian Indians” for South Asians and “native Americans” for Indigenous peoples. She also uses “Mexicans” as a category for people from Mexico, where huge numbers of Mexicans are Indigenous peoples.

lodging; both rented adjoining rooms in a lodge. One early morning, two police officers arrived at the lodge “to pursue anonymous leads ‘on the streets’ that there ‘was a boy up there, with a Hindu” (76). Upon trial of the case, Shah notes that under pressure from the police, McInnes testified that Singh had allegedly felt his body and attempted to sexually assault him. Despite Singh’s denial of knowing McInnes, Singh was arrested for attempted sodomy. However, Judge Henderson questioned McInnes’ character and doubted his testimony. The case was dismissed in June 1918.

The second story is of two ranch workers on Sherman Island in 1924—Native American John Willis and South Asian Aijmad Khan (103-106). Willis and Khan shared a community bunkhouse with other South Asian workers. One night Willis alleged that Khan had attempted to assault him and filed a complaint in Georgina Township. Shah notes: “Willis was bewildered by the gender inversion and outraged at being taken for a passive, sexually available object of Khan’s lust” (103). In his plea, Willis asserted that his willingness to fight sexual perversity came from his Christian values. The judge admired his “intelligence, ‘clean-living’ morality, and ability to communicate in English” (104). That case was, however, later dismissed. Shah argues: “Willis’s dissatisfaction with the punishment and his isolation as a Native American laborer drove him to involve his supervisor and the police. In the process, his need for justice from the legal system made his bunkhouse ... suspicious of police power and feared that they might be harassed or humiliated” (104). These two stories document instances of queer interracial intimacies between South Asian and Indigenous men. Though alleged and frictional, the stories show how such intimacies existed. Shah notes how South Asian men’s sexualities were constructed as violent and pervasive, and how Indigenous men were simultaneously constructed

as unguided and abnormal (75-78, 103-106). The stories offer valuable insights into state's fear of such intimacies, and their regulation through violent methods.

Shah's intentions in the book are to unravel how the state disciplined, regulated, and prohibited South Asian men's intimacies with other men and women. He argues that regulations "both ultimately contributed to the wholesome criminalization of sodomy and homosexuality; regardless of consent, and simultaneously helped create and institutionalize normal American masculinity" (12). He contends that South Asian men and other racialized men were rendered "degenerates," "perverts," and "deviants" by normalizing white middle class heterosexual masculinities. He provides critical queer readings of white heteropatriarchal and heteronormative state archives and regulations to locate queer narratives. However, where do we recognize sexual violences in South Asian men's intimacies with other men and women? In the above two examples, both Indigenous men reported non-consensual sexual contact and violence from South Asian men; and in both cases, the settler state dismissed Indigenous men's accusations. In Shah's queer readings, such acts are interpreted through the lens of violences of the state against racialized queer subjects. Is it possible in critically engaging with state records, to sexual violences and Indigenous men's agencies? Whether or not Willis was shocked by the "gender inversion," whether or not both Indigenous men fabricated narratives in front of the state, and whether or not South Asian men sought consensual queer intimacies with these men, we see reports of sexual violences made by Indigenous men against South Asian men. These violences need to be critically evaluated and engaged with. Similarly, voices of Native men need to be heard. Furthermore, Indigenous and South Asian women are rendered invisible in these accounts. I come to these points later in the chapter. In this section, I share these stories to demonstrate the frictions and fissures in interracial intimacies between South Asian and Indigenous men.

Further exploring the conditions of im/possibility within interracial intimacies, I draw from Thompson's analysis. Using the example of the Indian Act, Thompson argues that interracial marriages for Indigenous women were neither transgressions nor did they assure racial and gender equality (364). Arguing against theorizing transgression of sexual regulations as anti-racist or anti-patriarchal acts, Thompson asserts:

Instances of interracial sex outside marriage reaffirmed racial and gendered stereotypes of the delinquent, degenerate, and lascivious Black Jezebel and the immoral, helpless and destitute Aboriginal Squaw. (365)

Thompson adds to Sexton's argument that there is no interracial sexual relationship that "does not resurrect the same racial frontier it purports to transgress or transcend" (154). He writes:

There is no *interracial* sexual relationship: the political inflection and social valorization of intimate interracial relationships and the related publicizing of multiracial identities reified schemes of racial categorization, reimposing notions of racial purity to substantiate claims of sexual transgression and racial mixture. There is no interracial *sexual* relationship ... Sexual practices are barred from consideration, desire as an element of the interracial relation is disavowed, and the complex interplay of race and sexuality is disciplined. There is no interracial sexual *relationship*: multiracialism refuses to countenance the fissure between the intermingling of racialized bodies and the social-symbolic effort to mediate racial antagonism at the levels of sexual practice and identity formation. (154, emphasis in the original)

I quote at length from Sexton to illustrate the conditions of im/possibilities. Arguing against the hopes of decolonial alliances within interracial intimacies, Sexton highlights how racial, gendered and sexual hierarchies and violences are maintained within such intimacies. Franz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* made a similar argument while analyzing interracial relations between a woman of colour and a white man, and a man of colour and a white woman. Fanon asserted that both Black men and women seek to assimilate into whiteness through their

intimacies with white counterparts.<sup>8</sup> For him interracial intimacies cannot transgress white supremacist structures without “a restructuring of the world” (82).

While presently these regulations are not strictly in place, I argue that interracial and crossracial intimacies in settler states are still produced, or not produced, through the past and ongoing processes of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy. Understanding contemporary formations of interraciality requires a deep engagement with multiple histories, bodies, and spaces. While an exhaustive engagement is not possible, for the purposes of this chapter I have offered an assemblage of scholarship on the regulation of interracial intimacies. This overview looked at the variances and complexities, as well as violences and complicities embedded in these intimacies. In the next section, I explore interracial intimacies as “colonial intimacies” to foreground the racial and colonial conditions of possibility and impossibility.

### **Theorizing Colonial Intimacies**

By bringing questions of interracial marriages and same-sex relations together in the formation of the North American West, Nayan Shah elaborates further by looking at the complexities of race, gender, and sexuality. Challenging historical theorizations of migrant intimacies, Shah calls for attention to, firstly, transient affinities between migrants; secondly, multiple forms of queered domesticities; and lastly, varying forms of erotics and “the dynamics of power involved in stabilizing and constraining human variation” (6-8). This allows for an analytical engagement with sexuality that accentuates the dynamicity of erotics and violences. Shah defines “stranger

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, Fanon writes: “I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*. Now...who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man. I am a white man. Her loves takes me onto the noble road that leads to total realization...I marry white culture, white beauty, white whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (63).

intimacy” between transient migrants that are not limited to dominant understandings of sexual and romantic relations. He adds:

Certainly migratory work and transportation crossroads produced environments of compulsory sociality, but it was the appetite for passionate engagement, the determination to smash alienation, and the desire for visceral solidarity that created both fleeting and enduring relationships. (55)

“Stranger intimacy” is a useful concept for analyzing such relationships between migrants, as it conceptualizes everyday proximities and encounters that either reproduced social hierarchies or subverted them through affinities (273). Similarly, Mawani argues that colonialism produced colonial proximities and crossracial intimacies between Indigenous people and Chinese migrants in B.C.—which “unfolded in overlapping temporalities that produced uneven and contradictory colonial geographies of racial power” (*Colonial Proximities* 4). Understanding such proximities “might illuminate the variegated forms, patterns, and rhythms that underpinned colonial encounters and the racial epistemologies and modes of regulation that contoured imperial terrains” (7). Shah and Mawani use “stranger intimacy” and “colonial proximities,” respectively, as concepts to theorize colonial, racial, and gendered processes that engender intimacies and proximities.

To ground critical analyses of the processes of settler colonial state formations, I call interracial and crossracial (normative and non-normative) intimacies as “colonial intimacies.” I understand colonial intimacies as a conceptualization of colonial processes that enables intimacies, proximities, and encounters; and as lived experiences of racialized, Blacks and Indigenous peoples and their desires, erotics, and intimacies with each other within settler colonial states.<sup>9</sup> I choose not to call these intimacies “interracial” as this term historically and

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<sup>9</sup> A review of academic literatures found several references to “colonial intimacies.” All these conceptualizations were historical and theorized white and non-white intimacies. This includes theorizations of Native and white settler intimacies in French Louisiana (Spear) and in New England (Plane), Californian Indians and Spanish-Mexicans in

contemporarily is often limited by white and non-white desires.<sup>10</sup> In popular imaginations, Kumiko Nemoto notes how interraciality reduces racial violences and “re-order(s) signs of race and gender according to traditional ideologies, and perpetuate the display of white manhood and womanhood as dominant” (“Interracial Romance” 222). Along with racial and gender normativities, interraciality is also heteronormatively limited, erasing queer, genderqueer and trans desires as well.<sup>11</sup> For colonized and racialized peoples, their “interracial” desires and erotics are shaped through and maintained by colonial and white supremacist processes.

Further, I draw from critiques of multiraciality (the term is used for theorizing multiple racial genealogies through interracial miscegenation) to think through colonial intimacies. Jinthana Haritaworn argues that multiraciality has become key in producing geopolitical formations of the west as “sexually exceptional,” and free of violences on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality (3). Sexton further adds by arguing that multiraciality “neither [a] fundamental challenge to the living legacies of white supremacy nor a defiance of sexual racism in particular but rather the reinforcement of longstanding tenets of antiblackness and the promotion of normative sexuality” (1). Thus, discourses of multiraciality are maintained within the logics of white supremacy and anti-blackness.<sup>12</sup> I argue that discourses and political affects

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California (Perez), Indian “native” women and British men in British India (Motrescu-Mayes), and Burmese “native” women and European men in Burma (Ikeya). In this chapter, however, I theorize “colonial intimacies” as intimacies between South Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada, i.e. intimacies between differently colonized and racialized peoples in white settler states.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance: Daroya; Han; Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization*; Lim; Nemoto, *Racing Romance*; Nemoto, “Interracial Romance”; and Nguyen.

<sup>11</sup> At the same time, even in heteronormative relations, interraciality is not that prevalent. For instance, Zhenchao Quin notes that about 92 per cent of all interracial marriages in the U.S. included white partners, and only 4 per cent of married whites had non-white partners (34).

<sup>12</sup> Sexton further argues that monoraciality and heterosexuality are central to maintaining multiraciality. Additionally, Haritaworn has pointed out that ableism is never questioned in these logic of reproduction. They argue against Sexton’s optimism for “queer as a necessarily radical project” (9). They contend to “denaturalize a monoracially conceived view of the resulting categories and to delink reproduction from biology” (9), and to engender possibilities “of multiple allegiances and membership contestations with more than one imagined community” (9).

of interraciality serve similar purposes and seek to invisibilize interrelated processes of settler colonialism and anti-blackness.

Thus, to understand erotics between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, interraciality offers a limited lens. With the concept of “colonial intimacies,” I seek to go beyond interraciality, by formulating a framework that centers coloniality in understanding these encounters. Analyzing through colonial intimacies also allows for a fuller engagement with gender, sexual, and racial formations in settler-colonial states. Furthermore, these intimacies take multiple forms, across all genders and sexualities, which may manifest as acts of subversion or complicity, spaces of love or intimate violence, of permanence or transience, of reproduction or recreation, of capitalist production or anti-colonial solidarity. With the framework of colonial intimacies, we can account for how these intimacies may go beyond all such binaries, but may also be contained within racial, gender and sexual violences.

In the above discussion, using a multitude of examples of colonial intimacies, I have demonstrated these simultaneous conditions of possibility and impossibility of colonial intimacies. Instead of resolving these tensions, I argue for theorizing colonial intimacies as a continuum of possibilities and impossibilities. There is nothing inherently transgressive or decolonizing in colonial intimacies, nor are such intimacies reducible to violent logics of power. Rather, we have to acknowledge the complexities and complicities such relations manifest. I return to this continuum later in the chapter when I discuss “haunting intimacies” and “decolonial love.” In the next section, I briefly explore instances of Asian-Indigenous intimacies in Asian Canadian literatures. This discussion will allow me to critically engage with short stories by Binning and Highway in the following sections.

## Exploring Asian-Indigenous Intimacies

Within academic literatures there is a limited discussion and documentation of colonial intimacies. In this void, I turn to literary and creative texts as important sites to find traces of such intimacies. “North American” literatures, such as Asian Canadian, Asian American, and Indigenous, have engaged and drawn upon relations between Indigenous peoples and Asian communities. These texts are critical as they shed more light on Asian-Indigenous intimacies. In this section, I engage with some canonical Asian Canadian literary texts that center colonial intimacies between Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada.

There are traces of colonial intimacies between Asians and Indigenous peoples in Asian Canadian literature, including the works of Tamai Kobayashi's *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction* (1998), Joy Kogawa's *Itsuka* (1993), and SKY Lee *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990). Each text provides different facets of colonial intimacies, solidarities, and frictions. Reflecting on the works of Joy Kogawa and SKY Lee, Marie Lo demonstrates how indigeneity is mobilized within Asian American literatures to contest marginalization of Asian Canadians. She argues that representation of Indigenous peoples and their struggles within Asian Canadian literatures renders Indigenous peoples as “model minority”—“as models of anti-racist resistance and as enabling figures of social-political critique” (n.pag.)—which Asian Canadians need to emulate.<sup>13</sup> Further, Lo contends, colonial romance between Indigenous and Asian Canadian characters reimagines the traditional Asian family as a hybridized Native-Asian “multiracial” family, thereby enabling Asian Canadian claims to belonging to Canada (n.pag.). I argue this belonging is akin to claims and attempts of white settler belonging to Canada. Indigenous writer Philip Deloria writes about the settler’s desire to “play Indian,” He argues: “Americans wanted to feel a

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<sup>13</sup> I engage with Lo’s formulation of “model minority” in Chapter 5.

natural affinity with the continent, and it was Indians who could teach them such aboriginal closeness” (5). White settlers have always sought to perform this proximity to indigeneity, what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call “*to become without becoming [Indian]*” (14, italics and square brackets in original). In the stories discussed in this chapter, we see Asian claims to indigeneity as well. However, I contend that unlike white settlers, racialized “settlers” cannot play the Indian, they may claim it but never be Indian. Yet, the claims to “belonging” by white and racialized “settlers” is invested in a settler futurity that is “dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity” (14). This speaks to the racial and colonial logics of the settler states and the complexities of racial complicities in the reproduction of the settler state.

Analyzing Naomi, a Japanese Canadian woman, in Kogawa's *Itsuka*, and her romance with Father Cedric, a French Canadian Métis priest, Lo points at the trajectory of Naomi's political awakening to that of her sexual awakening and her relationship with Father Cedric. Naomi's involvement with the Japanese Canadian redressal movement, along with her relationship with Father Cedric highlights how “this liberal humanist coalition potentially also displaces decolonization struggles” (n.pag.). Thus, while the novel critiques Canadian nationalism and racial exclusion of Japanese Canadians, it ends up making alternate national claims to the Canadian state by positing decolonization struggles into a liberal multicultural framework.

Looking at the relationship between Wong Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, and Kelora, the half Chinese-half Shi'atko woman who rescues Gwei, in Lee's *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Marie Lo argues that the story can “be read as a cautionary tale on the dangers of a belief in racial purity and of Chinese Canadian internalization of the terms of Canadian assimilation” (n.pag.). In the novel, the Wong family has established a successful business. Their success is however

rooted through a rejection of their Native family, and further, by erasing the intimacies between Native peoples and the Chinese in Canada. The Wong family's fear of miscegenation and multiraciality mirrors the state-sanctioned antimiscegenation logics. In her reading of the novel, Rita Wong argues how the novel imagines a potential alliance between two people excluded by the Canadian state. Kelora allows Gwei Chang into her community and "makes possible a relationship to the land [for him] that is not codified into the property laws of the nation" (n.pag.). However, we still witness the limits to such intimacies. Wong points to the logics of the settler state—like the Indian Act and the Immigration Act—that have kept Indigenous and Asian peoples apart and divided from each other (n.pag.). She asks:

How does one assess the ways in which Chinese people have been implicated, albeit inadvertently, in their own ethnic containment within a Canadian nation-state that is itself a violent imposition upon indigenous land? (n.pag.)

Wong asks questions of complexities and complicities in her reading of other Asian Canadian texts as well in her article "Decolonizasian"—a wordplay on the words decolonization and Asian. She asks how can Asian authors make references to indigeneity without relying on prevailing racist and settler colonial logics of talking about indigeneity. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

Wong also discusses Tamai Kobayashi's *Exile and the Heart: Lesbian Fiction* (1998), a collection of short stories centred on intimacies of Asian lesbians and other lesbians. In "Wind" Kobayashi writes about a relationship between Kathy Nakashima, a Japanese Canadian woman, and Jan Lalonde, a Métis woman. Kathy burns her family's redress letter of apology, while Jan is studying land claims in Canadian Law. Kobayashi traces their relationship through different stories even when the two are no longer together. Kathy and Jan's relationship offers a different way of understanding colonial intimacies, a different narrative from the above stories. Kobayashi

shows possibilities for colonial intimacies which can challenge the settler colonial logics. Wong notes of these possibilities: “Here relationships are temporal, geographically situated on (de)colonized land, and open to negotiation and change” (n.pag.). Wong and Kobayashi espouse similar hope in colonial intimacies as Shah, Mawani and others. However, through the stories in *Itsuka* and *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, we can see the other end of the intimacies spectrum of possibilities and impossibilities. I return to the questions of spectrum after the discussion on the stories.

There is significant effacement of Indigenous-South Asian colonial intimacies in Canada. From popular discourses to academic literature, there is a marked absence of these intimacies. Even within South Asian communities, these relations are invisibilized. In my research I came across limited examples of such colonial intimacies. In the following sections, I draw upon Tomson Highway’s short story “The Lover Snake” (1985) and Sadhu Binning’s short story “Eyes in the Dark” (2014) to understand colonial intimacies between Indigenous peoples and South Asians in Canada.

### **Sadhu Binning: Stories of Intimacy, Citizenship, and Abandonment**

Sadhu Binning is a Punjabi poet, author, playwright, performer, teacher, and activist based out of Vancouver. He has been pivotal to South Asian political, literary, and cultural organizing in the Lower Mainland since the 1970s. “Eyes in the Dark” was published in his anthology *Fauji Banta Singh and other stories* in 2014. The anthology is a translated collection of short stories written in Punjabi in the ‘80s – ‘90s. These stories offer a lens to critically understand Punjabi migration to Lower Mainland in the late twentieth century. I chose “Eyes in the Dark” as it specifically

talks about intimacy between a Punjabi man and a Native woman, and highlights the silences and violences rooted in the formations of colonial intimacies.

I met Sadhu for the first time in April 2013. According to him, several Punjabi men sought out sexual/romantic/marital relations with Native women in Lower Mainland, and across B.C., because of how South Asians and Indigenous peoples were similarly racialized. He pointed to “Eyes in the Dark” which touched on the subject. It was during our conversation that he told me about Punjabi men marrying Native women for citizenship in the ‘70s – ‘80s. The story, written in a third person voice, tells the reader about Parminder (who also went by Peter), a Punjabi migrant, and his relationship with Sara, a Native woman from “Prince Rupert or somewhere near there” (64). We learn about the relationship when Parminder visits his friend Piara.<sup>14</sup> As they start drinking, Piara informs Parminder that he is expecting his friend Nanju to come with a Native woman. This woman, Piara tells Parminder:

Looks like a Punjabi woman and even understands and speaks a bit of Punjabi. She can cook our food, does all the work in the house. I heard that she was married to a Punjabi and when he got his immigration status, he kicked her out. She had a three- or four-year-old son and that bastard didn’t care about the boy either. (64)

Sara comes to Parminder’s mind as he hears Piara talking about the Native woman. Nanju brings the Native woman to Piara’s home, along with her son. Parminder finds the boy’s eyes to be familiar. He is able to only catch a glimpse of the woman sitting on the other couch, as she is drunk and covering her face. Vaguely recognizing Sara and scared to look further, Parminder leaves the house. The recurring theme of abandoned mixed-Native children in both Binning and Lee’s stories is very telling. Native children born out of colonial intimacies are as disposable as

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<sup>14</sup> Parminder visits Piara after his wife delivered a baby girl earlier in the day. We learn that Piara anticipated Parminder’s grief of having a daughter and while offering Parminder a drink, Piara says: “Man, I got worried about you ever since you told me this morning that your wife had a baby girl. I know how it is. I thought you probably needed cheering up” (64).

the Native women in these stories. While Asian Canadian children can claim citizenship in Canada and access to their communities, multiracial Indigenous children are often left out of these communities. Moreover, while Punjabi men could gain Canadian citizenship, Native women and their children from these marriages lost their Indian status and band memberships. As pointed earlier in the chapter, Indian Act stripped Native women from their Native status for marrying non-Native men till 1985. Thus, as Parminder married Sara before 1985, both Sara and her son lost their Indigenous status. As Parminder become Canadian, Sara and her son lost their status, and concomitantly their indigeneity.

Parminder had moved to Canada in 1973 on a visitor visa. Looking to get permanent status in Canada and companionship—“longing for women”—Parminder soon learns that “native women were more accepting of Punjabi men than white women were” (66). Shy about talking to women, he gains confidence in talking to Native women while they are intoxicated. He starts courting his neighbour’s niece Sara in explicit pursuit of gaining citizenship through marriage. At first, Sara is hesitant in getting involved with Parminder, but he soon convinces her.<sup>15</sup> After marrying they move in together into a small basement apartment. The story tells us:

He taught Sara some Punjabi dishes to cook. In many ways, she was like a typical Punjabi girl. She did not drink or smoke and never went outside the house by herself. She kept the little place clean, cooked for Parminder, washed his clothes, and more than anything else, she loved him. After a while, Parminder started to offer her liquor, which she refused at first, but then began to have a drink or two with him. (69)

We learn in the story that introducing Sara to alcohol was Parminder’s calculated plan. After acquiring landed immigrant status, he wants a legal divorce from Sara, so that he could go back to India and get married to a girl of his choice. Parminder accuses her of being “no different than the rest of the Indian whores” (69), with the racially scripted violent message of inherent

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<sup>15</sup> He told Sara: “Sara, I am good person. You can trust me” (67), and “Nobody will ever leave you Sara, I love you” (68).

alcoholism and promiscuity endemic to Native women.<sup>16</sup> We are told how Sara takes up drinking and becomes quieter as Parminder becomes more abusive. When Sara reveals she is pregnant, Parminder again accuses her of “sleeping around,” and one final day he gets her drunk and makes her sign the divorce papers (70). Soon after, he finds a job in a sawmill elsewhere, buys a house and went goes to India to get married.

