

**A RACIALIZED SETTLER WOMAN'S
TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY IN CANADA:
BUILDING RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITIES**

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Abstract

This dissertation tells the story of my racialized settler woman's transformative journey toward reconciliation and mutual empowerment through community in Canada. The dissertation discusses how Indigenous Land-based learning became healing and empowering for me as a newly arrived settler woman of a colour, learning about my positioning on the stolen Indigenous Lands of treaty six territory. It recounts the journey of migrating from one colonial Land to another, building a family and new community networks, and learning about Indigenous histories, cultures, Land-based learning, and about diverse newcomer settler communities in Saskatoon, Canada. The dissertation discusses how collaborative learning has supported taking responsibility for understanding the meaning of Land in solidarity with Indigenous and newcomer communities, through involvement in a community garden project, community radio show, and various cultural community activities. Using decolonial feminist relational autoethnography as my research methodology, this dissertation discusses my quest to challenge everyday racisms and colonial practices ingrained in the daily lives of newcomer Canadians. Following 12 years of community activities in Treaty 6 and 7 territories, this research emphasizes a key lesson from this life journey: the need to be responsible for understanding the Indigenous meaning of Land in order to create belongingness with the Land and its original peoples, while resisting the assimilationist forces impacting Indigenous and newcomer communities through their unique histories, despite the orchestrated biases operating through colonialist structures. The author concludes with the hope that the analysis of decolonial, collaborative learning stories and connections with the Land may help other non-Indigenous communities build meaningful relationships with the Land and Indigenous communities.

Keywords: Indigenous Land-based learning, Decolonial feminist relational autoethnography, Building relationships, Community activities (Community gardening, radio, and transnational cultural activities), Anti-racism, Mutual empowerment, Relational accountabilities

Dedication

To all my decolonial, antiracist, and feminist mentors, educators, community artists and activists, and friends.

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All my relationships, I acknowledge as my responsibilities. I am grateful for my relationships with Indigenous people, Lands, and cultures, and for all who supported me to be a reflective learner as a racialized settler woman living as an uninvited guest in this Indigenous Land. Gratitude to every Saskatoon community member who supported my informal community leadership activities and participated in making collaborative social changes for the past decade. Gratitude to the parents who encouraged, inspired, and brought their children to me for informal community activities in collaborative learning spaces. And finally, gratitude for the youth who were able to return to activities that enriched their learning experiences, through community gardening, community radio, cultural activities, sports, celebrations, and social activities. Being a mother and a community volunteer gives me strength, purpose and meaning every moment of my life. I treasure all of the collaborative learnings acquired during my community activities with cross-cultural and Indigenous communities in Saskatoon.

Over the past two years, as we have all been impacted by the COVID pandemic, I have watched with pride how the University of Saskatchewan community and my Ph.D. committee members, have persisted in supporting me to walk joyfully on stage during my graduation ceremony. Finishing one's dissertation is always a significant milestone, but the laughter and tears have flowed freely, and my heart is full today. I am now ending my doctoral research journey, confident that I have been well prepared for the upcoming challenges of life, work, and continued learning. My father used to say, after finishing higher studies, one can see how big the knowledge project is and how much responsibility a doctoral graduate undertakes in committing to making changes for the future.

I am grateful to my parents, whom I lost during my doctoral journey, and who raised me as an artist. Gratitude to my sisters who shared their feminist power and the platform to be an artist and community activist. I am grateful to my partner, Dr. Ranjan Datta, and my three daughters, who continuously inspired me to move forward, despite many social and systemic challenges.

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Last, but certainly not least, I am grateful to my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Marie Lovrod, who prepared me for the doctoral degree and taught me how to carry "gentle power" in mindfully constructing knowledge throughout my Canadian academic life, and in my continuing growth as a decolonial transnational feminist.

Table of Contents

Permission to Use	i
Disclaimer	i
Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Land Acknowledgement	1
Self Positioning	2
My Inspirations	5
Anguish as Inspiration	9
Evolving as a Researcher	17
Responsibility to Indigenous Histories	19
My Decolonial Journey	19
Challenges through Multiculturalism.....	20
My Life in Bangladesh and Canada	21
The Myth of Meritocracy: Deconstructing My Privileges	22
Decolonizing My Own Ethnic History	24
Identity Dysphoria	26
Decolonial Feminist Relational Autoethnography and Cross-cultural Collaborative Learning	30
Research Questions	33
Original Contribution of this Study	34
Objectives of the Research.....	35
What is This Dissertation About?	36
My Position Around the Arts and Artists.....	37
Why Have I Done Saree Wrapping for the