In this story, Binning captures and critiques Punjabi masculinity and gendered violences he witnessed around himself in the ‘70s – ‘80s, paying special attention to the power dynamics between Indigenous peoples and South Asians. In my research, I heard narratives of such intimacies/violences only through him and his brother Paul Binning. Whenever I asked questions to other respondents, both on and off the “field,” about sexual and romantic proximities between Indigenous peoples and South Asians, I was met with silences and disbelief. This was the case with lumber and cannery workers as well as activists, academics, and artists within progressive spaces—for the most part no one had ever heard of such stories. Binning’s story is one of very few examples of colonial intimacies over the span of over a century that I was able to find.

Even media exposés of “marriages of convenience” for immigration in the ‘80s – ‘90s only reported cases between Punjabi men and white women—even though many such marriages were between Punjabi men and Native women.<sup>17</sup> There are no public archives of such intimacies.

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<sup>16</sup> It also shows Indigenous women as already survivors of such violences that they would be so dominated by Punjabi men.

<sup>17</sup> Fear mongering and xenophobic tactics in the media were present throughout the 1970s and 80s. In the 1970s, detecting and stopping “marriage scams” became a major preoccupation of social forces that sought to stop East Indian migration to Canada. Articles aggressively blamed South Asians for their alleged involvement in smuggling and pursuing “marriages of convenience.” For example, an article “Their promised land” in *The Vancouver Daily Province* in 1971 reported that East Indians move to Canada by paying “excessive and frequently unnecessary fees” to agents who guarantee “the would-be immigrant a rich new life in the land of unlimited opportunity – Canada” (Hunter). According to the reporter there were over twenty such agents who made hundreds and thousands of dollars in various immigration rackets in B.C. Duped by such agents, Hunter reported on recent cases of “marriage-of-convenience” involving East Indians seeking landed immigrant status and Canadian women prepared to go through the marriage ceremony for cash. Marriages were arranged by specialty brokers for \$2000, plus \$500 for a “guaranteed” divorce. However, the reporter argued that the “young girls from good homes” are under the misguided belief that “they are doing their part to help the underprivileged.” Such reporting only accelerated as the

Sadhu elaborated on these effacements: “This is an aspect of the community that we would never really know anything about because nobody talks about it or wants to talk about it. So it is people who did [it] knew it and no one else knew it.”<sup>18</sup> He further expounded on these relations:

One of the problems was that the majority of the people who came here in the 60s were not educated. They didn’t know English and that was a big problem. So if they were looking for women they needed to at least be able to talk to them. The new people who came later were more educated and knew English, so things changed. But in late 60s and early 70s, there are some jokes about this; like this one is from Kamloops: this guy who worked in a saw mill used to go to the beer parlour on weekends and he would say after having a few beers to a Native woman – “You and me five dollars, ok?” That’s how many of our people will talk and she will know what he was talking about ... You know men mostly lived together and they would probably have some kind of arrangements with Native women. Maybe sometimes in groups of two-three men ... But I think it changed quickly.

Paul Binning, Sadhu’s brother and founder of the Paar Club,<sup>19</sup> a bhangra group comprised of boys and young men based out of Vancouver in the 1980s, similarly recounted sexual relations between Punjabi men and Native women: “When they would go to the pub, they would get drunk and they would bring a girl home. Few people will have the pleasure and then kick them out of the door.” He further expanded on “marriages of convenience”:

That happened a lot in big numbers. But that was more or less of a business transaction. There was always money involved ... those days not much maybe \$4000-\$5000... They all divorced as soon as they got immigration papers. Immigration wasn’t that tough those days like now. You went to the lawyer, lawyer took your papers to immigration, interviews and it was done.

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decade went along, with heightened surveillance and policing of South Asians and their marriages. By July 1971, twenty four arrests had been made (“More Arrests in Marriage Racket Here”). In August, the federal justice department laid charges against 36 persons charged with conspiracy in alleged marriage of convenience and named another 93 as conspirators (“Marriage Racket Trials Set”). As these cases progressed and more and more marriages were being held in suspicion and investigations. By the early 1980s, the Canadian state started imposing more restrictions on South Asians coming to Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Sadhu further said: “Because they never really talked about it or really owned that information. So I think it probably skipped their minds. Maybe genuinely they are saying they don’t know. At one point they may have heard about these things but now they would deny such things. So they’re probably not really lying.”

<sup>19</sup> I talk about Paar Club in Chapter 5.

Even though mainstream media did not report such marriages, according to Binning, they were prevalent and involved large sums of money. In Paul and Sadhu Binning's accounts, in spite the lack of documented evidence and absences of memory a significant economy of marriage and citizenship existed between Punjabis and Indigenous peoples; even as Indigenous women and their descendants lost their status permanently till 1985. This speaks to the materialities of Indigenous women's lives and settler colonial violences, where they would exchange their Indian status for money.

As I mentioned earlier, colonial intimacies remain largely erased. Paul expands on the ontology of denials and silences from South Asians, particularly men:

They won't. I mean I can introduce you to hundred people who have done that. There were thousands. It was happening in Vancouver, in Williams Lake, everywhere. And that was a common practice amongst Punjabi men...why would they talk about that? That would make them racist themselves. You [Punjabi men] are the poor guy who got beaten up and are the victim. Why you want to admit that you made somebody else a victim of racism too?

As a matter of fact, these gendered and racial tensions often resulted in struggles between Punjabi men and Native men. I explore these tensions in terms of the economy in Chapter 5, where these men would fight over "job stealing." However, as Paul and Sadhu, pointed out, along with other respondents like Gurpreet Singh,<sup>20</sup> sexual tensions were also a major factor behind the fights and quarrels. Gurpreet mentioned how Punjabi men were known to stare "creepily" at other women (Native and white) in public spaces. He argued that this staring was one of the reasons that Indigenous and white people had *nafrat* (hatred) towards them. Paul further elaborated:

A lot of these Indo-Canadians were young men...they would abuse Native women. That was a factor too in them [Native men] coming back and getting after us. We were always abusive towards Native women...and that is something that should not be hidden from

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<sup>20</sup> I share Gurpreet Singh's story and analysis in Chapter 5. Singh is retired in Vancouver. He worked in Quesnel in a lumber mill. This name is a pseudonym.

the history. It's not that they were pissed off because we were taking away their jobs; we were also abusing their women.

Thus, sexual proximities (between Punjabi men and Native women) were central to relations between Punjabis and Indigenous peoples. These proximities and intimacies often resulted in violence between the two communities.<sup>21</sup> Binning's story remains one of the very few narratives available from that time. These intimacies remain largely forgotten and silenced. While Binning's story is an important example, ironically, in Binning's efforts to demonstrate solidarity, the story remains grounded in colonial logics. Firstly, Indigenous-South Asian intimacies get rendered, or reduced, to primarily heterosexual desire and reproduction. And secondly, Binning's work leaves Native women silenced and passively victimized. I further explore these heteropatriarchal and heteronormative limitations of in the following sections.

### **Tomson Highway: Poetics of a "Fine-boned" Intimacy**

In this section, I discuss Tomson Highway's short story, "The Lover Snake." Highway is a Cree playwright, novelist, pianist, and songwriter. Highway's work has received international recognition and he has been central in creating Canadian and global platforms for Indigenous storytelling. Highway's story is a story of queer colonial intimacy between an Indigenous man and a Punjabi man, narrated in the queer Indigenous man's voice.

"The Lover Snake" is a two-page story written in first person voice tells the story of two lovers, "more than friends, more than brothers, more than lovers, even"—a Sikh man, Dahljeet,

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<sup>21</sup> However, in popular imagination these racial tensions were often blamed on economic conditions. Processes of racism were, as they continue to be, more intersectional than they are understood as. As much as these conflicts and fights were about racism and xenophobia, they were also about existing sexual desires, amongst other things. I explore this further in Chapter 5.

and a Cree man, the narrator (334). From the beginning the readers are told of the differences between the two men:

An unusual alliance, people would observe from time to time. And between us, Dahljeet and me, we would agree that the friendship was an unusual friendship. I mean, there he was, very much an Indian and here I was, also very much an Indian. Only, we were such totally different kinds of Indian. Worlds apart. So different, it was laughable. And we'd laugh. North Cree hunter ambles down the slope of Robson Street beside north Indian maharajah. An odd pair. To be sure. (333-34)

The story is filled with clichéd stereotypes of Indians from India—maharajahs, turbans, beards, elephant parades, royal weddings, rainbow-coloured saris, silver, gold and diamonds, and cobras.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, we learn about Indigenous peoples and their lands with clichés such as “moccasins and belts with the most fanciful patterns” and “pure white snow and of rivers that never run dry” (334). Highway employs these clichéd descriptors, with an orientalist gaze, to mark the seeming gulf of differences between the two kinds of Indians—pre-scripted Indians. Unlike the Native woman in Binning's story who is “like a typical Punjabi woman,” in Highway's story we are told again and again that the two Indians come from “worlds apart.” This is an important difference between the two stories; in Highway's story the impulse is not to equate the different experiences of racialization into one, but rather the cultural descriptors, albeit essentialized, work to keep questions of coloniality central to understanding colonial intimacies.

We learn in the story that the two men are no longer together: “Many, many years later, Dahljeet and I ceased to be friends. Something happened” (335). The reader is never directly told

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, one excerpt from the story describes the Sikh male as follows: “The magazine photograph is of a Sikh. A male Sikh. Male Sikhs wear turbans. It's a tradition that goes back many, many generations, so it is said. You can always tell a Sikh when you see one by the turban he wears. Most, as I recall, also wear beards like this one in the photograph does. Fine beards. A fine-boned people. This particular Sikh, the man in the photograph, has, pictured with him, the uppermost portion of a large snake slithering down over the front and center of the bright orange turban he wears, the reptile's diamond-shaped head, with its distended eyes, hovering just centimeters over the man's forehead, its flickering tongue slicing air between his eyes. This is the photograph in the magazine” (333).

what happened; instead we know through the narration that “something” drastic took place between the two men. The protagonist, on the one hand, refuses to believe the relationship finished its “natural course of events,” while on the other hand, he claims the story of the relationship is of “no consequence, no fantastic substance” (335). Triggered by looking at the photograph of a Sikh man in a magazine, the narrator thinks: “The cobra, the lover snake, come to lay claim to his over-zealous hunter, his nervous little man. And kill him...kill...kill...” (335). Earlier, we are told a story previously told to the narrator by Dahljeet that when an “overzealous hunter, some nervous little man” (334) kills a cobra, the cobra’s mate finds the hunter, across long distances and time, to hunt the hunter. “Then, and only, then, will that cobra, the lover snake, lie down and die” (335). What is Highway telling us through the tale of the cobra hunting the hunter? What can we learn about the Cree narrator and his lover? How can we read the figure of the cobra along with and beyond its phallogentric homoeroticism? How can we understand queered colonial intimacies?

Highway is known for narrating stories through the figure of the trickster. In Indigenous storytelling the figure of the trickster embodies roles between the sacred, prankster, transgression and imagination.<sup>23</sup> Highway specifically uses the Cree trickster, Weesageechak, “that half-crazed little Cree Indian clown whom no one’s ever seen” (334). It is believed that Weesageechak can take different forms and disguise. The protagonist has dedicated his life to revive Weesageechak, “that essential spirit many had thought was on his way to dying” (335). While I want to avoid a settler-romanticized and decontextualized reading of the trickster in the story, the telling of the story using Indigenous epistemologies, perhaps, is to symbolize destructive aspects of the relationship. Further, I do want to ask whether Highway is using stories of the Weesageechak

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<sup>23</sup> For a more critical analysis on tricksters see Fagan; Sinclair.

and cobra to draw connections between the Indian philosophies and mythologies. Both the Weesageechak and the cobra deployed as Indian mythical characters, play central roles in the telling of the story. Is it a gesture towards understanding “shared” Indianness between the two Indians?

We do not have any more clues about the mystery of their relationship in the story. But if we read closely, we may see that perhaps political and personal differences resulted in the two Indians’ breakup. We know Dahljeet and the protagonist were more than friends/brothers/lovers in their early days. Were they comrades in political struggles? Did they share common political goals, as two different Indians? As grown men in their thirties, Dahljeet is an academic in Vancouver, and teaches “some obscure Eastern philosopher whose work relies to a great degree on the inner workings of myth and legend” (335), whereas the protagonist, “half crazed,” is working on reviving Weesageechak—the Indigenous philosophies which are thought to be long dead. The protagonist, indeed, is reviving Cree culture, working on Indigenous resurgence and fighting for self-determination, while Dahljeet is an academic in a colonial university, an institution complicit in Indigenous dispossession. Further, the academy works within colonial epistemologies that disconnects praxis from theory, myth from reality, abstract from materiality, past from present, colonialism from “postcolonialism.” Thus, the academy allows Dahljeet to work on Eastern philosophies alienated and disengaged from “Indigenous philosophies.” It is indeed easy to study “far” off—temporally and spatially—legends, and not to engage with Indigenous resurgence. Perhaps, political and academic differences were the reasons for their breakup, for the men being “no longer friends” (335).

Did Dahljeet’s inability to see Weesageechak make him more colonized, and thereby more complicit in the colonization of Indigenous peoples? Is the hunter who murdered one-half

of the lover-snake the “academic” that came to define Dahljeet? Or, further, the whiteness in Dahljeet? We must question – who then is the “overzealous hunter”? Could one such figuration be the colonized subject that is complicit in the colonization of others? Do colonial violences instigate heteropatriarchal violences on queer love? Does Dahljeet become “straight” through complicity with heteropatriarchal colonial structures? Further, is the cobra the form of the lover? Will the lover snake kill the “settler-within” Dahljeet? Or will the snake kill Dahljeet himself? Does the “settler” need to die for Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty? Or is the cobra representing a toxic colonized South Asian settlerness that is “hunting down” the Cree? I explore the questions of killing and solidarity further in the next section, but for the purposes of this section, I want to argue that both stories by Highway and Binning demonstrate the limits of colonial intimacies, albeit in different ways. The two Indians, queer or not, differently racialized and colonized, form intimacies on stolen lands, only through their simultaneous inclusion and exclusion within the settler state (Dua). I explore questions of haunting and solidarity in the works of Highway and Binning in the following sections. In the next section, I briefly provide a conceptualization of Indigenous queer and two-spirit desires and intimacies.

### **Understanding Indigenous Queer and Two-Spirit Desires**

Exploring both heteronormative and queer intimacies above, I do not want to posit non-heteronormative intimacies as more transgressive. Queer of colour theorizations have demonstrated that queerness has the potential to be assimilated into imperialist, neo-colonial, and nationalist projects.<sup>24</sup> Thus, queerness is not inherently transcendental of gender, sexual, and racial hierarchies. However, without privileging non-heteronormative intimacies over

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<sup>24</sup> On queer of color theorizations, see: Alexander; Eng; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, and Posocco; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem; J. Puar; and Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*.

heteronormative, by centring Two-Spirit and Indigenous queers and women, I explore colonized and racialized queer and trans bodies, experiences, desires, and erotics. Leanne B. Simpson (Alderville First Nation) shows the limitations of critiquing patriarchal relations by centering cisgender men and women, and exhorts to see colonial construction of gender, sex, sexuality, and intimacy as “a violent and strategic dispossessing force, removing bodies from the land” (n.pag.). Similarly, Driskill et al., editors of *Queer Indigenous Studies*, argue that heteronormativity is the marker for settler colonial logics and undermines struggles for decolonization and sovereignty (19). Driskill, Justice, et al., editors of *Sovereign Erotics*, call for “a return to [Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit peoples] bodies as whole human beings [which] can disrupt colonial gender regimes that have attempted to disavow and colonize indigenous genders and sexualities” (3).

Qwo-Li Driskill calls for an assertion of “sovereign erotics”—a phrase coined by them in their essay “Stolen From Our Bodies,” Driskill writes:

When I speak of a Sovereign Erotic, I’m speaking of an erotic wholeness healed and/or healing from the historical trauma that First Nations people continue to survive, rooted within the histories, traditions, and resistance struggles of our nations. (51)

A “Sovereign Erotic” is, thus, a continuance of pre-contact and post-contact gender and sexual relations that are grounded in the struggles against settler colonialism (56-57). Sovereign erotics allow for an avowal of Native queer and Two-Spirit peoples. This opens up decolonial possibilities for love, erotics, desires and intimacies. Similarly, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) asserts that every act of sexual orgasm has the potential to be an act of decolonization (106). Driskill draws from Audre Lorde notion of “Erotic as Power,” where Lorde elaborates on the erotic as “the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling ... every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change” (“Uses of the Erotic” 53). Thus, unleashing the power of the erotic

can give the energy to “change within our world” (59). Jacqui Alexander likewise talks about women’s “erotic autonomy”—which poses a threat to the ideology of nuclear heterosexual family, and thereby the nation-state (22-23). By looking at Indigenous queer women’s desires, Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esslen Nation and Chumash) illustrates: “For Indian women to express the erotic is almost as frightening to America as if the skeletal witnesses in anthropology departments and national museums had suddenly risen from their boxes and begun to testify” (146). Thus, Indigenous queer and Two-Spirit desires are central to the project of decolonization of Indigenous lands. I briefly provided this overview, to engage with questions of gender and sexuality in the stories by Binning and Highway. Grounding my analysis in the voices of Indigenous women, queer, and Two-Spirit folks is pertinent to challenge the erasure of these voices and bodies in the settler state.

### **Theorizing Haunting Intimacies: Silences and Solidarities**

On his deathbed, in Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Gwei Chang, a Chinese man, remembering his lover Kelora, half Chinese-half Shi’atko woman, says: “You’ve been haunting me all my life” (236). Hauntingness is central to Gwei Chang and Kelora’s colonial intimacy. For instance, Marie Lo notes Ting An (son of Kelora and Gwei Chang) has an ability to deal with ghosts, which is attributed to his native ancestry (n.pag.). Ting An and his mother, Kelora, are believed to have a ghostliness around them which renders them different than others. Haunting is also a recurring theme in Binning and Highway’s stories as well. In “Eyes in the Dark,” Parminder sees the eyes of the son, and “For a moment, Parminder thought he had seen those eyes before” (65). Those eyes remind him of Sara, the Native woman he married to seek citizenship. In “The Lover Snake,” the photograph of the Sikh on the cover of the magazine makes the protagonist think of

his Sikh lover: “I wonder if that isn’t Dahljeet there in his brilliant orange turban and his fine, dark beard” (335). Intriguingly, both stories talk of intimacies as haunting. It is through the haunting eyes and haunting photograph that we learn of their past lovers and colonial intimacies.

On ghosts and hauntingness, Indigenous author Sherman Alexie writes: “In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts” (95). Ghosts and hauntingness are integral to settler colonial processes. Eve Tuck and C. Ree argue that settler colonialism is “an ongoing horror made invisible by its persistence” (642). Settler colonialism then entails killing Indigenous peoples to make them into ghosts, “once and future ghosts” (642), in order to appropriate, usurp, occupy and colonize Indigenous lands (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 12). Tuck and Ree elaborate on hauntingness:

... [It] is the relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by settler society’s assurances of innocence and reconciliation. Haunting is both acute and general; individuals are haunted, but so are societies. The United State is permanently haunted by slavery, genocide, and violence entwined in its first, present and future days ... For ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved. (642)

Hauntingness is a constant reminder of the past and a call for the future to be decolonized. It is symbolic and relevant then to talk about the haunting past lovers in the stories mentioned above. The past lovers in these stories are ghosts of the past, ghosts of genocide, ghosts of exclusion, ghosts of abandonment, ghosts of colonial and racial violences. For the lovers to haunt is to remind the readers of the violences of the colonial intimacies, and also perhaps to resolve and heal from the violences. Indian and other-Indian only come together and pursue (haunting) desires within the context of colonialism. I call these colonial intimacies “haunting intimacies” as they are developed within the structures of settler colonial logics, where desires, violences and silences are continuously haunting and haunted. These intimacies, proximities and encounters,

straight or queer, abusive or loving, one time or long term, violent or transgressive, and beyond these limiting binaries, are all made possible through settler colonial processes. Colonialism maintains haunting logics, or vice-versa, hauntingness remains colonial.

Talking about “haunting” presence of Indigenous peoples and people of colour within the Canadian nation, Larissa Lai asks: “What then of agency, subjectivity, and sense of self for those who must occupy the site of haunting, those who, in essence, have no essence?” (8). I take her question to ask, how do we engage with agency and voices of the haunted? As I note above, Indigenous voices are often erased and silenced in the making of colonial intimacies. The silences of these intimacies are always haunting and are maintained through colonial violences. There are significant silences around Indigenous-South Asian intimacies, from popular discourses to academic literature, and even within the communities themselves. Both Binning and Highway’s stories are attempts to reveal these intimacies and give them voices. Both authors write these stories from a place of solidarity, to unravel shared and different, complicit and contradictory, and past and present experiences of racialization and colonization. What is the politics of writing-as-solidarity or solidarity-through-writing? Below I demonstrate how both authors write solidarity differently and how their positionalities shape their analysis and writing.

Métis and Salish author Lee Maracle's (2013 [1990]) “Yin Chin”<sup>25</sup> challenges internalized logics of white supremacy, settler colonialism, and anti-immigrant sentiments within Indigenous and Asian communities—what bell hooks calls the “commodification of Otherness” (“Eating the Other”). Maracle explores relations, intimacies, distances, and frictions between Native and Asian communities.<sup>26</sup> She offers a methodology for writing solidarities by

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<sup>25</sup> The title, “Yin Chin,” comes from Lee’s *Disappearing Moon Café*. When the protagonists Gwei Chang and Kelora first meet each other, Chang is surprised to hear Kelora speak in Chinese. He calls her a “wild injun,” which is Chinese sounds similar to “yin-chin,” Lee takes the term from there (Lo, n.pag.).

<sup>26</sup> Maracle dedicated this story to Asian Canadian writers, SKY Lee and Jim Wong-Chu.

questioning her own humanity and reflecting on her own complicities of racializing others, in this case Chinese peoples. The Native narrator reflects on her everyday lived experiences and proximities to Chinese peoples, and explains internalized racisms as: “how unkind of the world to school us in ignorance” (327). However, the narrator also notes the shared commonalities and histories of colonialism and racism, and calls for Indigenous and racialized communities to come together to struggle against common enemies. The narrator says:

We were born during the first sword wound that the Third World swung at imperialism. We were children of that wound, invincible, conscious, and movin' on up. We could laugh because we were no longer a joke. But somewhere along the line we forgot to tell the others, the thousands of our folks that still tell their kids about old chinamen. (324)

Maracle illustrates the ways in which solidarity is textually conveyed and mobilized, and how writing is anti-racist and anti-colonial solidarity for many Indigenous and Asian writers.

The above examples of writings by Kogawa, Maracle, Kobayashi, Binning, and Highway provide an array of examples for writing-as-solidarity and solidarity-through-writing. However, processes of solidarity and writing are fraught with complexities and complicities. Reading *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, *Exile and the Heart*, and “Yin Chin,” and other Asian Canadian and Indigenous texts, Wong argues that the intimacies in these texts highlight “how much remains to be addressed and worked through in the process of decolonization” (n.pag.). She asks how ethical relations can be engendered between Asians and Indigenous peoples and stresses that Asian writers, in their anti-racist and anti-oppression praxis, need to be attentive to Indigenous peoples and lands in their works but at the same time, not reproduce settler colonial narratives that seek to dehumanize, commodify, efface, or orientalise Indigenous peoples (n.pag.). Further, “the process of ‘doing it well’ requires ... an understanding of how one is embedded within power relations” (n.pag.). Thus, solidarity requires a critical engagement with settler colonial and

white supremacist processes and the complicities of the author within. In this section I draw upon Maracle and Wong's work to further critically engage with stories by Binning and Highway.

Sadhu Binning, as I argue above, wrote this story from a place of solidarity. Binning critiques the masculinity and gendered violences he saw around himself in the '70s – '80s, and pays critical attention to the power dynamics between Indigenous peoples and South Asians. However, the story remains grounded in settler-colonial logics. Firstly, Indigenous-South Asian intimacies get reduced to heterosexual desire and reproduction. And secondly, the Native woman in the story is rendered as the passive victim and is silenced. Through their haunting presence, Indigenous women are rendered absent.<sup>27</sup> Even as Binning challenges the construction of Indigenous women as promiscuous and drunk, in the process he renders them voiceless and without agency. How do we recognize gendered agency even if the Punjabi men in the story are sexist and abusive towards Native women, as well as Punjabi women? How do we understand Sara's agency in the story? After all, we do not really hear her story, we are just told of the infinite ways in which she is exploited and abused, but never hear a word from her about her own experiences. The only insight we have is that she had reservations about choosing Parminder, because of her sister's experiences of abandonment by a white man. Indeed, Sara reflecting on her sister's relationship with a white man here is very telling in terms of Parminder's masculinity as well as his position in the settler state.<sup>28</sup> However, we are told that Sara believes Parminder's promise to never leave her.

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<sup>27</sup> Wong argues that in *Disappearing Moon Cafe* "it is the hyperconspicuous absence of a Native woman, Kelora, that in a sense makes possible the novel's plot. First, this absence makes visible the uneven relations the 'Asian' characters have with the Native peoples of this land, gestures toward the complicated histories between First Nations and Chinese people, and acknowledges the legacy of interracial relationships that have often been marginalized" (n.pag.).

<sup>28</sup> I elaborate on this comparison further in Chapter 5.

Similarly, in my conversations with Sadhu and Paul Binning, Indigenous women were always the victims at the hands of the settler state and Punjabi men. For every Punjabi man who does not come forward with his story, there is at least one Indigenous woman, or more, whose story will never be heard as well. Borrowing from Gayatri Spivak the who will hear the Indigenous woman speak (“Can Subaltern Speak?”)? However, it is not that she is not speaking. On the contrary, plenty of Native women have been speaking and resisting the settler state for centuries; but, drawing from Spivak further, who will listen to them? In the above discussion of Shah’s work, I had similarly asked, how do we hear Indigenous men’s complaints of non-consensual sexual contact and violence committed onto them by South Asian men. I argue that these erasures of Native women and queer peoples from accounts of racialized intimacies concomitantly reproduce the state structures that enables the continued disappearance and killing of Indigenous women, girls, queers and Two-spirit peoples. Erasure and silencing of Indigenous desires from these stories is that the same logic that allows for settler state’s apathy towards missing and murdered Indigenous women. Rather than reducing them as fabrications or invisibilizing them to center state processes, how can racialized peoples understand Indigenous experiences of violences and be solidarity with Indigenous peoples in their struggle against continued genocide?

The questions that need to be asked here are: Why are these women with Sikh men? What is happening in the communities that these women are part of? What kind of agency do these women have? What is making them choose their partners? By looking at “voiceless” Native women’s agency, what can we understand about gendered colonial processes? As Bonita Lawrence indicated to me in a personal conversation, Indigenous women are more grounded here than Sikh men who are rendered much more foreign to Canada. Further, till 1985, in pursuing

these intimacies with non-Native men, Native women lost their Native status. This speaks to their own agency and their willingness to exchange their status for “love,” or money in the cases of marriage of convenience. Needless, Native women exert agency here, in spite of the violences that produce the conditions for this agency. Sikh men seek to become citizens through marriages with Indigenous women. Hence, Indigenous women have power in these dynamics. Only once the men attain power, in this case through citizenship, do they assert power over Native women.<sup>29</sup> These relationships appear much akin to fur trade relationships between white settlers and Native women, where white men relied heavily on Native women for their expertise and knowledge (Lawrence, “*Real*” *Indians and Others*; Racette). These dynamics changed only when white men were able to establish colonial trade relations.<sup>30</sup> I am not comparing white settlers to Sikh men, but perhaps we can understand formations of Sikh masculinity vis-à-vis Native women’s agency more critically through this juxtaposition. I highlight in the above discussion that in spite of Binning’s anticolonial solidarity with Indigenous struggles for self-determination, Indigenous women get constructed through the settler colonial gaze. What does this limitation tell us about South Asian solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty? To answer this question, I move on to discussing how Highway’s story seeks to answer these difficult questions differently.

Highway’s “The Lover Snake” directly tackles the two main problems within Binning’s story. Firstly, it is a story of a queer relationship. And secondly, the narrator is Cree, thus

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<sup>29</sup> Marie Lo notes that in *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, Kelora plays a fundamental role in saving Gwei Chang from exposure, hunger and death, as he relies on her intimate knowledge of the lands to survive (n.pag.). Further, Wong argues that Kelora allows Chang to enter her community, and engenders a relationship to the land that is not dictated by the property logics of the settler state (n.pag.). Moreover, much similar to Parminder in Binning’s story, Chang also leaves Kelora once he is able to “settle” in the country.

<sup>30</sup> Similarly Chris Finley (Colville Confederated Tribes) notes: “the conflation of ‘New World’ with Native women’s bodies presents Native women’s heterosexual desire for white male settlers as justifying conquest and the settlement of the land by non-Natives” (34).

centering a queer Native voice. The Native protagonist is the narrator and we hear about the relationship through his perspective. The story challenges not only heteropatriarchal and heteronormative erasures and violences, but also gives the Indigenous person a voice and agency. Further, as I demonstrate earlier, it foregrounds simultaneous, but different processes of racialization and colonization that the two Indians—Cree and Sikh—face. This becomes the context of solidarity for Highway and he explicitly lays it out. After all, the story is not about a Cree man and his white lover. The deliberate choice to make the protagonist's lover Indian speaks to Highway's political investment in dismantling (settler) colonialism and white supremacy. Furthermore, his engagement with myths and legends of the East draws parallels to indigeneity and processes of cultural and epistemological colonization, opening yet another line of possible solidarity and intimacy.

Similar, yet different from silences on Indigenous women, I should note that South Asian women—of all sexualities—are also rendered invisible in such narratives. For instance, we never hear, or from, about Parminder's wife Kulvir in Binning's "Eyes in the Dark," Both stories by Binning and Highway focus on center Indigenous and South Asian cis-men. South Asian women are absent from the memory, archives and literatures, and consequently from this chapter as well. Even as I center gender and sexual formations, I am cognizant of how women are erased from the theorization of colonial intimacies. Queerness is, therefore, is a limited framework as long as Indigenous and South Asian women are erased from the narratives and theorizations.

Can there be colonial intimacies that can open up spaces for resistance, solidarity and decoloniality? The two stories demonstrate that these spaces are limited and limiting through the intersectional structures of colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and heteronormativity. This analysis echoes Sexton's formulation of the conditions of the possibility

and impossibility of interraciality. In the previous section, I raised questions of killing and solidarity in Highway's text. I argue that Highway answers these questions by showing the complexities of colonial intimacies and decolonial love, which I will discuss this in the next section. Highway offers two answers which are dependent on the way solidarity between racialized peoples and Indigenous peoples is imagined and articulated. The first way of understanding solidarity is to question whether there are indeed spaces of solidarity, i.e. whether we can assume that solidarity can exist from racialized peoples' perspectives, and whether racialized peoples would be willing to risk their stakes in the decolonization of Turtle Island. Then, I argue, Highway's answer would be in the affirmative. Solidarity can be achieved by killing the "settler-within," If Dahljeet is able to decolonize himself through opening up to Indigenous resurgence and to the myths and legends of the Weesageechak and the cobra, then the cobra can kill the colonized subject and make Dahljeet and other people of colour committed to Indigenous decolonization.

However, if the argument is that no such "pure" solidarity can ever exist, i.e. racialized peoples as "settlers" can never be committed to "true decolonization," in Franz Fanon's words (*The Wretched of the Earth*), because that requires giving up their stakes in the Canadian state, then Highway's answer would be to kill the "settler." In other words, the cobra does not need to kill the "settler-within," rather the cobra must simply kill the "settler." Killing can take many forms, from physical extermination to physical removal. Highway's story leaves the call for solidarity open for interpretation by the reader. The reader can choose how solidarity looks for them. In this dissertation I fluctuate between theorizing the two forms of solidarity. I assert that the complexities and contradictions of the stories open up spaces for thinking through decoloniality and assessing the stakes for the same. There is no one solidarity. Rather, solidarity

is politically variable, violent, and vibrant. I conclude this chapter by looking at these possibilities and spaces of decolonization and solidarity by exploring “decolonial love,”

### **Towards Decolonial Love**

In February 2013, at the peak of the Idle No More movement, an Indigenous woman, wearing an Idle No More t-shirt, was attacked by a group of approximately ten South Asian men in Surrey, B.C. (“‘Bridging Cultures’ Idle No More Rally”). Many South Asians and Indigenous people in the Lower Mainland, outraged and distressed by the act came together to challenge patriarchal and colonial violences within their communities and outside. South Asians sought to express their sympathies and solidarities with the Indigenous woman and the community, recognize their complicities within the settler colonial project and challenge patriarchal violences within South Asian communities. At the same time, many South Asians carefully addressed the instance of violence in an attempt to avoid media portrayals of all South Asian men as misogynist and violent (a widespread image for South Asian men). Similarly, Indigenous organizers wanted on the one hand to challenge anti-South Asian racism within their communities, and express racial solidarity with South Asians; while on the other hand, still hold South Asians accountable for their violent acts. In fact, many South Asian and Indigenous organizers came together to organize an event called “Bridging Cultures: An Indigenous and Indo-Canadian/South Asian Gathering” to show support to the young woman as well as to Indigenous and South Asian women who continue to suffer patriarchal, racist and colonial violences.

A group of South Asians also released a statement after the assault. The statement titled “A Joint Statement of Concerned South Asians in the Lower Mainland”<sup>31</sup> read:

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<sup>31</sup> Personal archives.

We are a group of South Asians who are troubled, outraged and saddened by the act of patriarchal and colonial violence that took place this past Sunday in Surrey. We have learnt that a group of approximately ten South Asian men attacked an Indigenous woman wearing an Idle No More t-shirt. We write this letter to condemn this attack and to express our solidarity and support for this sister and her loved ones. We stand with you. This act is the latest in a long legacy of colonial gendered violence against Indigenous women, including the tragedies of missing and murdered women. We write as South Asians who are dedicated as allies to Idle No More. We are deeply committed to the well-being and self-determination of Indigenous people and to ending violence within all our communities. We acknowledge the prejudice that exists amongst many in our communities against Indigenous people. We also recognize that we need to take responsibility for our roles in the oppression of Indigenous people through our silences and complicities on these lands. We cannot engage in the oppression of Indigenous communities or violence against any woman. Such violence delegitimizes our own efforts, as South Asians, to challenge racism, assimilation and patriarchy. By acknowledging the ways in which our struggles as South Asian and Indigenous communities are different but intrinsically linked, we seek to build a stronger and broader movement that ensures liberation and emancipation for all. We are reminded of how many of our South Asian elders often refer to Indigenous peoples in our languages as being part of the family of our older uncle. We also want to emphasize that violence against women is not a “Punjabi” or “East Indian” problem, despite what the dominant society projects on our communities. Racist stereotypes label all our communities as “backwards” and violent towards women. We reject those stereotypes. Heteropatriarchal violence is endemic across racial identities, and is further exacerbated by colonialism and the subjugation of racialized and impoverished communities, especially in many areas of Surrey. As South Asian women, we have been struggling against racism, patriarchy and colonialism for many centuries and strive to build respectful and accountable alliances with the Original women of Turtle Island. The horrific acts of violence on Sunday highlight the degree to which settler-colonial mentalities, patriarchal attitudes, and lateral violence are urgent and pressing issues. Perpetuating stereotypes and enacting violence leaves us all susceptible to more oppression. We continue to unlearn the colonial mentalities imposed upon us, are dedicated to ending violence against all women, and seek to decolonize our relationships with Indigenous nations.

As a way to conclude, I recount this story and full statement to illustrate the multiplicities, complexities, and complicities of colonial intimacies. The powerful statement highlights the shared patriarchal violence and continued legacies of colonialism that affects Indigenous peoples and South Asians, albeit in very different ways. While recognizing how patriarchy affects South Asian women, the signatories of the statement highlight how South Asians are

complicit in gendered, sexual, racial, and colonial violences against Indigenous peoples.<sup>32</sup> And more specifically, the signatories recognize how Indigenous women continue to face all these violences at the hands of the state as well as racialized communities. Analogous to this story, in the earlier sections, I highlighted two examples in Shah’s work about two Indigenous men reporting sexual violence committed against them by South Asian men. These examples illustrate that colonial intimacies also come with sexual and gendered violences, as an inherent part of intimacies, while decolonial relations may also be fostered through these intimacies.

In this chapter, I defined interracial and crossracial (normative or non-normative) desires, and erotics as “colonial intimacies” to center critical analyses of the processes of settler state formations. For differently colonized and racialized peoples, their “interracial” desires and erotics are manifested through, and maintained within, colonial and white supremacist processes. I understand colonial intimacies as a conceptualization of colonial processes that enables such intimacies; and also as lived experiences of racialized, Black, and Indigenous peoples and their desires, erotics, and intimacies with each other, within settler colonial states. These intimacies take multiple forms, across all genders and sexualities, which may be acts of subversion or complicity, spaces of love or intimate violence, of permanence or transience, of reproduction or recreation, of capitalist production or anti-colonial solidarity. My analysis seeks not to deny forms of agency and desire, rather to highlight how bodies encounter each other within the white settler state, and how the trajectories of these intimacies are pre-scripted—though not necessarily in totality of any form. Even though the bodies maybe complicit within settler violences, and

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<sup>32</sup> At the peak of Idle No More movement in Canada, many South Asian communities across Canada expressed their solidarities with Indigenous peoples, including solidarity statements from Sikhs, Tamils, Tibetans and a Toronto based group “South Asians in Solidarity with Idle No More.” While it is beyond the scope of this project to analyze these solidarities, I note them here to demonstrate how many South Asians continue to express and acknowledge their complicities.

may reproduce many of these violences, spaces for decolonial love and solidarity are not foreclosed.

Another way to conceptualize colonial intimacies is through the fragments—from the 1907 elopement story, to Bailey and Rashid’s date on *Mohawk Girls*, to the stories of Binning and Highway, and finally to the attack on the Indigenous woman in Surrey. All these examples demonstrate how varied intimacies are, and that nothing inherently makes these colonial intimacies anti-colonial. Rather some have the potential to manifest the most horrific forms of colonial violences, while others are able to imagine alternate futures. Drawing from Sexton, I have explored differing conditions of possibilities and impossibilities in interracial intimacies, desires and erotics. I do not want to disavow colonial intimacies, nor do I want to fully embrace them. Rather I do want to explore the question of love in colonial intimacies, as Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*) says: “Today I believe in the possibility of love; that is why I endeavour to trace its imperfections, its perversions” (42). Maintaining these tensions, frictions and fissures, in this section, I conclude the chapter, by exploring “decolonial love,”

Drawing on Black and Indigenous queer feminist critiques of erotics, how can spaces, possibilities, and hopes for “decolonial love” be theorized? Chicana feminist Chela Sandoval calls decolonial love a technology for social transformation, which is “a shared practice of hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world” (2-4). Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that decolonial love is a foundational part of the imagining of decolonial futures as, decolonial love is “the humanizing task of building a world in which genuine ethical relations become the norm and not the exception” (“On the Coloniality of Being” 244). Imagining ethical relations beyond colonial logic calls for displacing the “imperial Man” by the condemned of the earth, which

requires a confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies imposed on colonized peoples through the logics of modernity (260-61).<sup>33</sup>

Junot Díaz contends that for colonized subjects “to actually value [their] own matrix over whiteness is a revolution” (qtd. in Mire n.pag.). Exploring the “economy of love,”<sup>34</sup> Díaz illustrates the workings of heteronormative and cis-normative love within communities of colour in his books *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008). He notes that for any man of colour in a “heteronormative relationship to try to discover the ways that his masculinity has been organized vis-à-vis women of colour, is part of this colonial enterprise too” (qtd. in Mire n.pag.). In critiquing heteronormativity, Díaz still looks for love within heteronormative and cis-normative spaces. In questioning and challenging the heterosexual cis-man of colour, Díaz ironically ends up centering the said man. Can we look for decolonial love beyond heteropatriarchal heteronormative cis-normative colonial logics? Leanne B. Simpson's *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2014) draws from Díaz's conceptualization of decolonial love. Simpson asks what if the man of colour in Díaz's stories is replaced by an Indigenous woman, queer person or Two-Spirit person? (qtd. in Winder n.pag.). She further asks:

I was also really interested in exploring what decolonizing love looks like. How did my ancestors love? What were their sexual and gender orientations? Their relationship orientations? Their views on monogamy and family? How did they view romantic love and their sexuality? Consent? Agency? Because it seems to me, that despite everything, we are here today, living as Indigenous peoples because our Ancestors had a tremendous capacity to love their families, friends, lovers, their land, their culture and their community. That in some ways, is our greatest resistance. (qtd. in Winder n.pag.)

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<sup>33</sup> He further expands: “With decolonization I do not have in mind simply the end of formal colonial relations, as it happened throughout the Americas in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. I am instead referring to a confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the planet. In short, with decolonization I am thinking of oppositions to the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being” (261).

<sup>34</sup> Díaz defines “economy of love” as “Some people are at the top and some people are at the bottom. Sure, there's stuff that happens in between but no matter what as a dude, however low you are set on that scale, there's always a girl set lower than you” (qtd. in Mire n.pag.).

Drawing upon Simpson's questions, by centering Indigenous voices in questions of love, desire, erotics, and intimacies, we can see how the Indigenous subject is not just a passive victim of colonial, racist, heteropatriarchal, heteronormative, and cis-normative processes and of non-Native peoples. Then, is decolonial love possible between differently colonized and racialized peoples? Tuck and Ree argue that decolonization means listening to the ghosts (647), as "haunting aims to wrong the wrongs, a confrontation that settler horror hopes to evade" (642). Perhaps keeping all the critiques, apprehensions, fears and skepticisms, not on the side, but rather in the center, makes islands of colonial intimacies possible. Perhaps decolonial love is possible, as long as decolonization of stolen lands is foregrounded. As we are invited to question by Highway, the issue of whether or not other-Indians can be part of such intimacies and love, remains open.

## **Chapter 5: Desiring Bodies/Labouring Bodies: Racialized Citizenship and Settler Colonialism**

Migrant aspirations in Canada and the U.S. are often captured by phrases such as the “Canadian dream,” “American dream,” “North American dream,” and the “land of opportunity.” By invoking fantasy, such phrases are deployed as motives for why people choose to move to Turtle Island. The dream may be for a better life. Free of poverty and precarity. Or for more luxuries. Away from war, disease, disasters that are not so natural. Death. Loss. Grief. Away from violences. Desire for better education and health. For themselves. For their children. For their family. For love and intimacy. Aspirations. Needs and wants. There is no one reason. People move because they move, (as) they have always moved.

How are these desires and dreams manufactured? The “American dream,” Inderpal Grewal explains, is “a search for a future in which the desire for consumption, for liberal citizenship, and for work come together to produce a specific subject of migration” (*Transnational America* 5). Neoliberal practices and hegemonic imaginations produce nationalist discourses both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of the U.S. Thus, Grewal argues, first, America cannot be studied within the territories of the U.S.; and, second, emphasis must be given to ground “transnational connectivities” within which subjects, technologies, and practices are produced (2-3). Further, subjects of the “American dream” are not just territorially-bound to the U.S., but rather are also im/migrants, global consumers, and subjects of other nations (7). While, there are significant differences between the U.S. and Canada, racialized diasporic formations in these white settler states are similar. The racialized dreams that Canada and the U.S. produce are indeed the same.

However, what happens when the territories are occupied, boundaries are constructed through violence, national subjects are settlers, original inhabitants are dispossessed, and citizenships are racially exclusive? What if the pull-factors are dubious and misleading, consumption is enabled through exploitation of lands and peoples, transnationalism is produced through denial of the self-determination of the colonized nations, and immigrants, while excluded on one hand, are complicit in all these violences on the other hand? I argue that American and Canadian desires are not simply neoliberal: they are settler colonial and white supremacist as well. These dreams are manufactured by erasing colonial violences and realities. The lands these so-called multicultural liberal nations stand on remain colonized. Theorizing European colonial process, Anibal Quijano argues that European colonial culture is made seductive by promising power and privileges to colonized societies (“Coloniality of Power” 42); this seduction becomes a mean of “participating in colonial power” (43). For the last five hundred years, the “new world” has continued to disguise colonial and capitalist violences as racialized desires and dreams.

How do we critically understand racialized desires within processes of colonialism, neoliberalism, transnationalism, migration, and diasporic formations? Beenash Jafri proposes studying racialized desires in the making of the white settler colonial projects. In her examination of the racialized cowboy figure in a South Asian diasporic film, Jafri argues that desires of racialized subjects reproduce the settler state (“Desire, Settler Colonialism” 74). By looking at settler colonialism as “a project of desire” (73), Jafri contends:

Settlerhood is not only an object of desire in and of itself, but desires which appear innate and ahistorical do the work of naturalizing the colonial imperative to indigenize the settler, while erasing Indigenous histories of, and claims to, land. (83)

Thus, racialized desires do the work of maintaining the settler state, and in the process legitimizing the colonial state and racialized peoples' presence in these state. Jafri focuses on love, marriages, and "settling down" as racialized desires that produce the settler state. I add to this work by looking at modalities of desire and labour together which produce the settler state. Instead of separating the affective from the material, and reducing diasporic formations to either logics of desire or logics of labour, in this chapter, I argue that the desiring racialized body is the same as the labouring racialized body.<sup>1</sup> Seen together, the desiring/labouring racialized bodies help us understand the logics of varying racial and colonial processes in the making of white settler states. Further, it is through racialized desires and labour that the settler state maintains itself and normalizes ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples. Desiring/labouring racialized bodies, thus, are complicit in reproducing the settler state.

This chapter considers, what Jodi Byrd addresses as the cacophony of "contradictorily hegemonic and horizontal struggles" (*The Transit* 53) in the making of intimacies between Indigenous nations and South Asians in present-day Canada. I drew from Lisa Lowe framework of "intimacies of four continents" in Chapter 4 to contextualize the formations of "colonial intimacies" between South Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada (*The Intimacies of Four Continents*). Lowe calls for a "political economy" framework to understand the "particular calculus governing the production, distribution, and possession of intimacy" (18). While my focus in Chapter 4 was primarily on sexual and romantic desires—the formation of "domestic" intimacies, I argued to conceptualize the "domestic" and "material" intimacies as interdependent and mutually inclusive. Building on that, in this chapter, I focus on formations of "material"

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<sup>1</sup> I draw from the works of Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*; Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*; Alexander; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*; Lorde, *Sister Outsider*; Kamble; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Pawar and Moon; Reddy, *Freedom with Violence*; and Puar.

intimacies between Indigenous peoples and South Asians at the colonial-capitalist (Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*) sites of resources extraction in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

I build on the previous chapters on formations of South Asian diasporas and link questions of race, caste, gender, and sexuality with those of class, labour, and citizenship. I look at the logging and cannery industries in British Columbia and the tar sands in Alberta as simultaneous spaces of dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples, and spaces of racialized and gendered labour formation. These industries operate on Indigenous lands to extract resources from these lands. Resource extraction is central to Canada's dispossession of Indigenous nations and concomitantly becomes a highly visible site for Indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination and sovereignty. Through intersecting structures of oppression, power, and privilege, I analyze how South Asians are racially constructed as the outsider-other, on one hand, yet become complicit in ongoing processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands, on the other hand. In this chapter I argue that the settler state requires the labour of racialized peoples in order to pursue its colonial-capitalist quests. Specifically I look at the labour<sup>3</sup> of first generation South Asians in the maintenance of the Canadian settler state. Analyzing racialized constructs of the "model," "good," "hard," and "steady" worker, I argue that while race, gender, and class may structurally marginalize the labours of South Asians in

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<sup>2</sup> Juliana Hu Pegues also explores such intimacies in her writing about Asian men and Native women in Alaskan canneries. Hu Pegues expands on Lowe's conceptualization of intimacy by including "those who labour and live in proximity – those whose lives and livelihoods are bound up with one another" (56). Understanding intimacies as such allows for reading canneries and cannery towns as racialized and symbiotic sites for Asian and Indigenous peoples. These intimacies reveal the invisibilization of Native women from labour narratives and the simultaneous erasure of Asian settlement from Alaska's history (57). Hu Pegues suggests that Asian American studies need to understand these "alliances formed outside worker claims to production, to a more capacious anti-racism that might account for decolonization" (64).

<sup>3</sup> I deploy "labour" in the broadest sense. It is obviously deeply tied to class formations, but I argue it is not simply bound by working class understandings. I use labour to talk about all forms of work that people of colour engage with/in settler economies. I am careful to not conflate classes and efface class hierarchies, yet class always enables and is enabled by structures of race, caste, gender, ability, and status.

these different industries, their labour still remains complicit in settler colonial processes. Further, the constructs of the model-self render Indigenous peoples as the “unmodel-other,” Following Eve Tuck’s conceptualization of a “desire-based” epistemological shift (“Suspending Damage”; “Breaking up with Deleuze”), which seeks to rupture the binaries of subversion and reproduction and grounds Indigenous desires’ for self-determination, in this chapter I pursue to unsettle the dreams and desires of racialized im/migrants in Canada.

I begin this chapter with Gurpreet Singh’s story to illustrate the complexities of racialized desire and labour within the settler state. Singh was a mill worker in Quesnel and now retired in Vancouver. His story captures the essence of Punjabi communities in lumber industries in the ‘70s - ‘90s B.C. In the next section, I intersectionally frame colonial-capitalist processes of accumulation, Indigenous dispossession and racialized labour formations on stolen Indigenous lands. Reflecting on the questions of Indigenous and Black labour, I demonstrate how racialized labour becomes necessary for the settler state. The following section discusses the colonial and racial constructs of “model” immigrants and “unmodel” Natives. Drawing upon my fieldwork, in the subsequent sections, I discuss racial, gender, and class labour formations of South Asians in the tar sands, forestry, and fishery industries. I demonstrate how racialized labour, knowingly or unknowingly, willingly or forcefully, becomes complicit in processes of colonization of Indigenous peoples. Finally, I conclude with a return to exploring the desires and dreams of racialized bodies on stolen lands.

### **Stories of Labour, Stories of Complexities**

I start the chapter with Gurpreet Singh’s story to illustrate the complexities and complicities of racialized desire and labour within the settler state. His story is at times representative of the

stories of his peers and at some points it is not; yet it encapsulates the contradictions of lives of people of colour on stolen lands and reflects on difficult questions of racialized complicities. By honoring his struggles and his life, I illustrate how lives of people of colour are structured through their participation in settler economies. His story is theory itself. For most parts, I have left the story as it is (arguably my narration of the story is already produced through my theoretical lens).

I met Gurpreet Singhji<sup>4</sup> outside the Surrey Central Station on a warm summer afternoon in July 2014. Singhji<sup>5</sup> had offered to pick me up from the station, much like everyone else I interviewed. Like others he also preferred talking in his house instead of meeting in public spaces such as a Tim Horton's or a public library. Apart from the preference for chai over tea, coffee or other beverages, his desire to meet at his home was also about the reality that these public spaces have never been home for his generation of South Asian immigrants. I did not mind meeting people in their homes as I was curious to visit peoples' houses—it was ethnographic curiosity perhaps about people's private spheres. It always was a little strange to meet aunties and uncles for the first time on the thresholds of various SkyTrain stations. I would never know which car would be theirs, what they would look like, what they would be wearing, whether or not they would be on time. I was also never sure how I should (be) dress(ed). Dressing for these meetings was one of the hardest decisions and compromises I had to make, perhaps a bigger compromise than of my politics. Negotiating genderqueerness was hard in these brief encounters, and yet I felt oddly comfortable in these queer moments of waiting for strangers.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the person. Unless stated otherwise all names I use in this chapter will be pseudonyms.

<sup>5</sup> I use Gurpreetji and Singhji interchangeably in this section. Ji is added after his first and last name as a marker of respect.

Gurpreetji was on time and took me straight to his home. He hastily introduced me to his wife, asked her to make us chai, and took me downstairs to the basement. He explained that the basement was the part of the house where he felt most comfortable. We sat facing each other on a leather couch. He was wearing grey jogging pants and a beige t-shirt. With his arms folded in front of his chest, his body language looked very unsure as to why we were there. I was also not prepared to be in such an intimate setting. There were over ten sets of harmoniums in the room. I awkwardly tried to start a conversation about them and asked if he played them all. Singhji told me how he had collected the harmoniums over a period of time, and that he occasionally played some of them. The conversation stopped and I started questioning whether I should have come to meet him or not. I inwardly resolved that this would be the last interview—the painful, awkward silences of my interviews had become exhausting by this time. Still, I managed to comfort myself with the queerness inherent in these uncomfortable encounters, and the silences eventually broke into conversations and stories. It was precisely through the awkwardness and silences that Gurpreetji began (telling me) his story.

Gurpreet Singhji came to Vancouver, B.C. in 1972 on a visitor visa. He came from a small village in Jalandhar district, Punjab, where he had worked on his family farm. Like many of his contemporaries he did not stay in the city after coming. In search of a job he ended up in Quesnel, B.C., a small city in the interior located on the banks of the Fraser River, a few hours south of Prince George. After a few years of being in Quesnel he successfully applied for permanent residency in Canada. In those days, visitors could apply for immigration after arriving in the country. But it had not been that easy for Singhji.

The first time Gurpreetji sought a visa extension he was denied and stamped for deportation the next day. The system was, as it continues to be, exclusionary, racist, and

arbitrary.<sup>6</sup> Hundreds of Punjabis were deported in the 1970s on a regular basis. Sometimes airplanes filled with Punjabis would be sent back as soon as they landed. Singhji was himself stamped for deportation when he first landed in Canada. But he was luckily able to dodge deportation that time, as he did the second time as well. Arguably, there was more room to challenge and subvert the racist arbitrariness of the system back then than it is now.

Immigration officers in the 1970s Vancouver had their own individual offices. People would line up outside the offices to apply for visas or extensions. Outside these offices there functioned economies of information exchange, sharing, and support. Dissuaded by the deportation stamp, Gurpreetji learned of a certain officer who was known to be good and not racist. This officer informed Singhji that he was short fifty points of the minimum needed to stay in Canada. On the officer's advice, he stayed back in Vancouver to increase his points. Gurpreetji started working with a Punjabi magazine as a translator, joined English classes and became a regular visitor of the local gurudwara. Through these undertakings he was able to increase his points. While waiting for residency he decided to move back to Quesnel.

In Quesnel, Gurpreetji struggled to find work and for days walked from mill to mill in search of a job. He lived in a small house with thirteen other South Asians. The house had three single beds that were shared by everyone on rotation. Whoever worked would buy bread and dal for others. As beds were limited, most slept outside in the living room on the floor. Many went to bed with empty stomachs. Gurpreetji tells me that apne log (our [own] people/men) helped each other a lot, something that everyone else I interviewed also told me. They all would look back and remember the early days when Punjabi communities struggled and survived together. Often one working person would support ten or more unemployed South Asians.

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<sup>6</sup> Harsha Walia calls these racially exclusionary processes of citizenship as “border imperialism,” I discuss her framework in Chapter 1.

To find work, Singhji and others would have to wait in lines in the mill. A foreman in charge of each shift would pick people as he needed for the shift. Singhji lined up for morning, afternoon and evening shifts every day for weeks. During those days, foremen always favored white workers over Punjabis. Racial hiring practices changed soon when Punjabis grew more in numbers. Singhji explained that they gained recognition from foremen as dedicated, hardworking, and “steady workers.” These recognitions made them preferable over Native and white workers.

Racial violence against South Asians was at its peak in the early ‘70s. Gurpreetji became a target within his first few weeks of living in Quesnel.<sup>7</sup> One morning, as he was on his way to a recently acquired job, two passersby with baseball bats attacked him on the road, beating him nearly to death. He told me he was hospitalized for two weeks and bed ridden for five or six months. Forty years later the attack still haunts him. As we were sipping chai and talking, he rolled up his pants on the left leg to show the scars. His eyes were moist and his voice shook as he showed me the scars. The lingering traumas were very present in that room.

Singhji became a permanent resident of Canada while still bed bound in Quesnel after the attack. Soon after his physical injuries healed, he found a permanent job and worked for thirty years in the same mill. Back then, if workers worked for thirty days in a row they would get unionized and permanently hired. Many times he worked overtime, sometimes even three or four shifts together. Often he did double shifts three days in a row, as overtime rates were substantial and cumulative. Within months of settling down in a steady mill job in Quesnel, Gurpreetji returned to India for the first time after two years of living in Canada. He got married on this trip. His wife joined him in Quesnel in 1974 and they raised their three children in Quesnel until the

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<sup>7</sup> I give examples of anti-South Asian racism in the following sections.

children left for Vancouver for better opportunities. Gurpreetji's wife never worked in Quesnel over the decades they spent there, as there were few work opportunities for racialized women. He was surprised when I mentioned how other racialized women worked in canneries and other industries elsewhere in B.C.

Gurpreetji told me that racism was ever present in the mills. The majority of the people Singhji worked with were South Asians or white, with a few Native and Chinese workers. He often got into fights with white co-workers. In the town, white people routinely left neighborhoods as Punjabis were moving into. Racial slurs, aggression, and physical violence were everywhere Punjabis went. However, as their numbers increased racism went down, yet it was omnipresent.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike other lumber towns in northern B.C., Quesnel did not have a significant number of Indigenous workers in the mill. Gurpreetji had very limited interactions with Indigenous peoples throughout the decades he spent in Quesnel. In the workplace he did not have much *wasta* (relation) with them. He described the two Indigenous workers he worked with as intelligent and hardworking. In the town, according to him, they mostly idled around, caught fish, drank, slept here and there, and did not work much. He believed that those who can leave addiction are able to improve their lives; and those who are always intoxicated can rarely change their lives. However, like many of his peers, Gurpreetji did mention how Canada is Indigenous peoples' country and how white settlers took it forcefully and violently.

After further questioning, Gurpreetji reluctantly mentioned that one of the attackers who attacked him on the street was Native and other person was a *gora* (white). Racial tensions had been high as South Asians were seen as snatching away jobs from Indigenous and *gora* (whites)

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it was opposite with Native peoples, where a few could be tolerated but larger numbers were seen as a threat by the employers.

workers. Further, he mentioned that apne log were known to stare creepily at other women in public spaces. This staring was one of the reasons that Indigenous and white people had nafrat (hatred) towards Punjabi men. But as Punjabi women and families started coming, men changed their habits and that changed other peoples' nazaria (gaze) towards Punjabis.

Gurpreetji moved to Surrey twelve years ago, after retiring in Quesnel. He lives with his wife and son's family. His children are well settled in Surrey. He feels very lucky to be in Canada, especially when he sees the conditions back home. He thinks the South Asian community is now well established in Canada. "Apne log now do all the work that gore used to do in the past. Anything and everything. Apne log are hard workers, we came here and started with nothing and gained success." Further, he elaborated:

Native communities on the other hand are not hard workers. They are the same as they were forty years ago. We have made it better for ourselves ... Gore kaum (white community) are nice and honest people. They are generally better than East Indians ... they have lots of tolerance. Our people do so many things wrong and we get angry. But they let go a lot of it. There are many baabe (Punjabi elder men) who go to the park daily. There are 3-4 washrooms there in the park. But they go out in the open behind the bushes. I feel angry. What can we do?

After two hours of conversation and two cups of chai, Gurpreetji took me to the Bear Creek Park on the way to the station. He goes for walks there two or three times a day there. He took a lot of pride in the natural beauty and maintenance of the park. I could not help but notice that his pride in the "natural" landscapes of Surrey reproduced the myths of terranullism (Lorraine Le Camp (Cree) qtd. in Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others 2*); the myth that the lands remain unoccupied and uninhabited, which erases Indigenous peoples from "nature." During our walk he pointed to an elderly Punjabi man sleeping under the tree. He was disgusted at the sight of the man and called him "lazy, unemployed, loafer and alcoholic – just like them. Just like Native peoples..."

## **Modalities of Capitalism: Indigenous Dispossession and Racialized Labour**

Black Marxist theorist Cedric Robinson showing how processes of capitalism have always been racialized, argues:

The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force ... racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism. I have used the term 'racial capitalism' to refer ... to the subsequent structure as a historical agency." (2)

Processes of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy are deeply entwined processes, and capitalist expansion has always been enabled through colonial and racial violences. Lisa Lowe argues Robinson's formulation of racial capitalism "refuses the idea of a "pure" capitalism external to, or extrinsic from, the racial formation of collectivities and populations" (150).

Instead of defining capitalism as an abstract structure, Lowe contends that the term captures capitalism's deliberate reliance on social and cultural differences on the basis of race (150).

Similarly, Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that coloniality "brings together race and capital" ("Reconciliation as a Contested" 233). Lowe draws on these theorizations to show the foundations of the processes of settler colonialism in the Americas, which produced intimacies between differently racialized and colonized peoples, connecting the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, enslavement of Africans and indentureship of Asians.

In theorizing colonial structures in Canada, Glen Coulthard asserts that colonial domination in Canada is "territorially acquisitive in perpetuity" (*Red Skin, White Masks* 152)

and:

... continues to be structurally committed to maintain ... ongoing state access to the land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and foundation of colonial-state formation, settlement and capitalist development on the other. (7)

Challenging Marxist theorizations of capitalism, Coulthard calls for a contextual shift in the analysis of Canadian state from capital relations to colonial relations (10). This shift, he argues, would allow for a more critical investigation of settler colonialism in the following four ways: first, it would highlight the systematic injustice of colonial violences “on its own terms and in its own right”; second, it would demonstrate the significance of Indigenous labour in the processes of colonial-capitalist accumulation; third, the shift would open up possibilities for a more thorough ecological critique of accumulation processes; and last, a shift would challenge economic reductionism (11-14). Further, Coulthard asserts, “like capital, colonialism, as a structure of domination predicated on dispossession, is not ‘a thing,’ but rather the sum effect of the diversity of interlocking oppressive social relations that constitute it” (15).

On the question of Indigenous labour, Coulthard notes that histories and experiences of dispossession have been more fundamental to Canadian processes of settler colonial-capitalist accumulation than proletarianization (60). Audra Simpson argues that settler colonial methods seek to acquire Indigenous territory make Indigenous labour undesirable (19). Simpson shows how for settlers Indigenous lands were unoccupied, which invisibilized Indigenous labour; as for settlers, Indigenous labour on the lands was not tangible or capitalistically productive (101). This negation of Indigenous labour enabled settlers to steal and occupy Indigenous lands, and constructed Indigenous labour as opposite to settler labour; even as Indigenous labour was used across North America to build the infrastructure for the settler state. Indigenous labour was, therefore, rendered as non-labour. Further, Indigenous labour on the lands and properties that the settlers desired was invisibilized to enable territory accumulation. Contemporarily, Tracey Friedel (Métis) and Alison Taylor contend that the settler state renders Indigenous labour as “not capable,” “inherently deficient with respect to labour,” (30) and “incapable in an economic

sense” (42). With Indigenous populations physically displaced and dispossessed, immigration naturally becomes the primary source for population growth as well as labour. Thus, due to its own colonial predicaments, labour shortages in settler states like Canada could only be resolved through increased migration, often replacing previous Indigenous labour.<sup>9</sup> In this context, immigrants are, as Sunera Thobani argues, a “vital and necessary source of labour” (*Exalted Subjects* 25). All non-Indigenous labour then serves to reproduce the settler state which simultaneously represents Indigenous labour as non-labour, and invisibilizes the work of Indigenous labour. It is important to bring questions of land and labour together to recognize the intersections of processes of colonization and racialization of Indigenous peoples and racialized communities (Hu Pegues 57-58).<sup>10</sup>

Technologies of citizenship have been fundamental to the processes of settlement, economic development and nation-building, and hence citizenship is inherently interwoven with questions of labour.<sup>11</sup> By giving political and economic rights to white settlers, the settler-state has maintained and naturalized colonial dispossession and accumulation. As argued above, colonial- capitalist circuits of migration enable racialized bodies to come to these settler-states. Although racially othered and excluded in state structures, historically and currently, racialized immigrants have sought, and continue to seek, their inclusion in the state through access to

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that with the growth in Indigenous populations, increased Indigenous migration to urban centres, and the mere fact that most Native communities are located on prime lands coveted by extractive industries, Indigenous labour may be in demand in the near future (Coulthard 13). Further, Coulthard notes, the disciplining of Indigenous communities “to the cold rationality of market principles” remains on the agendas of both the state and the market (13).

<sup>10</sup> Speaking of the Caribbean context, Shona Jackson similarly notes how (forced) racialized labour was brought into the Caribbean to displace and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands (3). Grounding the complexities and complicities, she contends: “The *raison d’être* for the introduction of enslaved and indentured workers into the Caribbean ... labor becomes the dominant social discourse around which Creoles form new identities: the basis for their subaltern, settler modes of indigeneity and power” (4).

<sup>11</sup> I draw from the works of Abdo; Bannerji; Galabuzi; Glenn; Lawrence and Dua; Man; Thobani; Walia, “Transient Servitude”; Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* and others.

citizenship, “supporting the nation’s erasure of its originary violence and its fantasies of progress and prosperity” (Thobani 16). Further, through asserting and claiming agency, im/migrants become accomplices in colonization of Indigenous peoples (95). Through desiring citizenship and dreams of inclusions in the nation state, racialized immigrants are readily transformed from potential allies in an exploitative colonial-capitalist system into accomplices of the settler state. Byrd, Thobani and others, as noted in previous chapters, argue that even resistance to the settler state is a form of belonging and assertion to the state.

One of the prime methodologies of the settler state has been to acquire racialized labour from outside of the Americas. Settler-capitalist states have maintained themselves by exploiting the labour and bodies of enslaved Africans, invisibilizing the labour of Indigenous peoples, indenturing Asians, illegalizing migrants, precaritizing workers, producing categories of refugees and asylum seekers, and systematizing “unskilled” and “skilled” immigrants. I do not seek to conflate these bodies into one “racialized body” or conflate the legacies of slavery to other forms of labour and migration. Rather, I seek to highlight how the settler state has always relied on racialized bodies to till the land, mine the resources, work in the industries, build the cities, and construct the infrastructure. Racialized bodies also engineer the settler state’s technologies, nurse its patients, teach its children, fight its wars, finance its exploits, and maintain its law and order. What does the state acquire through dispossessing Indigenous peoples and drawing on racialized labour to work on Indigenous lands? Is it because of the ontological and spiritual connections of Indigenous peoples to lands that the settler state needs bodies that are not connected to land in the Americas? Or that racialized peoples can never make claims to land in the same ways as Indigenous peoples can? How does the state rely on racialized peoples’ bodies and labours to survive, sustain, produce, and create? I raise these questions to highlight

the complexities of racial formations and complicities in the settler state. These questions point to the gambits used by the settler state to maintain itself.

How do we understand race and racialized diasporas in this colonial-capitalist context? As I demonstrate in Chapter 1, colonization of Indigenous nations in the Americas is connected to the colonization of South Asia and beyond. Through underlying conditions enabled by colonial and capitalist processes, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy, past and ongoing, here and there, circuits of migrations are maintained and reproduced, whereby racialized bodies come to settler societies. Kamala Visweswaran challenging cultural reductionisms of diasporic formations, argues that “diasporas result from colonial design, not cultural happenstance” (“Diaspora by Design” 13). Lily Cho argues for the need to understand diasporas as a “condition of subjectivity” instead of an object of analysis. According to Cho, diaspora should be analyzed through “long histories of displacement and genealogies of displacement” (“The Turn to Diaspora” 14). Similarly, Junaid Rana notes that “the system of indentured labour formalized through imperial expansion across Asia and the Americas provides an important point for comparative studies of world regions and the formation of a global racial system from British colonialism and American capitalism” (*Terrifying Muslims* 101). Diasporas, Visweswaran, Cho, and Rana contend, are constituted by intersectional processes of colonialism, capitalism, and racialization. Hence, as Stuart Hall argues, it is important to understand diasporic identities not as essences but as positionings. Diasporas must be understood in relation to global colonial processes. Diasporas are designed, constructed, produced, structured, and not just constituted through dreams and aspirations. Such an understanding does not preclude any resistances to the structures, but rather highlights the complexities and complicities of diasporas.

It is important to reflect on legacies of enslavement and violences of anti-Black racism in the present, to understand methods of racialized diasporic formations within settler colonial contexts. Andrea Smith argues that through processes of colonialism have relied on varying constructions of labour of Indigenous and Black peoples. She contends: “anti-Blackness requires the disappearance of colonialism, Indigenous genocide requires the disappearance of Indigenous labor” (“The Colonialism That” n.pag.). This allows the settler state to exploit Black labour and appropriate Indigenous lands. Further, the settler state keeps Black people landless (Tuck, Guess, and Sultan; Tuck and McKenzie), and negates the labour of Indigenous peoples (Coulthard; Simpson). Tiffany King argues that while Black labour has been used to build the settler state, but their labour cannot be understand as complicit in settler colonialism. King asserts: “blackness is constituted by a fungibility and accumulation that must exist outside the edge and boundary of the laborer-as-human” (n.pag.). Labour becomes a limiting frame for conceptualizing Blackness with/in white settle colonialism, as the enslaved labour is anti-human (Wilderson III, *Red, White & Black* 11). Further, King cautions against the category of labor for Black bodies, as for non-Black communities of colour labor allows for migrants to seek belonging, inclusion, and citizenship within the settler state. She contends: “People of Color scholars often rehearse histories of arrival as populations of coerced labor as a way of explaining their presence, as well as distance or proximity to the category of the Settler” (n.pag.). Shona Jackson, on the other hand, also calls for a rejection of the category of labour by Black peoples, as a rejection of settler colonial modalities. She contends: “when labor is turned into the basis for our right to rule we articulate what is fundamentally anti-Indigenous or anti-native in both the old and new worlds” (“Humanity beyond the Regime” n.pag.). She points to the ways in which Black labour can be complicit the maintenance of the settler state; offering a different articulation of Blackness than

King and others. However, I posit that taken together King and Jackson demonstrate perversities of anti-Black logics within the reproduction of settler colonial state. Rejecting the conflation of labour with Blackness is not just a struggle for Black Liberation but also for Indigenous decolonization. Thus, for people of colour, any claims to inclusion to the white settler states is a way to invest themselves in the dispossession of Indigenous and Black peoples. In the next section I show how constructs of “model” migrant and “unmodel” Native are produced and reproduced through settler state’s technologies.

### **Making of Model/Unmodel Others**

Susan Koshy demonstrates how white privilege has been reconstituted as deracialized<sup>12</sup> meritocracy through the consent of racialized immigrant communities, particularly Asian Americans in the U.S. (“Morphing Race into Ethnicity”). Through complicity and opportunistic alliances between whites and different racialized communities whiteness rearticulates and reproduces “the existing national binary of Black and white”—where Black communities remain at the bottom of the racial hierarchies and non-Black communities of colour can aspire to go up the “race-ladder” by, participating in and benefitting from anti-Black racism in the United States (156-57). Vijay Prashad similarly critiqued the social engineering and processes of anti-Black and anti-poor agendas behind the myth-making of South Asians as “model” racialized subjects in the U.S. (*The Karma of Brown Folk*). According to Keith Osajima, the discourses of “model minority” started during the Civil Rights Movement and the peak of Black militancy. Creating binaries between the “urban ghetto” Black communities and upwardly-mobile Asian

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<sup>12</sup> The phrase “colour-blind” is often used to describe how constructs of meritocracy are racialized. However, given the ableist underpinning of the word I used “deracialized” as replacement. Similarly, for “gender-blind” I use the word “degendered,”

communities, the discourse was deployed to disavow “the black militants claim that America was fundamentally a racist society, structured to keep minorities in a subordinate position” (450). Critiquing scholarship on processes of racialization and minoritization of Asian Americans, and Asian Canadians, the work of Koshy, Prashad, Osajima and others have challenged anti-Black racism in the making of Asian-American/Asian-Canadian subjectivities.<sup>13</sup> This important scholarship has been critical for analyzing the multi-layered, interlocking processes of racialization and white supremacy, and the complicities and resistances of racialized communities in the U.S. and Canada.

While anti-Black racism is real and violent in communities of colour, specifically within South Asian communities, as I demonstrate in the previous chapters, I argue that analyzing white supremacy and whiteness primarily through the binary of Black and white limits the critique and resistance against the violences of white supremacy. Histories, legacies, and violences of slavery have been foundational in the making of race at the advent of colonial modernity, however, without engaging with the original and ongoing processes of settler colonialism on the stolen Indigenous lands of Turtle Island, any analysis of white supremacy is limited, incomplete, and complicit in settler colonialism.<sup>14</sup> I add to Koshy, Prashad, and Osajima’s work, and ask how would complicity and opportunistic alliances between whites and non-Indigenous and non-Black racialized communities (re)produce not just anti-Black racism and white supremacy but settler colonialism and anti-Native racism as well?

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<sup>13</sup> In addition, works of Stacy J. Lee, Bob H. Suzuki, Ellen D. Wu and others, debunk the myth of the model minority.

<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 1, I demonstrate the intersections of settler colonial and anti-Black racist violences. As I argue there, South Asian complicities within settler colonialism can only be theorized with a critical engagement and analysis of anti-Black racism in the past and present.

Thomas Biolsi argues that Indigenous peoples are constructed as a model minority for other racialized minorities, but not as a model of being efficient and productive citizens. Rather, they are “a limit model of what other minorities should never expect as a remedy for racism because other minorities are not ‘special cases’” (255). Racialized peoples seeking to be “model,” “assimilated,” and “settled” aspire to be like white citizens. Subsequently, multicultural technologies of the state seek to discipline racialized subjects to not seek out “privileges” from the state on the basis of their marginalized and oppressed identities, historical or ongoing. This is not to say that Indigenous peoples make such claims or that racialized communities do not fight against racism and other injustices that they face. Rather, what Biolsi is hinting at is that “model” aspirations enable people of color to “un-see” racism or invisibilize the processes that seek to marginalize them. This is indeed how the myths of deracialized meritocracy are constructed.

Drawing upon Biolsi’s formulation and using examples of internment of Japanese peoples in the white settler nation-states, Iyko Day asserts that Indigenous peoples function as the “minority model” offering a blueprint for methods of racializing non-white, non-Indigenous immigrants within the settler state (“Alien Intimacies” 121).<sup>15</sup> Intriguingly, Marie Lo offers a different understanding for “model” Indigenous subject for Asian Canadians. Representation of Indigenous peoples in Asian Canadian literatures, Lo contends, reveals more about Asian Canadian desire for contestations against racism than about Indigenous peoples themselves (n.pag.). Even though Indigenous people are struggling for sovereignty, in Asian Canadian literatures indigeneity is mobilized as a “model” of political resistance that Asian Canadians need to imitate (n.pag.), thus, Indigenous peoples are rendered as “model minority” for fighting

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<sup>15</sup> Mona Oikawa similarly argues that the racial violence waged against Japanese Canadians during the internment is connected to and dependent upon the violences to which Indigenous peoples have been subjected through processes of colonization (“Connecting the Internment”). To move Japanese communities, the settler state relied on the technologies it already had in place to displace Natives peoples.

the Canadian state. Lo draws this conclusion by reading specific texts written by Asian Canadian authors who acknowledge processes of settler colonialism.<sup>16</sup> I argue, outside of these (political) texts, Asian Canadians do not necessarily see Indigenous peoples as “models” of resistance, but rather as I demonstrate below, many South Asians deny any political agency to Indigenous peoples.

Taking cues from Biolsi and Day, I argue that Indigenous peoples become the minority-Other for people of colour. For people of colour, who seek to “settle” and become “model” citizens, imaginations of indigeneity become the marker for how not to be “unmodel.” To become the “limit model” for racialized peoples, Indigenous peoples are rendered as “unmodel,” thereby making the former the “model” minority. Hence, Indigenous peoples are the antithesis of the “model minority.” The racialized self is not just constructed in relation to the white-superior-other, but also in relation to the unmodel-Native-other. Furthermore, Byrd argues: “Anti-Indian master-narratives serve as a safety valve of sorts and provide the ground upon which change would be allowed to come to America” (“In the City” 24). Thus, for the “model” subject to reproduce anti-Native racism is a method to claim belonging to the settler state, and be the medium for change by keeping indigeneity down as a non-marker of progress. While Koshy, Prashad and others demonstrate how the Black-other is always present in the making of the Asian subject in the U.S., I argue that the Native-other also always continuously informs and shapes South Asian subjectivities in the U.S. and Canada.

The unmodel-Native-other or the racialized “model” subject are not essentialized, frozen, given, or stagnant identities. Rather, these models are colonial mechanisms of the white settler state to keep racialized, Black, and Indigenous communities separate from each other, and often

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<sup>16</sup> I explore Lo’s argument and these Asian Canadian texts in Chapter 4.

play them out against each other. “Model” and “unmodel” are myths produced by the settler state to service its white supremacist settler neoliberal motives. Ironically the myth seeks to erase race as a structural category, but invariably reproduces race for the myth to sustain itself. As Koshy elaborates:

Produced as a representation of Asian American achievement that attested to the race transcendence of the American Dream, when it was under attack as a manifestation of white supremacy, the model minority stereotype was and continues to be one of the primary discursive mechanisms for articulating the relationship between whiteness, blackness, and Asianness. (181)

Additionally, Sze Wei Ang argues that model minority discourses, or “the act of labeling some minorities but not other as ‘good’, perpetuates the kind of systematic violence that affects all minorities” (120). They effectively show the anti-Black racist and anti-poor agendas of the state to maintain racial hierarchies and to pit different communities against each other. Critiques of “model minority” discourse show how this discourse is produced through the logics of “cultural family values,” and constructs of “model” worker. I add to this literature by demanding a critical engagement with the settler colonial and anti-Native racist agendas of the state, and to center settler colonial processes in understanding the racialization of non-Native and non-Black communities of color.

Thus, even though the model minority is a myth, a racial construct, and state produced, this does not absolve racialized communities of their complicities in the oppression of other communities. Even as we debunk myths of the model minority, we cannot efface complicities within settler colonial processes. And furthermore, these myths work within racialized communities to create hierarchies amongst communities, playing to the tunes of the settler state. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that every person of colour in the settler colonial nation-state is “invited to be a settler in some scenarios, given the appropriate investments in whiteness, or is made an illegal criminal presence in other scenarios” (17). It is through processes of

colonialism and white supremacy that certain minorities can become “model” and “quasi-assimilable” and while others become unwanted, criminal, and dispensable (17). For the former group of people of colour “becoming a subordinate settler is an option even when becoming white is not” (18). It is this group of labour that can be identified as invested and aspiring to whiteness and deracialized meritocracy.<sup>17</sup>

Not only is the presence of South Asians on these stolen lands structured through original and ongoing processes of colonialism, but also their racialized subjectivities are constructed vis-à-vis the presence, or sometimes absence, of the Native-other. In other words, the racialization of one group of “Indians” is not isolated from the presence of the other “Indian.” However, as I argue in previous chapters, this presence is not always visible or readable. Rather, there exists, in the words of Byrd, “traces of Indianness.” These traces “are vitally important to understanding how power and domination have been articulated and practiced by empire, and yet because they are traces, they have often remained deactivated as a point of critical inquiry” (xvii-xviii). Below, I discuss examples from my fieldwork to elaborate on how these traces inform and shape the “other-Indian” or the “Indian-other.” As shown in the above discussion, the “model minority” discourse is produced through the logics of “cultural family values,” and constructs of “model” workers; these were recurring themes during my interviews in both Vancouver and Fort McMurray. I demonstrate the workings of these logics in the following sections. Further, as I have argued in the previous chapters, there is a significant difference between the three sites I discuss. South Asian communities formed in these extractive sites have to be looked at within their specific spatial socio-economic colonial settings. I juxtapose these sites together to

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<sup>17</sup> Further, I understand this group as a racialized community with, what Aihwa Ong calls, “flexible citizenship” – Asian diasporas that have “the material and symbolic resources to express a complex agency in manipulating global schemes of cultural difference, racial hierarchy and citizenship” (746).

highlight the complexities and incommensurabilities in understanding varying racial and labour formations within white settler colonial projects. I start with looking at the formation of “model” South Asians in Fort McMurray.

### **Model(ing) settlements in Fort McMurray**

The tar sands industry in Fort McMurray is at the centre of ongoing colonization of Indigenous territories, forests and wetlands of northern Alberta. Fort McMurray is a pertinent research site because of a large South Asian presence in the city. In the summer of 2013, I interviewed nine cis-men engineers working from middle to upper middle levels in the oil companies. In addition, I spoke to five cis-women, all married to engineers, two with employment in the Human Resources departments, one engineer in an oil company, one bank worker, and one runs a day care out of her home. In the Introduction, I expand on the demographic making of this community. There I argue that these racialized high-income, skilled engineers claim “model minority” status and aspire upper class heteronormative whiteness through their investments and commitments to the tar sand industry.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Given the critiques of tar sands, I engaged with my respondents with the critiques to understand their reflections on working in contested sites. By far most respondents acknowledged that no oil extraction and production is without environmental costs. A few went to the limits of validating the critiques, like Sanjeev argued: “Personally I think the critiques are valid. They have valid points. I don’t think the oil industry does enough to address those critiques in honest ways.” However, they all justified the industry and their contributions to the oil economy. Many rationalized pollution being universal and not just limited to Fort McMurray and its oil production. Response such as Kabir’s were very common: “Oil itself is not good. But we all get benefitted from it. Without oil we won’t survive.” Environmental costs were often justified using trivialized examples, as Kritika noted: “Pollution is everywhere. It’s not just because of the oil patch. You’ve lots of traffic! So pollution because of the vehicles – so people are not cared about that.” Further, Savita added: “I don’t think there is anything that we can do to completely eliminate it as of yet. You know, besides living as junglis (the word often is used to describe Adivasis, means uncivilized and savage), don’t use a car, just walk, don’t use anything at home as everything causes emissions.” Further, good employment rates and investments in the “community” were also cited as good reasons for the oil companies to continue the work they do. Prime example of corporate investments in the Fort McMurray community were that of the Suncor Community Leisure Centre at MacDonald Island Park which consists of Syncrude Aquatic Centre, CNRL Arena (ice surface), Nexen Field House, Fort McKay Group of Companies Running Track, the MacDonald Island Community Art Gallery presented by Kirschner Family Corporation, and several other corporate owned and advertised spaces. Following Canadian state discourse about the tar sands, many respondents argued in favor of the

Class is very integral to this analysis of skilled racialized workers in the tar sands and their aspirations to “model” subjects. I am sensitive to class yet attentive to not make class the sole focus of analysis. Class, like other social categories, is dynamic, making class analysis more complicated, multilayered, and non-unidirectional.<sup>19</sup> Instead of solely studying class formations in the economy, I analyze how class, as a social category, intersects with social categories of race, caste, and gender in the making of “model minority.” For instance, there is a large presence of Indians in high white-collar jobs, there is a large number of Indians and other South Asians who work directly and indirectly in the service industry catering to Fort McMurray’s tar sands economy. As well, there is a significant number of South Asians working as temporary foreign workers in the tar sands. Numbers for both categories are hard to retrieve as both sectors represent workers who are heavily marginalized and have precarious status in the economy.

Questions of citizenship, migrancy, temporariness, and nationality are also deeply intertwined with class and race in this context. Who gets to a high-paying white collar job is not just on the basis of merit and skills, it is dependent on a complex and multi-layered formations of race, gender, class, and nationality; therefore, class is not given or static. At the same time, it’s important to state that the majority of my respondents moved to Fort McMurray either because

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oil production by calling it “ethical oil,” Rohit argued: “The way I see it, it’s called ethical oil as there is no dictatorship involved, there’s no war over this oil, there’s no racism involved. People talk about Middle East and still get oils from them. Like Saudi Arabia, a sultan runs the country and, from what I hear, it’s completely racist where salary depends on our skin. Fort McMurray’s oil is called ethical oil – where no one is dying for this oil.” This was a common example used by many respondents. Further some argued how the oil companies are very conscious and vigilant around safety and environmental issues using examples like banning of plastic bags in the city, good air and water quality, and projects such as reclamation of tailing ponds. All the critiques, as many argued, are political and driven by how easily available oil is for the United States. Kabir contended: “And the US is now not in favor of Alberta oil – they have their own Shell Oil which was recently discovered. But before that they were actually depending on the oil from the Middle East. You know its all politics. When they have already used up all their oil, they would have to automatically take from us. So it’s just the attitude of the people and the government and the time frame that drives this.” Thus, all South Asians I spoke to in Fort McMurray relentlessly defended tar sands and claimed pride in being part of the industry.

<sup>19</sup> I draw from the works of Alexander and Mohanty, *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*; Bannerji, “Building from Marx”; Bannerji, “Returning the Gaze”; hooks, *Talking Back*; hooks, *Where We Stand*; and Kelley.

of the financial crisis of 2008 or due to systematic racial barriers to employment on the basis of skills. Many respondents had been either laid off or had just graduated during the time of crisis and were unable to find meaningful employment in urban centers in different parts of Canada, while many others had been based out of cities like Toronto and Vancouver and had to work in jobs below their qualifications. This was because of racial barriers such as non-recognition of education and experience out of Canada, language barriers, no access to cultural and social capital, etc. It is important to note that all the men, except one, worked as engineers and did not occupy any positions of power in the managerial or directorial ranks.<sup>20</sup> While class is easily identifiable in the positioning of my respondents in Fort McMurray, their prior experiences may suggest other stories. My respondents have class privilege in the settings of Fort McMurray but elsewhere can be identified as “victims” of neoliberal economy. Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to class yet not to make it stagnant in the process and sole focus of analysis.

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<sup>20</sup> While there is skilled labour is indispensable for the economy, they are deemed not fit enough to hold positions of power in the tar sands companies. Many respondents in Fort McMurray noted how “glass ceiling” exists within the tar sands economy. There were very few people of colour employed in higher managerial positions. But as many pointed out, this had nothing to do with race. In my conversation in Fort McMurray, racism was often reduced to the individual level, negating all structures of racism that work to keep my respondents racialized in the tar sands economy. Reducing experiences, or rather lack of experiences of racism, to the level of the individual is one of the myths that the white multicultural Canadian state continues to reproduce. If the person is hardworking, “nuanced thinker” and has a positive outlook, then racism doesn’t effect people; as the following quote from Asim, an Ahmadiya Pakistani engineer, illustrates: “I have never really experienced it. Maybe it’s just me, right? If I ever faced racism, I have been completely able to ignore it ... which is a great and positive outlook.” Such responses demonstrate deep faith in the working of Canadian multiculturalism and imagining Canada as fair, equitable and unlike the U.S. free of racism, historically and contemporarily. In Canada, according to Kritika (worked in the Human Resources unit), “as long as you do your work and do what you’re required to then they’re not going to question you. As long as you have the talent and you’re passionate about what you do then there’s always opportunity.” Some respondents noted that Indians educated and/or trained in Canada got better opportunities than ones migrating from elsewhere, but still the opportunities were limited, illustrating how race, class and education are so intertwined in the economy. In fact, some respondents were taking golf lessons in order to better network with their white colleagues and bosses. Some racialized bodies might be able to transcend race partially but never completely – quasi-assimilable – yet in the opinion of my respondents this has nothing to do with race.

### *Visible/invisible labour bodies*

My respondents constructed meritocracy as deracialized and degendered. These logics invariably maintain settler colonialism by effacing gendered and racial technologies and violences of the settler state. Here I build upon that analysis to understand racialized and gendered regimes of labour within settler colonial modalities. In addition to a denial of racism, deracialized logic also works to deny ongoing processes of settler colonialism and simultaneously effaces Indigenous peoples by mobilizing anti-Native racist discourses. One of the major myths productive of settler colonialism, as noted above, is the myth of terranullism. Most of the respondents reproduced the same myths about the tar sands being on empty unoccupied free lands. As Kabir, South Asian oil engineer in Fort McMurray, pointed out: “for some reason we don’t see them [Indigenous peoples].” His casual comment demonstrates the ease of erasures of Mikisew Cree peoples, Athabasca Chipewyan peoples, Fort McKay peoples, Chipewyan Prairie Dene peoples, Fort McMurray No. 468 First Nation, and more than six Métis communities in the region.

Indigenous peoples and communities are also structurally excluded and invisibilized in the workplaces. Ritesh, an IT specialist in Fort McMurray, reflected on why he did not have Indigenous colleagues: “maybe just because of the cosmopolitan culture of the workplace [with a chuckle]—it’s much more civilized area in the office.” Ramesh, works on pollution reduction technologies in the tar sands extraction, commented that “typically the ones I have seen [are] on the streets or in trades—I have not seen in the office people with those kinds of features.” This invisibilization is both a structural and a colonial construct. While the petro-economy has been “welcoming” of skilled racialized migrants and their labour, the same cannot be said for Indigenous peoples.<sup>21</sup> Increased oil production within the last decade has failed to see a

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<sup>21</sup> For instance, in 2012 Suncor employed 2.7 per cent Aboriginals and American Indians and 11.7 per cent visible minorities (Suncor n.pag.).

corresponding increase in the participation of Indigenous peoples in the tar sands economy.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous workers in Wood Buffalo<sup>23</sup> are disproportionately employed in blue-collar jobs as compared to non-Indigenous workers.

Alison Taylor and Tracy Friedel argue that this is precarious work as “it is often related to the construction phase of projects with limited opportunities for training and no benefits, pension, or job security” (826). Elsewhere, Friedel and Taylor further assert that these exclusionary structures rely on the colonial construct of Indigenous peoples as “inherently deficient with respect to labour,” (30) and “incapable in an economic sense” (42). Many respondents reproduced such narratives by highlighting the growing presence of South Asians in workplaces. They proudly claimed that management perceived South Asians as more hard working, responsible and serious employees than workers from other racial groups. Kabir argued: “[We] have good work ethics. If racism exists, then it is benefitting us. Because we kept our good image to the management.” Further he asserted: “Now we are seeing so many getting promoted as managers and directors ... We’re putting up quite a good image in the management. We [have made] our own contributions to the company.” Discursive constructs of “good worker” demonstrate how South Asians claim to be productive workers in the industry, and how these tools subsequently maintain the status quo by excluding Indigenous peoples.

Examining labour market development policy discourses in the tar sands, Friedel and Taylor point the limitations of the social inclusion discourses when it comes to Indigenous

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<sup>22</sup> Sourayan Mookerjea notes the example of an Indigenous woman, Dorothy Pacquette. In 2005, Pacquette walked from Fort McMurray to Edmonton, covering 450 kilometers, to protest increasing numbers of non-English speaking immigrants in Fort McMurray (249). Mookerjea rejects Pacquette on grounds of her xenophobia and as someone not committed to class politics. However, Pacquette’s walk illustrates the deep and violent methods through which Indigenous peoples have been excluded from the perks of the booming industry on their traditional lands (in addition to being displaced because of the industry).

<sup>23</sup> Fort McMurray is at the heart of the oil industry and is the urban service area for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB). RMWB was amalgamated in 1995 to let the expanse of tar sands industry tax base be captured and managed in Fort McMurray.

peoples. They critique any special social programs catered towards an Indigenous workforce as the programs “ignore[s] the decades-long paternalistic policy making and structural exclusion that marks Indigenous–state relations, [and] effectively lay[s] the blame for historic legacies of racism at the door of Indigenous individuals and collectives” (30). These policies and programs obscure colonial and racist histories as well as neoliberal structures of power and violence. Taylor and Friedel argue that these policies have pushed to create Indigenous people as “better” market-citizens and suppressed any “alternative forms of education and training (as well as alternative forms of production and consumption, e.g. harvesting and self-sustaining activities)” (822). Thus, any social assistance programs that the state and economy offer to the Indigenous workforce are inherently tied to the colonial and capitalist motives of the state.

Some Native peoples in Fort McMurray run their own businesses, including public-private partnerships. This was a contentious issue for some respondents. Kritika, a teller at a Canadian bank in Fort McMurray, noted: “But I have seen many business people, business owners. Whoever has a little bit of knowledge about what they do runs the show. They own the company and mint money.” However, Friedel and Taylor point out that attempts of the state and the tar sands industry to seek partnerships with Indigenous peoples are “situated within a broader set of colonial relations, Western liberalism, and globalization, the language of which constructs First Nation and Métis peoples as perennially having lacked means of production (and also systems of governance)” (33). Thus, even if Indigenous businesses are making profits from the system, their participation is still within the colonial and neoliberal realms of oppression and exclusion.

Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez argues that as part of neoliberal structures Indigenous peoples are “encouraged to throw away the yoke of internal colonialism by becoming successful

entrepreneurs in the global economy” (“North American First Peoples”354). She further warns that while neoliberalism may use the rhetoric of cultural recognition, when “market logic and cultural sensitivity clash the market logic prevails” (354). All oil companies claim to be working in partnership with their Indigenous neighbors. Suncor, in its “Report on Sustainability 2013,” claims:

Many of Suncor's operations are located on or near the traditional lands of Aboriginal Peoples. We know our operations have an impact on the environment and the communities where we operate ... Responsible development takes into account Aboriginal issues and concerns about the effects, positive and negative, of energy development. People and communities affected by Suncor's activities should have the opportunity to benefit from energy development through: employment, business development, education, training, and community investment. (n.pag.)

For Friedel the primary intent of these “partnerships” is “not widespread improvement in the social and economic realities for Indigenous peoples, but instead the promotion of an image of corporate social responsibility” (241). Friedel argues:

Through a contemporary narrative of ‘partnership’, the corporation takes up the role of benevolent Mounties in the nineteenth century ... the corporation becomes a contemporary go-between in the context of First Nations–government relations. Thus, in the ‘development’ of the twenty-first-century Canadian west, a new chapter in the story of Canadian nationalism begins and it is the corporation charged with guiding, tolerating, and protecting ‘grateful’ Aboriginal people. (241)

Following Friedel’s arguments, I argue that the introduction of Indigenous participation in tar sands economies obscures the colonial and neoliberal structures that work to dispossess them. Moreover, the emphasis on neoliberal participation of Indigenous peoples in tar sands will be unsettled if tar sands companies take Indigenous self-determination seriously and ethically. Even if neoliberal inclusion within the tar sands economy may have given (temporary) access to jobs and resources to some Indigenous peoples, in the long run, with Indigenous calls for environment justice and decolonization such inclusion is short-lived and against Indigenous sovereignty.

### *Un-model Others*

Erasing Indigenous presence from the frontier city of Fort McMurray also renders Indigenous peoples as rural, dependent on nature, and not adaptable to urban environments—in other words, uncivilized.<sup>24</sup> For example, Kritika mentioned how Indigenous peoples from Fort McKay<sup>25</sup> are “not exposed to the town life because you need to explain that this is what is happening. They’re not in the position to understand what is happening. In that case it is pretty sad.”<sup>26</sup> Respondents (re)produced many such racist stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, and including the state-sanctioned categorizations of Indigenous peoples as lazy, alcoholics, drug-addicts, homeless, uneducated, unemployed, welfare dependent, and not able to understand their own positions and conditions. Indigenous peoples, as Ramesh pointed out, are “homeless and unemployed. They’re not into higher end jobs and studying. They’re also a little bit drugs oriented. Yeah that’s what I have heard about them and seen ... They are on those parts of the social frameworks.” For Kritika: “it’s not just the guys, but the saddest part is that I have even seen women doing the same [drugs and drinking].” Some respondents shared their experiences of engaging with Native colleagues but with paternalistic overtones. For instance, Sonam, who works as a Human Resource Manager in an oil company, mentioned how she has to be careful around her Native colleagues, as “they’re a little sensitive. You cannot say anything about Natives—so you have to be more careful talking to them.”<sup>27</sup> Kabir understood Indigenous peoples’ sensitivity towards

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<sup>24</sup> In Chapters 2 and 3, I illustrate how for South Asians in Canada processes of othering Indigenous peoples are shaped through a lens of caste and indigeneity in South Asian contexts.

<sup>25</sup> Fort McKay is a hamlet within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Members of Fort McKay First Nation predominantly reside in the hamlet.

<sup>26</sup> Kritika continued: “But on the other side they get too many perks from the government.”

<sup>27</sup> Sonam further added: “They don’t get too much close to you. I don’t have any idea but I believe they don’t get direct with South Asians. I don’t think it’s racism but they do keep a distance. Compared to Canadians they have more of a distance,” The quote hints at racism from Indigenous peoples towards South Asians that uncritically perpetuates myths of Natives being racist towards im/migrants.

stereotyping and racism as “too much of a defensive. They always feel themselves as vulnerable. When you say something they just feel offended.”

It should be noted that most respondents commented how they have had no or very little interaction with Indigenous peoples, or have never seen them in the city. Most of them encountered Indigenous people through their school textbooks,<sup>28</sup> or their children’s textbooks,<sup>29</sup> through the Canadian citizenship guide,<sup>30</sup> news, filling out forms,<sup>31</sup> or through Western films. Thus, effacing racialized structures of power and privilege, respondents conceptualized themselves through a white-lens. Through these traces of Indianness, my respondents see themselves much closer to white peoples than to Indigenous peoples, thereby becoming the “model minority” as compared to the unmodel-other. Centering whiteness further invisibilizes Indigenous peoples. All the negative stereotypes and racist perceptions that my respondents (re)produced are derived from the hegemonic ideologies of the racist settler colonial state. From ideas of “incapable labour” to “profiteering Indigenous businesses” to “welfare Indians,” the

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<sup>28</sup> Satish, a computer engineer in an oil company, mentioned: “Because I came here in Grade 10 and I still had to do Social Studies. So there you had to talk about some of the Native communities. After Grade 10, in 11 and 12, you don’t do any of those things. So it was just one year, one course where I was introduced to Native peoples.”

<sup>29</sup> Reshma, who runs a day care out of her home, added: “I learnt through my son. Because I was doing homework with him in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. At that time, I learnt about how first French came and then English came. French and English had war and used these peoples. So it happens everywhere. That era was very black and dark.”

<sup>30</sup> Ritesh recounted: “No we were not aware of the First Nations people in Canada. The first time the word came into my mind is when I got this nice white citizenship book. So that time only I saw the terminology ‘First Nation people’ and who they are, where they are associated with, how do they actually form a part of this country. But I never had any knowledge them in India.”

<sup>31</sup> For instance, Kabir narrated: “In the beginning in Toronto, when I started seeing forms – they would ask me are you an Indian. I used to scratch my head and say what should I put. Because I did not know what they were asking about. In some of the forms I even said yes I am Indian. Then I slowly realized that its Native Indians and not East Indians. So slowly I came to know when someone talks about us that means they are talking about East Indians. When they just say an Indian they mean Native Indian.” Similarly, Reshma recounted: “I was very confused actually when I was new to Canada whenever they would ask: ‘Are you Indian?’ And literally I checked every time I was asked that – ‘Yes I am that’. Once this HR lady was looking at me and asking ‘Are you Indian?’ and I was like ‘Yes I am Indian. And I am proud of being Indian’. She asked which area, are you Metis etc. And I asked what is that. Then she asked are you Canadian Indian? I said I am from India. She asked India in Asia? I said yes. Then she told me about this Indian and I learnt about them and realized I don’t have to check mark on that.” These responses show everyday proximities between the lived experiences of my respondents and indigeneity. They further illustrate how Indians are constructed and imagined through the presence of the other- Indian—the Native other.

state produces and maintains settler ideologies to legitimize its ongoing occupation of stolen lands.

### ***Gender-ed Complicities***

Meritocracy gets (re)produced not only as deracialized but also as degendered. With gender the similar logic works as if heteropatriarchal and misogynist structures do not function in the work place. It must be noted that Fort McMurray and the tar sands are hyper-masculinized spaces including home, work and other public spaces—sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and unequal wages are the norm. Women have been not able to capitalize their skills and labour in the booming industry as compared to the male workforce. For example, male/female ratios in 2007 were 79 to 21 per cent for geoscientists and 96 to 4 per cent for trades (Maya Rolbin-Ghanie). In Suncor, women made only 23.3 per cent of the workforce in 2012 (a slight increase from 21.5 per cent in 2007) (Suncor n.pag.). For my respondents not having any women engineers or having one co-op female student or just one-woman permanent staff for 30 years is “normal.” It was either explained through merit or through Canadian exceptionalism. The logic is that companies prefer employees with the necessary skills, and similar to race, gender is not relevant in determining skills and merits. For example, Ritesh explained, “Oh yeah! It’s fair. All these companies care about is qualification. They don’t care about gender and anything else. If you are qualified enough then they give you jobs, like an engineering director was a woman a few years back. So it’s not like that [sexism does not function in the workplace].” For Kabir: “it’s not that they are not there. I would say its mainly based on their performance and what nature of work they do. In other words, if the women are not studying engineering then they

would not be qualified enough. As more female students are getting trained in engineering, as Kritika noted, “[these companies] have started hiring women.”

Gender equality, or relative lack of discrimination, is also explained through Canada’s exceptionalism vis-à-vis the U.S.; for example, Sanjeev, a computer engineer in an oil company, noted: “as far as I understand, Canadian people are still family oriented not like other parts of North America ... Here, as I understand, it is still more family oriented. That plays a part. And obviously it will always force the women typically to be at home to be with the child. Their later entry into the workforce also plays a role.” Comparing gender equality in Canada to “back home” (India for most respondents), many reflected that gender imparity was “not as bad as back home.” All conversations around gender assumed women to be white or racialized, and not Indigenous. On the one hand, Indigenous women get invisibilized in these conversations, much akin to the settler state methods, where Indigenous women are always already absent from the imagination and state-formulations of indigeneity. Further, violences against Indigenous women in these hyper masculinist colonial spaces is obfuscated in these discourses.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, Indigenous men are made effeminate in comparison to the racialized immigrant—men or women, i.e. they’re not “man enough” with their braids, to be in the office, have a stable job and life and not be dependent on the state.

The questions about gender discrimination and sexism garnered similar denial and disbelief from men and women alike. I should further note, that out of the five women I interviewed, four of them were interviewed along with their husbands at the same time. While this, along with the fact that I was identified as man by most of my respondents, would have impacted my interactions with the women. But given that none of the women had high-skilled

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<sup>32</sup> For instance, see: Gazan; Grant; Rolbin-Ghanie, ““And Then Let’s Go””; and Wheeler.

jobs as compared to the men I interviewed (with the exception of one), is telling of the gender dynamics both within the private and public sphere for these women. Out of the remaining five men, only one respondent's wife worked outside; all others were homemakers. Additionally, with all four couples I interviewed, the domesticated gender dynamics were highly visible, gendered and normalized (from who served tea and snacks, to who went to answer the call, to who went to look at the child/ren etc.). While I did not ask my respondents about domestic gender dynamics, the gendered relations at home replicate the gender relations at the workplace. I draw out this picture to point out how both the private and public spaces remain highly gendered within the economy, and how gender is integral to understanding the workings of the tar sands. In addition, the fact that all my respondents were in heterosexual endogamic marriages speaks to the deep interconnections between heteronormativity and neoliberal economy. That the economy requires the workers be heteronormative is easily visible in the city, public and private spaces. Fort McMurray is a very heteronormative city with very limited queer spaces. For all my respondents to be heterosexual is not a mere coincidence in the context of the tar sands economy. The demands of the economy and market require the residents to have "stable" normative lives in terms of class, gender and sexuality.

In the next section, I discuss Punjabis and their work experiences in different parts of B.C. in forestry and fishery industries during the 1960-90s. Comparing the Fort McMurray community with B.C. communities exposes the heterogeneity of South Asian diasporas in Canada. Firstly, it demonstrates how not everyone in the diaspora is similarly privileged or upwardly mobile. Secondly, it ruptures the myth that immigrant communities who "make it" on the point system are similar; rather it highlights the complexity of socio-economic positionalities of communities.

### **Working Class Complexities: Mills, Canneries, and Racialized Labour in Unceded Lands**

In Vancouver I spoke to Punjabis who had come to Canada in the 1960s-70s from different rural parts of the Punjab, India. The late '60s and early '70s saw an increased and steady migration of South Asians to the region as a result of thriving forestry and fishery industries. Some of these migrants settled in the Lower Mainland, while many others were scattered across Central B.C., Northern B.C.<sup>33</sup> and Vancouver Island.<sup>34</sup> I spoke to six men who worked in lumber mills<sup>35</sup> and six women who worked in fish canneries.<sup>36</sup> Some had lands back home and many did not. Like my respondents in Fort McMurray, everyone I spoke to in Vancouver is jat (upper caste amongst Sikhs) and in heterosexual endogamic marriages. But unlike the Fort McMurray respondents, the Vancouver respondents are not necessarily as privileged and upwardly mobile. There are stark differences in the experiences of the communities in Vancouver and Fort McMurray. Working class jobs enabled everyday proximity to the Native-other and perhaps a more complex and nuanced understanding of each other. For the Vancouver respondents, this proximity produced a different sense of belonging to Canada as many knew more intimately that they were on stolen Native lands.

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<sup>33</sup> By the 1950s, many sawmills in the Lower Mainland had reached their saturation or were in decline. Many Punjabi migrants were forced to move to more isolated areas in Northern B.C. for work. In addition, in 1958 a Punjabi lumber industrialist established his own sawmills in Prince Rupert—Prince Rupert Sawmills Ltd. This served as a major catalyst for increased Punjabi migration to Prince Rupert and other parts of Northern B.C. (for more, see: K. E. Nayar).

<sup>34</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, my discussion is limited to Punjabi communities in mainland B.C. There was a significant community of South Asians on Vancouver Island. But due to logistical and financial reasons, I was not able to include those communities.

<sup>35</sup> I spoke to two men who worked in Prince Rupert, two in Terrace, two in Vancouver, and one in Quesnel. They are retired now and live in different parts of the Lower Mainland. They had all come from rural parts of Punjab.

<sup>36</sup> Out of the six women I interviewed, five worked in Prince Rupert (two of them lived in Prince Rupert, while two travelled from Kitimat and one travelled from Terrace), and one lived and worked in Vancouver. They are all retired now and live in different parts of the Lower Mainland. All, except one, had moved directly from Punjab; one moved via UK.

Historically, in the early twentieth century many Sikhs on the west coast called Indigenous peoples *taae ke* (a Punjabi term used to refer to the family of the elder uncle) as a respect for Indigenous peoples and a recognition of colonial and racial proximities. In my conversations with South Asians in Vancouver, I realized *taae ke* is not a word used now to refer to Indigenous peoples. However, historically it was used widely across B.C. Gurpreet Singh, a journalist based out of Vancouver, adds:

... many old Indo Canadian immigrants used to refer to the aboriginals as *Taae Ke*, an expression in Punjabi that means elderly uncle's family. Those people saw a connection between themselves and the so-called "Red Indians." However, as time progressed, hostilities started to grow between the two groups. Some Indo Canadians who gradually became rich and joined the elite club began belittling the *Taae Ke*. ("In Solidarity with *Taae Ke*")

I note the usage of *taae ke* to illustrate the pernicious continuities and intimacies between South Asians and Indigenous peoples in Canada. The decline in the usage of the term, as Singh notes, demonstrates the growing conflicts between the two communities, and the changed power relations and complicities of South Asians on stolen lands.

### ***Racial tensions, fights, and multicultural performativity***

The early '70s in B.C. was rife with class and racial violence, from verbal abuses to physical fights, between South Asians and the locals—often over “stealing jobs.”<sup>37</sup> South Asians were

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<sup>37</sup> Instead of racism fading away as more and more South Asians started coming to Vancouver in 60s, 70s and 80s, racist violence against South Asians continued to only grow and aggravate. Newspaper reports from late 1950s to 1980s are filled stories of discrimination, exclusion and violence. From racial barriers in housing, to racial slurs and physical violence (including a murder), to discrimination in education and hiring, to myths of South Asians exploiting the generosity of the Canadian immigration system by illegally migrating to Canada, racism was everyday and everywhere. This was also the time when the Klu Klux Klan (KKK) was active in the region and primarily targeting South Asians. By early 1980s, KKK was gaining grounds in Vancouver and in other places across British Columbia.

*The Daily Colonist* reported in February 1981 that KKK was preparing for an “unavoidable race war” in the Vancouver area and its estimated 200 members were arming themselves with rifles, handguns and other survival equipment (“KKK Urges B.C.”). Alexander McQuirter, head of KKK in Canada, told newspapers in early 1981 that KKK was planning start camps that would train people to use weapons for possible race riots and foreign invasions

made scapegoats for the economic crises in Canada.<sup>38</sup> As South Asian migration to the region increased, South Asians were being blamed for taking away jobs from the locals—whites as well as Indigenous peoples. Before the influx of South Asian migrants, Indigenous and white men worked in the lumber mills. Since there was an abundance of work and shortage of labour, these men were able to find work on the basis of their own needs—which included flexible working hours and days. However, with the influx of Punjabi men, the flexibility was lost for Indigenous and white workers. As the mill owners employed workers on a first-come-first-work basis, Punjabis diligently found more work than their Indigenous and white counterparts. Naturally this change in conditions triggered resentment between communities, which would often result in fights. For example, in June 1971 a “wild brawl” broke out between 30 South Asian and white youths in Quesnel.<sup>39</sup> According to the civic heads and South Asian spokesperson, the root of the problem was the “job situation.” *The Vancouver Sun* reported:

East Indians have arrived in ever-increasing numbers in the past few years to find work. Employers who have hired them on a first-come-first-served basis found them diligent and reliable. Even the more bigoted agree that when an East Indian gets on a payroll, he does his very best to stay. This has caused resentment primarily among young unskilled

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(“Klan to Hold Drill”). As McQuirter was arguing for deporting all non-whites to “wherever they came from,” the supporters in Vancouver suggested closing doors to further immigration to Canada by non-whites, as “East Indians, Chinese and Japanese immigrants have contributed nothing to Canada’s economy, culture or heritage” (“KKK Urges B.C.”). Rise in racial discrimination increasingly began to be blamed on the rise of KKK in the area. South Asians, Blacks, Chinese and Indigenous peoples, all organized against KKK for promoting racial incidents by spreading a doctrine of intolerance and bigotry. Fortunately, KKK did not survive for much longer in Vancouver, following its trajectories across North America.

Many fought the rampant and violent forms of racism in those decades. South Asian activists and (white) Canadian media both constructed South Asians as the central (and often as only) targets of racism. These exceptionalizing narratives are jarring considering the ways Indigenous and Black communities were being targeted at arguably more structural and violent levels in the region. Following Lawrence and Dua’s critique of anti-racist organizing and its complicity in settler colonialism, I argue politics of fighting racism can often be a means towards inclusion and assimilation within the Canadian state. While solidarity was discursively forged with Indigenous nations and their struggles, it remained largely symbolic. I argue that through participation in anti-racist projects South Asians did work to legitimize the structures of the settler colonial state. Fighting racism and white supremacy inherently challenges the racially exclusive formations of the nation-state. Yet often, paradoxically, anti-racist struggles reproduce the nation-state as structurally non-racist, fair, and just.

<sup>38</sup> Vancouver dentist Dr. Shadi Khanna, a spokesman for a new East Indian Benevolent Association quoted in ,”

<sup>39</sup> In Prince George, there were 150 South Asians; in Quesnel, about 200; in Williams Lake about 200. In total there were about 700 South Asians in the Cariboo region stretching from Cache Creek 150 miles north to Quesnel (“East Indians Accused”).

workers who see their bread and butter, the menial jobs, going to people they neither understand nor care to get to know. In many case the most resentful are the young whites - "hotheads" - who work for a few days or weeks, then disappear on a binge. When these "hotheads" come back drunk, they often find their jobs filled by East Indians. ("East Indians Accused")

Tensions had escalated so high that South Asians were afraid to go out alone. Pulp mill worker Virenar Manhas, the first South Asian to move to Prince George, told the newspaper: "In the 13 years I have lived here, I have never thought twice about going out alone say, for a beer. But recently, after the events in Quesnel, I sense more tension in the air, I would prefer to go out for a drink only with a friend" ("East Indians Accused").

These fights took place in beer parlors, streets, malls, and mills. South Asians were often called "Hindu," "Paki," "bloodsuckers," "trash," "turban-heads," "snake charmers," "sandniggers," and "camel-jockeys." These racial slurs often were accompanied with phrases like: "Go back home." Racial tensions throughout the '70s continued to be explained as aftermaths of economic crises. In 1977, *The Vancouver Sun* quoted Dr. Don Dutton, "an expert on racial discrimination," arguing that there is ample research that shows racial discrimination increases during times of economic recession ("Of WASPs, Recession"). This reliance on economic conditions as a cause for racial tensions effaced the complexity and permanence of racism in Vancouver and across British Columbia. Processes of racism were, as they continue to be, more intersectional than they are understood as. As much as these conflicts and fights were about racism and xenophobia, they were also about existing sexual desires, amongst other things. An article in *The Vancouver Sun*, at the time of Quesnel conflict, quoted George Klassen, a sawmill worker from Saskatoon: "They come here and take our jobs, and try to make out they are better than we white people. Just the way they look at our women, you know what they are thinking. All my friends think the same way I do. We would do anything to get rid of them"

(“East Indians Face Violence”). Gurpreet’s story, at the beginning of the chapter, addressed such reasons for racial tensions and fights as well. Gurpreet and others reflected on how Punjabi men would stare at Native women in public spaces and get into fights with Native men. I explore these sexual proximities and colonial intimacies between Punjabi and Native peoples further in Chapter 4.

As noted above, quite often these fights were between Punjabis and local Indigenous men. One respondent, Sohan Singh, who worked in a saw mill in northern B.C., recounted similar events:

Sometimes there were [fights]. Teeth would be broken. Eyes were gashed up with the bottles. Faces would be bruised up. We used to go to bars up till 1972 in Terrace. We would go and drink up till 10-11 in the night. They [Indigenous peoples] would come as well and drink. And everyone would drink together. Once there was some fight in the beer parlor. Some East Indian people fought with the Native Indian people. It was very bad. Some say they made the first move. Some said they just didn’t like us. They were drunk and got agitated. After that we never went back. After that we had no social life outside the house. We would socialize only at home with our own people or with white friends<sup>40</sup> in home only. From 1972 I have not seen any bar.

At the beginning of the chapter, I narrated how two men—one Indigenous and another white—racially attacked Gurpreet Singh. Similarly, many of the other respondents talked about how they were attacked by or got into fights with Indigenous men. Many mentioned how fights were common in the mills, stores and beer parlors. Paul Binning,<sup>41</sup> founder of Paar Club, a bhangra group comprised of boys and young men (based out of Vancouver), narrated similar incidences. His group was asked to perform in Fort St. James in the early ‘70s. There were tensions between South Asians and Native peoples in the town around “job stealing.” Instead of fighting back, the Punjabi community decided to culturally engage with the Natives.<sup>42</sup> They asked Paar Club to

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<sup>40</sup> Many respondents like Sohan, only mentioned socializing with their white friends.

<sup>41</sup> Real name. I draw further from Binning’s insights in Chapter 4.

<sup>42</sup> Nayar similarly notes how one of the main objectives of Prince Rupert Indian Association was to reach out to the broader Skeena community to educate others about Indian culture (205).

perform in town and “show the community that they were something else other than just workers in the lumber mills.” Once the group reached town, they were prevented from entering by a group of young Native men.

Binning recounted:

Natives were pissed off why they got us there. There were already many people there and they didn't want us to be there as well. We got enough of us there. When we got into the apartment they wouldn't let us out. There was a lot of tension there. And then the police finally came. They came with big guns. They shot in the air just to keep people off. There was that much tension there.

When we got to the arena and started dancing there, they wouldn't let us out of the dressing room. You know there were a lot of them. We were pretty afraid being young and not being in our territory. Then the audiences came we made it out. When we started performing – when we started the dhol (drums) and everything else, lot of them saw how it was basically what they do. So they got into it. And they really started enjoying the dance part of it.

In those days we used to perform for 18-20 minutes continuously. By the time we finished the whole town was into it. It was a big arena. Everyone was there. And when we finished, the guys from the back kept saying ‘more more.’ One of our guys thought they were calling us bore. So he started saying you're bore. And everything started again. They all got up and wanted to come fight.

Nothing really happened but just the experience of that—it was something that we can never really forget. We wanted to do something. We stood up to the ground. We told whom we were, why we are here, we want to be part of this culture, this country.

The story exposes the workings of multiculturalism and racial-cultural exchange from grassroots, as the group deployed bhangra as a political and cultural tool to foster friendly relations with Indigenous peoples. Unlike the contemporary recognition and celebration of bhangra by the state, for South Asian groups in the '80s bhangra was a way to seek recognition and build peace with other marginalized communities. However, the story also demonstrates the complications and contradictions of racial proximities, tensions, and belonging. The story shows how Punjabis legitimately thought of themselves as Canadians and wanted to demonstrate their Canadianness through multicultural performativity. Bhangra was deployed both as gestures of solidarity and as

overtures of superiority. The incident illustrates the multiple layers of racial violence within settler societies.

### *Steady Workers and Indian-Others*

In my interviews, Punjabi workers in the mills and canneries often described themselves as “steady workers”—which was as much of a self-identification as it was an othering of the Native workers as not “steady” enough.<sup>43</sup> This discourse was used to construct South Asians as better labourers than Indigenous workers—by both South Asian workers and their white employers. In her study of Punjabis in northern B.C., Kamala E. Nayar demonstrates this reputability of Punjabis:

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, for example, when the Hillcrest Lumber Company was close to bankruptcy, Punjabis continued to work, without pay, in order to keep the mill in operation. When the industry picked up, the owner, Carleton Stone, was so grateful to the Punjabi workers for their hard effort that he began to favor Punjabis when hiring. In due course, Punjabis gained the reputation as hardworking labour in the forestry industry. It was precisely for that reason that Sohen Singh Gill preferred to hire Punjabis to work at his lumber mills, including Prince Rupert Sawmills. Two of the Sohen Singh Gill’s former workers explained: “Sohen Gill preferred hiring Punjabi men because they were hardworking even though now (in the 2000s) our reputation may have changed with us drinking. But, at that time, the First Nations and white people were considered as less reliable. The First Nations people were not that reliable because after working a couple of weeks they would disappear once they received their pay cheques.” (148-49)

By default, the “better” worker is inextricably linked to the “better” citizen. According to a respondent, Nirmal, who worked as a mechanic in a saw mill in Prince Rupert:

There used to be a lot of Native workers there before but not many after [we moved]. They started taking holidays, as they were not steady workers. Once they would get paid they would never come back. They would waste it all in alcohol. Many of them were very good but they were not meant for steady work ... you would know how they are once they drink they don’t care. They won’t remember if they have to go to work tomorrow or not. They are still like this now.

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<sup>43</sup> I demonstrate in the previous sections, and more specifically in Chapters 2 and 3 for South Asians othering Indigenous peoples in Canada is shaped through a lens of caste and indigeneity in South Asian contexts.

Everything is paid for them through welfare. When they're getting the welfare then what do they need to work for? The government also keeps giving them welfare. And the government will keep giving them. Such is the state of affairs. Government had to give them work but they would not be steady. They would not work like us though. They don't think like us – we need to work; we need to earn to survive. They wouldn't think about job and life. They didn't have motivations like our people.

Similarly, another respondent, Mahinder, who retired as a sawmill union leader in Vancouver, noted:

Everything is free for them – including no matter what people want to do in the university. But these people won't even do Grade 12. They start drinking early as kids. So drinking only happens and no one is interested in education. In Terrace, every year when kids would graduate, you would never find Natives kids graduating. No one would graduate. They are not steady enough like us.

Through such discursive methods Punjabis self-constructed themselves as more reliable and hence more desirable and employable than Indigenous workers; probably the employers constructed Punjabi workers similarly.

Home ownership was also central in these tensions. Punjabis, similar to most other immigrant communities, valued home ownership, as it was a marker of stability and prosperity in a new country. Subsequently, Native peoples saw this as signs of settlement on Native lands, making Punjabi workers akin to white settlers (Nayar 198-99). In Chapter 4, I noted a similar comparison that Sara draws between Parminder and her sister's white abusive partner.

Apprehensive of starting a relationship with Parminder, a non-Native person (Punjabi), because of her sister's experiences with a non-Native person (white), Sara draws the comparison. This is a critical comparison that many Indigenous peoples make. It points to the fact for Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, like white settlers, are on Indigenous lands, and complicit in their colonization. Even as I argue against deploying “settlers of colour” for racialized peoples, these comparisons point to the inherent colonial and racial structures in the making of the Canadian

settler state. This power hierarchy and relationality is, thus, important to theorize. My exploration of South Asian complicities foregrounds this relationality.

On the question of Indigenous labour, Nayar offers an alternative explanation to work patterns of Indigenous peoples in the sawmills. She quotes a Haida Nation member:

I worked at Prince Rupert Sawmills from 1966 to 1967 ... My uncle and cousin were working there as well. There may have been about twenty First Nations working there out of about a hundred people ... During the summer, lumber mills slow down because of forest fires. Many First Nations would work in the mill during the winter and then go back to their main line of work in the fisheries during the summer. First Nations were transient with the lumber mills. It was subsidiary work. First Nations people really worked in the fisheries. (149)

Nayar counters the narrative that Indigenous workers were lazy and unreliable by demonstrating that their labouring priorities were different. Further, Nayar notes that the arrival of Punjabis coincided with improved wages and working conditions and advancement in technology in the lumber and canning industries (154). She claims that “First Nations have long held the notion that other people—foreigners and ‘newcomers’—had come to ‘steal’ their jobs, an understandable sentiment given the rivalry between the First Nations and the ‘white man’ over land and resources” (152). Nayar’s work contributes to the literature on Punjabis in Canada; however, her analysis is not attentive to the complications of these colonial-capitalist intimacies and renders these proximities linear and reductive.

While there was discrimination from Indigenous peoples towards South Asians, the materialities and affectivities of these interactions were much more complex. I argue that it was not just the “fear” of stealing jobs that made Indigenous peoples hostile towards Punjabis. Rather, hostility was rooted in deeper anger, rage, and frustration with the settler-colonial practices that kept Indigenous peoples marginalized, excluded, and colonized. In her work, Nayar talks about the processes of colonialism and racism that Indigenous nations continue to

survive and struggle against. While Nayar is cognizant of violences in the analysis of Native-South Asian relations, she does not critically engage with settler colonial processes to understand the material realities of Indigenous communities and the complicities of South Asians in these violences. Throughout the text, Nayar offers multiple examples of discrimination from Native peoples. The complexities and complicities of South Asian diasporic formation in northern B.C. are not duly addressed in her work. In my work, I draw from her research to illustrate these complexities and complicities.

Past and ongoing violent colonial processes have enabled Punjabi migrants to maintain a higher socio-economic status than Indigenous workers in the 1970s. The figure of the “steady worker” is constructed through sexist, racist, classist, and ableist underpinnings. More importantly, the steady worker is produced as steady through the making of the Native-other as unsteady. Thus, the Native-other becomes the unmodel-other. Nayar notes how many Punjabis did not want to be called “Indians” because of the term’s negative association with Indigenous peoples; they didn’t want to be mistaken as Indigenous (183). This rejection perpetuated Indigenous peoples’ position as “third-class” and maintained stereotypical images (191). Similarly, Paul Binning also observed: “It is a fact that Punjabi people up to now never liked the Natives. They thought that the Natives were nothing. They always looked down at them.” To reiterate, these traces of indigeneity reinforced the racialized immigrant subject as the economically preferred citizen within the settler state. It was this reputation that was an underlying cause of tension between South Asians and Indigenous peoples, with the latter often blaming South Asians for stealing their jobs.

In analyzing the relationships of South Asian women workers in the canneries with their Indigenous co-workers I found more spaces of mutual respect, exchange, and solidarity. In the next section, I discuss Punjabi women's experiences working in the canneries.

***Fun at work: Gendered economic-citizenship***

Punjabi women started working in the fishery industry in B.C. in the early 1960s. Soon it became the norm for these women to work in the industry—the same industry where Native women had been working since the late 1800s. Their participation in the paid workforce cannot solely be considered within economic terms. Historically, Renisa Mawani notes: “Labour in salmon canneries was contingent on a racially ordered and hierarchized workforce, one that regularly intermingled across racial divides” (*Colonial Proximities* 33). Labour of racialized and colonized women in the canneries has been a complicated site of reproduction and resistance. For Punjabi women, while entering the workforce to support their families was important, women also started working for their personal socio-cultural needs. Nayar has shown that for many women the need for social and emotional well-being in the new country, along with the need for economic survival and financial independence, was the main catalyst in their joining the cannery economies (85). In Canada these women sought out work for a sense of community, belonging, and survival. Drawing upon my interviews I demonstrate how work in the canneries was a means for these women to feel empowered and simultaneously “settled.” Their participation in the economy, I argue in this section, was key in their becoming “productive” citizens of Canada.

As compared to physical violence and hostility that characterized racialized men's relationships with Indigenous men in the lumber industry, I found spaces of mutual respect, and solidarity between South Asian and Indigenous women working in the fisheries. Such relations

were largely absent from the narratives of Punjabi men who worked in the mills. While some women alluded to tensions, most denied any form of racial frictions in the workplace and elsewhere. Most women mentioned how everything was “good” for them and they had “good” relations with everyone. For example, Kirat, who worked in a cannery in Prince Rupert, asserted that “everything had been very good.” Responses like hers were very common. When asked about their relationships with their Native co-workers, all women responded unequivocally that “they were good.” A very few mentioned that they faced racism, but did not expand on it more.

In contrast, Amarjit Kaur Pannun and Kamala E. Nayar document conversations about Punjabi women workers’ experiences with racism and conflicts with their Native co-workers.<sup>44</sup> For example, Nayar provides evidence that between 1979 and 1981, some Indigenous women had circulated a petition to prevent Punjabi women speaking Punjabi on the bus and the workplace (107). Many of Nayar’s respondents noted these tensions: “Not all but some were very bitter and did not like East Indians. There was a lot of tension because of the language and cultural differences”; (107) and “Tension would sometimes arise when some of the Native ladies would say, ‘You are taking our jobs, go back to your country!’ Some Native ladies tried to prevent the Punjabi women from moving into better jobs by insisting that the Punjabi women should do the dirty jobs” (127). Pannun elaborates on these differences and forms of racism:

These women use the word *phark* [difference] to describe the distinctive treatment they receive in the workplace and to describe their situation in Canada. Jagdish’s response to my question “how do non-Punjabi workers and staff treat you?” was “*sāde nāl phark kar dhey hai* (they make a distinction between us [and them]).” These women use the word to distinguish between themselves and members of the dominant community, as well as members of other minority communities. “*Sāde vich phark hai* (there is a difference between us),” was Tirath’s response to my question “are you a Canadian?” (9)

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<sup>44</sup> Nayar argues that Punjabi men experienced less tension in the sawmills than the women did in the canneries, as forestry jobs were less sought out by Indigenous men (148). While numbers of Native employment in these industries validate Nayar’s observation, in my interviews, I noticed the opposite trend. I expand on the gendered processes of storytelling below.

My respondents chose not to tell me about their negative experiences with their Native co-workers, or of explicit racism at the workplace. Women's reluctance to not share similar stories with me may have been that they were not comfortable with me as an outsider (not from within the Punjabi community from B.C.) and a male researcher.<sup>45</sup> This perhaps stopped them from sharing their more personal stories. On the other hand, Punjabi men were able to share such stories more freely with me. This speaks to male sociability in the field and to the gendered processes of storytelling. Most women I spoke to were pleasantly surprised by my interest in their stories, as they continued to maintain that there is nothing special about them and their stories. For men, there was a certain sense of pride in narrating these tensions and conflicts. I argue that remembering the past as "good" and non-violent is a way for these women to claim and maintain a sense of belonging to Canada.<sup>46</sup>

Ghassan Hage notes that racialized immigrant communities portray their immigration experiences as positive, and this is "how the whole migratory enterprise continues to legitimize itself" ("Multicultural Situations" 494). Tracing "happiness" in making of the colonial empires and present-day (white) multicultural nation-states, Sara Ahmed notes:

Migrants are increasingly subject to what I am calling the happiness duty, in a way that is continuous with the happiness duty of the natives in the colonial mission ... Citizenship now requires a test: we might speculate that this test is a happiness test. (*The Promise of Happiness* 130)

Happiness, is therefore, central to claiming citizenship within white nation-states (European and white settler states alike). Ahmed adds: "If the promise of citizenship is offered a promise of happiness, then you have to demonstrate that you are worthy recipient of its promise" (133).

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<sup>45</sup> While I do not identify as a cis-man, I am often read as male by others.

<sup>46</sup> Nayar had similar experiences with women she interviewed. She notes that most women initially responded, "relations are good." Only as the interviews progressed, did the women tell her more intimate stories. She argues "for some Punjabis, conjuring up memories of intercultural tension threatened their present sense of cultural synergy or their sense of camaraderie with the Skeena people" (184).

“Melancholic migrant,” a term that Ahmed coins for those migrants who are unhappy and refuse to project happiness by talking about race and colonialism, challenge the “very desire to assimilate, to let the past go, which returns to haunt the nation” (158). To be happy, the migrant has to let go of the racist pasts and presents, and to be unhappy, one has to stand outside of national happiness. For my respondents to articulate happiness through the discourse of “everything is good,” demonstrates the complicated and contradictory processes of racial-gender-citizenship formations within the settler state. “Good” is neither a denial nor an erasure, but rather an unmasking of the racial and colonial violences in the making of the dreams.

Like their male counterparts, South Asian women reproduced narratives of steadiness and hard work. Jaswant, who worked in a cannery in Prince Rupert but lived in Kitimat, noted: “In peak time I worked 12 hours/day for one month at a stretch. We worked steady hours like that. We worked for weekends for double pay—we would get attracted to the extra money so we kept working on steady for days.” Jaswant said the following about her Indigenous co-workers working extra (steady) hours: “Many did, but some did not. The ones who would come drunk, they were sent back home. We would know when they would not be able to work. Sometimes we would have to call the union to send them back home. Some of them would not just show up. Sometimes they would not come for weeks.” Akin to Punjabi men, these discourses legitimized their work vis-à-vis that of their Native counterparts. Even if women were more generous than men in talking about their Indigenous co-workers, the construction of steadiness was always made through the presence of Native-unmodel-Other. Punjabi women often demonstrated to the employers how they were more reliable than their Native counterparts (Nayar 150).

In addition to narratives of steadiness, most women also talked about fun at work. “Bahut fun kitha” (we had a lot of fun) was a phrase used by most of women respondents. Narrating

their experiences at the canneries, women talked about camaraderie with their co-workers on the floor and lunch breaks when they shared food with each other. Many also reminisced about their almost-single lives while they worked in the canneries. Cannery jobs were seasonal—March through April was the roe herring season and June through August was salmon season. These women would work for four to six months and would go on Employment Insurance for the rest of the year.<sup>47</sup> Since many women did not live in towns with canneries, they would travel and stay away from home during the peak time. They would share accommodations together, sometimes with over ten women in the same room. Away from home and domestic responsibilities, earning “good” money, and living with friends was the charm of these jobs, and hence they were fun. Satwinder, who worked in a cannery in Vancouver, recounted her experiences as: “There were a lot of us who worked there. We were all friends. Very smart women used to work with us. They were very good. We had a lot of love for each other there. It was like a home there. It was fun.”

Gurpal and Avtar, like Jaswant, also lived in Kitimat but travelled to Prince Rupert during the cannery seasons. Gurpal cherished her time away from home and her role as a breadwinner: “Yeah I used to live with my friends in Prince Rupert. And my kids and husband would stay in Kitimat only. My husband would look after them. It was nice to be away from home to work and make good money.” Avtar’s story captures the experience for these women as:

Kitimat had no canneries so I used to work in Prince Rupert. My sister-in-law used to drive us from Kitimat to Prince Rupert. Sometimes she would drive 7-8 people there. I used to pay money for the gas to my sister-in-law. My sister-in-law and her friends used to share a place together – so I started paying them rent and staying at their house. Sometimes there would be overtime and we had work for all 7 days a week and sometimes only for 4 days a week. I stayed in Prince Rupert and didn’t come home. We slept there. We cooked there. There would be 5 women sharing one room – 5 people would come into work and other 5 people would go into work – morning shift and evening shift. I would work 8pm to 8am and other women worked 8am to 8pm. When I would come back home somebody would have cooked for me. Sometimes 5 women

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<sup>47</sup> Nayar notes: “While Punjabis have traditionally not relied on social assistance or welfare, their attitude differed towards EI because they viewed it as an insurance plan to which they had contributed” (103).

would share a room and sometime even 10 women shared a basement. We would cook food in shifts, as we were all friends.

My husband looked after the kids when I was away. Everyone's husbands looked after the kids during that time. Almost 30 ladies used to go Prince Rupert from Kitimat. And so 30 husbands would look after the kids. One daddy would look after the kids in the neighborhood and rotate like that. Turn by turn. It was only two months. Fun. Good money. I would make 4000-6000 in only two months. And then collect UI – not too bad!

In Pannun's work, many aunties recounted similar stories: "The atmosphere is that of a mela [fest]. It is mostly raunak-melã [big vibrant fest]. Lots of talk and laughter. Really, work is a time for all of us to get together and visit," (7) and: "The talk is non-stop. We never run out of things to talk about" (8). Similarly, Nayar quotes a Punjabi woman: "Punjabi ladies like to work because it brought money but also it kept them busy. They liked it because they could speak Punjabi on their breaks with other ladies, gossip, socialize with other people" (105). Nayar demonstrates that cannery work was a basis for social life for Punjabi women. In these narratives, women make it seem as if the work was not hard as they talked more about fun than work. However, survival was hard.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, work was a means for social, cultural and economic fulfillment. It was a place to have fun. I argue that "fun" at work was a way for these women to establish themselves as productive workers, and subsequently economically resourceful within the settler state. These women through their work felt empowered, competent, and "settled" in Canada. Work was a space to socialize, connect, and alleviate isolation and boredom. This trope allowed the women to be "worker-citizens" of Canada. I theorize "fun at work" not to negate the complexities and

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<sup>48</sup> Pannun notes such difficulties: "At first, it was a difficult adjustment period for the family as well ... They may be away anywhere from one day when the season is just starting to 13-14 day stretches when large quantities of fish arrive. In this situation, it is impossible for the family to wait for the "wife and mother" to come home and fix dinner or clean house. From the start, the families were forced to fend for themselves" (22-23), and "It has taken its toll on her physically over the years. She and her friends are plagued by health problems from the long hours on their feet, the poor ventilation, and allergic reactions to the organic matter in the air" (24).

contradictions in the lives of these women. Of course, their lives were not all-just fun. Migration to Canada, starting a new life, entering the workforce, facing sexism and racism at work and in public, raising children, balancing family and work, were not easy to juggle.

Himani Bannerji talking about popular images of South Asian women in Canada, writes:

Neither should one forget that bringing in and keeping in place a vulnerable labour force is profitable, and therefore, to the profit-makers, reasonable ... How we [South Asian women] are seen or not seen can only be accurately determined from the *terms of our entry* into this country. We are not allowed in to create the middle-class or even the skilled labour class. In fact, whatever skill we did possess became de-legitimized upon our entrance to Canada. Farm work, factory work – these are our labour mandates. Since we have already been allocated a space in the lowest level basement of Canadian society, it is entirely appropriate that we are visually and socially invisible. (*Thinking Through* 179, emphasis in original)

Bannerji captures the racialized and gendered inclusionary, yet exclusionary, or vice-versa, processes that South Asian women navigate in Canada. These processes and structures are violent, oppressive and colonial. They have rendered South Asian women forever othered within the settler-state. Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, these materialities and technologies of exclusion can still be complicit in settler-colonial processes. Studying public debates on the migration of Chinese, Japanese and South Asian women into Canada at the turn of the twentieth century, Ena Dua (“Exclusion through Inclusion”; “The Hindu Woman’s Question”) illustrates the working of simultaneous processes of inclusion and exclusion, what she calls “exclusion through inclusion.” The majority of those who participated in the debate argued for exclusion of these women. But, there was a slight minority of people who debated in favor of allowing Asian women to Canada, on the assumption that the presence of female migrants from Asia would work to curb inter-racial intimacies between Asian men and white women (“The Hindu Woman’s Question” 111-12). Dua argues that racial grammars of the nation-state can lead to not only exclusionary but also inclusionary practices. Thus, the state can enable exclusion through

inclusion. This theorization of the white settler state illustrates how South Asian women working in the fisheries are excluded by being included in the settler economies. Their labour might be exploited, on the one hand, yet it was important to reinforce the settler state and its colonial-capitalist exploitation of Indigenous lands, on the other hand. Racialized and gendered labour formations have been fundamental to the maintenance and reproduction of white settler states.

### **Rethinking Labour and Desires: Towards Desirable/Decolonial Shared Futures**

This chapter began with the discussion of migrant dreams and aspirations. More than often racialized migrants come to settler lands with hopes, yearnings, and desires. These lands offer them promises of better lives and futures. Often they have to struggle hard to make ends meet. These day-to-day struggles to survive are further complicated by the axes of gender, caste, sexuality, class, ability, ethnicity, religion, status. Processes of settler colonialism make their lives further complex and complicit. With all this in mind, how do we start acknowledging, accounting for, translating, feeling, sharing and writing these complexities and complicities? To complicate the question further, I do not attempt at defining who is a settler or not, or what defines a good citizen to the settler state or a bad ally to Indigenous nations or a bad citizen and good ally conversely. Yet the way I conducted my interviews was to already assume and name my informants, their bodies, their stories, their experiences, their journeys, their materialities, and affectivities as complicit. These bodies invariably and inevitably are good settlers for the state and bad allies of Indigenous nations. And yet that is not what I sought out to do. Further, I question if I can theorize complicities in isolation: are they not always enabled by, and enabling other structures of complicity? Complicity in one structure does not erase complicities in others.

For instance, as I mentioned in the previous section, most of the respondents I spoke to in B.C., came to Canada with visitor status or no status. They mostly came from rural Punjab. Some

were educated and others not. Some owned lands back home and many did not. They came with dreams to settle in the developed world, the so-called land of opportunities. But instead they found themselves working in logging mills, canneries and meat processing industries, working on farms, driving trucks and cabs, working on railroads and in hotels and motels. Sixteen, seventeen, eighteen hour long days. Seven-days a week. For years without breaks or vacations. Arguably, those were hard lives. With little time for family, friends, or themselves. Albeit some also had fun at work. They may own fancy houses in the Lower Mainland now. Or not. Their children may be settled in upwardly mobile careers. Or not. But can those hardships be erased with money and comfort? They may claim to be part of Canada and be thankful to Canada for letting them stay. But can that ease the pain of decades of racism and exploitation? And what about experiences of gender, caste, and religion? South Asians were the “steady worker” that the capitalist settler state needed to work to displace and dispossess Indigenous nations, and continue to be. Their stories are complex.

People I spoke to in the tar sands had different class-experiences. They are the “model” immigrants who have made it. They have money. They have comfort. They have luxury. Then does it matter that many of them ended up in Fort McMurray because they were laid off in the middle of the economic crisis? Does it matter that for years they worked in jobs in bigger cities where their “skills” were never fully realized? Does it matter they may never really break the visible invisible glass ceiling of whiteness and patriarchy? Yet they are still part of one of the world’s most destructive extraction project. They are at the crux of an industry that is for so many Indigenous peoples a “slow industrial genocide” (Mercredi). Their stories are complex.

While the stories are complex and different for communities in Vancouver and Fort McMurray, I demonstrate in this chapter, how both communities claim “model minority” status

by constructing Indigenous peoples as the “unmodel-other,” This status is produced through the logics of “cultural family values,” and the constructs of model/strong/good/steady workers. This aspiration to “model minority” is an “ascendency to whiteness” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill) and settlerhood that South Asians aspire to and claim in Canada. As I argue, these processes make South Asians complicit in ongoing processes of settler colonialism of Indigenous nations, lands and peoples. These complicities connect South Asians in B.C. to Alberta to Ontario to Prince Edward Island, arguably in other white settler colonial states like the U.S., Australia and New Zealand. However, there are also stark differences between these two South Asian communities in Vancouver and Fort McMurray.

I have demonstrated in the dissertation, there were unambiguous differences in the positionalities and experiences between these two communities. Here I reiterate three main differences. First, as I show in Chapters 2 and 3, only the respondents from Vancouver acknowledged caste violences in India. None of the respondents in Fort McMurray mentioned any forms of caste hierarchies they may have been complicit in. It must be noted that both communities are upper caste. Second, I demonstrated in this Chapter that Vancouver respondents were more aware of violences against Indigenous peoples in Canada than respondents in Fort McMurray. I argue that unlike the Fort McMurray respondents, the Vancouver respondents are not necessarily as privileged and upwardly mobile and have stark differences in their experiences in Canada. For the Vancouver respondents, proximity to the Native-other produced a different sense of belonging in Canada, as they knew more intimately that they were on Native land. This produced a sense of solidarity between Punjabis and Indigenous peoples, albeit this solidarity was frictional, incomplete, and not decolonial. Whereas, respondents in Fort McMurray was more unaware of Indigenous presence in the city and region, and lacked a sense of solidarity

with Indigenous peoples. Similarly, their rural backgrounds from Punjab, and class experiences in Canada, perhaps gives Punjabis in B.C. a different understanding of their complicities in caste hierarchies in India, albeit that does not necessarily make them any less casteist. In addition, they are more aware of racist violences against them. In other words, they are able to understand violences at a more intimate level than the more upwardly mobile “model minority” Indians in Fort McMurray. To rearticulate, Sikhs have different racial, religious, and caste histories. Thus, their lived (class) experiences shape their understandings of intertwined logics of caste, race and indigeneity, however these understandings do not necessarily translate into progressive praxis.

Lastly, for South Asian women employed in B.C. canneries “fun-at-work” challenges heteronormative logics of racialized and gendered labour formations, albeit still working within those logics. I argue that for these women to seek “fun” disrupts economic scripts of desires, intimacies, and aspirations, both “material” and “domestic.” Due to varying modalities of class formations, I argue, Punjabi women in B.C. were more effectively able to challenge logics of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity, as compared to South Asian women in Fort McMurray who invariably reproduce these logics their classed participation in the tar sands economy. Further, Punjabi women’s intimacies with Indigenous women also ruptures settler normativities. Unlike men in B.C. and South Asians in Fort McMurray, and arguably elsewhere in Canada, Punjabi women in B.C. were able to navigate the racial frictions and foster intimacies with Indigenous women, which necessarily were not decolonial, yet they did not follow the settler scripts either. Thus, I argue that through the critical intersections of race, class, and gender, Punjabi women challenged the settler-state’s exclusion through nurturing intimacies which decentered the settler state.

These three key differences rely on an intricate nexus of race, caste, gender, and class. Obviously questions of class and labour produce these key differences and thus are central to engendering anti-colonial alliances. However, in this chapter I explored limitations of labour and complicities of racialized labour in colonial processes. To reiterate, I address four caveats in relation to theorizing racialized labour in settler societies, as discussed in the preceding chapters and in this chapter. First, when I talk about labour, I am not necessarily talking about class; rather I am interested in labour formations or subjectivities as they are constructed through intersecting material, discursive, and affective epistemologies. Second, any analysis of South Asian labour is incomplete without engaging with intersections of caste, gender, ability, ethnicity, and citizenship status in Canada. Third, it is important to reflect on the ongoing legacies of slavery and the violences of anti-Black racism in the present in order to understand the methods of racialized labour commodification within settler colonialism and its anti-Black contexts. And last, I employ labour not as an indicator for belonging, recognition, and inclusion in the settler state. While honoring and recognizing struggles against past and continued racial exclusion of South Asian communities over the last century, it is important to note that their exclusion, labour, and struggles for inclusion have only been made possible through dispossessing and colonizing Indigenous nations.

I draw from critical Indigenous and Black theorizations of labour to illustrate how racialized labour reproduces violences on Indigenous and Black peoples within white settler colonial contexts. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue labour praxis is incommensurable with a decolonizing project (18). Similarly, Shona Jackson calls for a rejection of labour as a humanist praxis (n.pag.). Dean Saranillio elaborates further:

While I politically agree with an anti-capitalist vision, particularly in a global capitalist system that increasingly has relied on war to sustain itself, these movements should be

accountable to Native people by considering a preceding moment in time, a different arrangement of land, resources and a way of life that predates the settler state. (“Why Asian Settler Colonialism” 290)

Rejection of the labour category is not an anti-Marxist theorization, but rather a call for a deeper engagement with Indigenous and Black struggles and lives. It is a call to realign and rethink racialized labour desires and investments to the white settler state. It is a call for decolonizing desires.

Eve Tuck calls upon researchers on Native communities, city communities and other disenfranchised communities to suspend damage-centered research—“research that operates, even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation” (“Suspending Damage” 413). She offers “desire-based framework” as an epistemological shift, as:

... desire interrupts the binary of reproduction versus resistance ... Desire is a thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody. Desire, because it is an assemblage of experiences, ideas, and ideologies, both subversive and dominant, necessarily complicated our understanding of human agency, complicity, and resistance. (419-20)

In a later article, Tuck calls for a “politics of desire that observes desire as enjoying *some/a lot of* self-determination” (“Breaking up with Deleuze” 645). I quote at length for myself and the reader to grasp the immensity and fierceness of Tuck’s conceptualization. She is careful in talking about desire for communities that are read as “damaged” for them to “hold the power to begin shifting the discourse away from damage” (“Suspending Damage” 410). I do not intend to replace/displace Indigenous communities with South Asian communities in the analysis and to create spaces and epistemologies of desire for the latter at the cost of/by dispossessing Indigenous nations. While all racialized and colonized peoples can be read as “damaged”

through violences of cis-heteropatriarchal, capitalist, white supremacist, and colonial processes, I am not conflating their “damagedness” into that of Indigenous peoples. To be clear, not all communities of colour are homogenous, and we have to look for intersecting and overlapping structures of power to understand oppressions, traumas and pains. Nevertheless, I centre Indigenous desires for self-determination and sovereignty. For decolonization. For souls. For lands. For futures. For presents. And for pasts. Neither do I want to dismiss racialized desires and dreams. For futures. For presents. And for pasts. I seek to understand Native and racialized desires as a “cacophony,” drawing from Byrd, which is contradictory, complicated, complicit, agential, and in solidarity. For Tuck, desires, are “longing about a present that is enriched by both the past and the future,” and “integral to our humanness” (417). While it is imperative to think about decolonization within the South Asian diasporic context, it is important to reiterate that: “decolonization is not a metaphor” (Tuck and Yang). When Indigenous lands and nations continue to be occupied in Canada, racialized peoples need to work towards unsettling themselves within the settler state, and seek decolonial desires for futures between Indigenous nations and racialized diasporas on stolen lands.

## Conclusion

In July 2014, I spent a lot of time at the Vancouver Public Library, browsing through almost a century of B.C. newspaper archives. Researching news reports on South Asians in B.C., I explored multiple facets of South Asian lives. I spent most of the time collecting stories of racial violence against South Asians, some of which I have shared in the dissertation. On days when I would not have interviews or meetings scheduled, I would scour old newspaper tapes, usually sipping home made chai or ice caps, surrounded by the everyday boisterous chaos of the public library. I would usually arrive at the library around 10:30 in the morning, set up my desk with the tapes and my laptop, and catch-up on emails and current news before diving into the “old” news. However, more often than not there was not much of a difference between “old” and current news. Unlike the challenges of tracing indigeneity in the making of South Asian diasporas in Canada, as I elucidated in this dissertation, the connections between “old” and “current” news were not that difficult to trace. Instead, they asserted their ominous presence. Archives demonstrate how history repeats itself. Archives are the keeper of these overlapping histories, however incomplete, invisibilizing, and hegemonic they may be.

Events in the late summer of 2014 blurred the past and present for me in the archives. The end of July marked a new genocidal attack from Israel against the people of Gaza. Black communities and allies were out on the streets in Ferguson, U.S. to protest against state-sanctioned murder of Michael Brown and other Black peoples. There was a massive tailings pond break and toxic spill affecting Indigenous communities in the Cariboo region in B.C. A 15-year old Indigenous girl, Tina Michelle Fontaine, was found dead in Winnipeg’s Red River; adding to the ever-growing, yet constantly disregarded, list of Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit peoples missing and murdered by the settler colonial state. In Ottawa, the federal

government was bringing in changes to the Immigration Bill that has fundamentally changed the citizenship rights of racialized peoples in Canada. And at York University and other campuses in Toronto, a white supremacist organization “Immigration Watch Canada” distributed racist and xenophobic pamphlets demanding a curb to immigration of racialized peoples into Canada.

One morning in late July, following my daily routine, I settled in to go through the tapes. In the past few days I had made my way up to the early ‘80s looking at stories of racial discrimination against South Asians in Vancouver. That morning, I started following news stories on the emergence of the KKK in Lower Mainland (as discussed in Chapter 5). I had heard about the activities of the KKK in the ‘80s in the region only a few weeks’ prior through talking with community elders. This part of history has not been documented in academic archives. Reading the archives was my first time reading live records of the KKK’s violence in the region. By 1981, the KKK was starting to prepare for an “unavoidable race war” on communities of colour, specifically South Asian communities (“KKK Urges B.C.”). As I read further, I came across a story of a cross burning. In June 1981, the KKK organized its first public cross-burning in B.C. *The Vancouver Sun* reported:

“Let us offer a prayer to God for creating us in His image, for giving us white skin and superior intellect.” With that invocation, delivered by a blonde woman in her early 20s, the KKK’s first public cross-burning in B.C. in years was under way Sunday. Before long, 40 white supremacists, a dozen of them wearing white robes, were brandishing flaming torches, making Nazi-style salutes and chanting “white power” as an eight-meter-high, rough-hewn wooden cross sent flames into the darkening sky. (Ouston A11)

Reading the news, I felt triggered and decided to go on Facebook to take my mind off this disturbing image.

Just then, the news broke that Israel had attacked a school in Gaza that had been marked as a safe shelter for Palestinians. Reports started pouring in that some 11 Palestinians were killed in the artillery attack and over 100 were wounded. As I was processing the news, already shaken

by KKK violences, there was an announcement made in the library PA system about an event scheduled for that afternoon celebrating the centenary of Canadian forces joining the World War I. The event was going to showcase the library's collection of memorabilia of Canadian soldiers who fought in the war. All of the sudden, I was sobbing loudly right in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> floor. Overwhelmed by the racial and colonial continuities between white supremacist violence in the Lower Mainland, genocide in Palestine, and the celebration of (settler) Canadian participation in (white) imperial wars, I could not hold my tears back. I quickly packed my belongings, and found refuge under a table in a corner. I spent the next 30 minutes crying. It took me over two weeks to return to the library and continue the research where I had left it.

I recount this story not for my tears of privilege, guilt, and hopelessness. Rather, I narrate this story to trace the racial and colonial continuities, here and there, now and then, shared by Black, Indigenous, Muslim, and other people of colour, globally, through time, albeit in varying ways. Since 1492, the world we know it continues to be shaped by racial and colonial violences. While the legacies and continuities of these processes are very different for varying racialized and colonized peoples, it is impossible to efface the connections, proximities, and intimacies of shared violences, and the simultaneous complicities. Yet the modalities of settler colonialism continuously efface and invisibilize these intimacies.

To understand intimacies between differently colonized and racialized peoples on stolen lands, the dissertation studied the triangulation of the logics of raciality, coloniality, and indigeneity. This triangulation, I argue, helps to explore the complexities, complicities, and incommensurabilities of racialized diasporic formations in settler colonial contexts. Firstly, I contend that the triangulation unmasks the racial and colonial violences in the processes of settler colonialism. Epistemologically, analyzing the determinants of raciality, coloniality, and

indigeneity privileges complexities, instead of shying away from a critical theorization of the multiple logics of power and oppression. In an endeavour to complicate understandings racialized diasporas in settler states, in this dissertation I bring together structures of white supremacy, brahminical caste supremacy, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, border imperialism (Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*), heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and settler colonialism together.

In Chapter 1, I theorized settler colonialism through the intersections of anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, and border imperialism. I argued that while transnationally, each of these processes have multiple genealogies, and in white settler states the three converge together as intrinsic to settler colonial modalities. Secondly, I argue settler colonialism cannot be theorized in isolation and unrelationally, but rather these three elements have to be foregrounded in understanding the multiplicities of relational colonial and racial formations. Chapters 2 and 3 brought anti-caste frameworks in conversation with anti-settler colonialism analytics. I argued that in order to theorize South Asian diasporas in Canada, a critical engagement with brahminical caste supremacy is needed. The two chapters together explored the questions and silences of caste and indigeneity within South Asian diasporic formations; and, secondly, demonstrated how caste, race, and indigeneity converge together in settler states in the making of racialized diasporas. In Chapter 4, grounding processes of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity within settler colonialism, I explored the formation of interracial and crossracial (normative or non-normative) desires, and erotics, what I call “colonial intimacies,” I argued that these intimacies take multiple forms, across all genders and sexualities, which may be acts of subversion or complicity, spaces of love or intimate violence, of permanence or transience, of reproduction or recreation, of capitalist production or anti-colonial solidarity. Lastly, Chapter 5 theorized classed,

gendered, and racialized labour formations at sites of resource extraction on Indigenous territories. I contended that the settler states require labour of racialized peoples on extraction sites to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands. Thus, capitalist forms of labour exploitation and extraction are deeply intertwined with settler colonialism and white supremacy. Together, these chapters explored the varying complexities of the nexus of race, caste, gender, sexuality, and class in the making of settler states.

Drawing on these complexities, the study of the triangulation of raciality, coloniality, and indigeneity offers a critical lens to conceptualize complicities. In this dissertation, I argued that South Asians in Canada are complicit in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous nations, peoples and lands by the Canadian state. Further, I showed how complicities are complex, and cannot be studied in isolation. Rather, complexities make complicities, and complicities are complexities. In Chapter 1, I argued that settler colonialism with its overlapping logics of anti-Black racism, Islamophobia and border imperialism makes racial complicities complex. Differently racialized and colonized peoples are complicit in violences against each other. More specifically, racialized peoples are complicit in the colonization of Indigenous nations, peoples, and lands.

Exploring caste-privileges in the diaspora, in Chapters 2 and 3, I argued that the Native-other is produced by an urban savarna upwardly mobile Hindu through a continuum of Indian-Others, which includes the Black-Other, Dalit-Other, Bahujan-Other, and Adivasi-Other, and the Muslim-Other. The savarna subject does not instantly recognize the Native-other as the caste-other, but rather this recognition is mediated by the settler state. By recognizing the caste-other in the Native-other, the savarna subject can ascertain their positionality and privilege in settler society. This is how the structures of brahminical caste supremacy and settler colonialism come into contact with each other, and maintain each other. In theorizing conditions of possibilities

and impossibilities of colonial intimacies in Chapter 4, I argued that these intimacies can be acts of subversion or complicity, or spaces of love or intimate violence. Exploring different examples of such intimacies, I demonstrated how some intimacies reproduce settler colonial violences, while others may open spaces for decolonial love. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how South Asians claim “model minority” status by constructing Indigenous peoples as the “unmodel-other.” This status is produced through the logics of model/strong/good/steady workers. This aspiration to “model minority” is a quest to whiteness and settlerhood. These different processes make South Asians complicit in ongoing processes of settler colonialism of Indigenous nations, lands, and peoples.

Lastly, the focus on the complexities and complicities of the triumvirate of raciality, coloniality, and indigeneity allows us to articulate the incommensurabilities between varying political struggles and Indigenous decolonization. Complexities and complicities make incommensurabilities. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang insist that incommensurabilities demonstrate the distinctness of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty in relation to calls for racial rights and other social justice projects. They elaborate, as quoted in Chapter 1: “Decolonization is not equivocal to other anti-colonial struggles. It is incommensurable” (31). Further, they argue that decolonization is not a metaphor, rather the need is to decolonize Indigenous lands. Taking directions from Tuck and Yang and other scholars on racial and colonial incommensurabilities, in this dissertation I explored different struggles for social justice and their in/compatibilities with decolonization. In Chapters 2 and 3, I looked at challenging intersections of struggles for dismantling brahminical caste supremacy in South Asia and globally within the framework of decolonizing Indigenous lands. Chapter 4 explored spaces of decolonial love to rupture structures of heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity as possible sites of decolonial solidarities

between racialized peoples and Indigenous peoples. In Chapter 5, I looked at racialized labour and desires within settler economies to argue that struggles for labour justice and anti-capitalism need to foreground Indigenous sovereignty. Throughout the dissertation I have also explored processes of knowledge production on race within settler academies and how they efface questions of indigeneity and sovereignty. Thus, incommensurabilities shape racialized formations in settler states, and the triangulation seeks to unmask the making of these contradictory and complex struggles.

Indigenous decolonization is, therefore, incommensurable for South Asians “settled” in Canada. South Asians through their investments, desires, labours, and positionalities within the settler state, maintain their privileges in Canada. Decolonization for South Asians means letting go of their aspirations in the continuance of the Canadian state. Rather, they need to invest themselves in the formation of Indigenous decolonized nations. Even as incommensurabilities may leave theoretical questions invalid, political strategies inept, alliances failed, and racialized presence on stolen lands complicit, colonial incommensurabilities are necessary to rupture, unsettle, and decolonize any normative and linear understandings of belonging, citizenship, and nation-hood. Grounding these ethics, continuities, and complexities, it is indispensable for South Asians to be committed to unsettling their complicitities towards shared decolonial futurity.

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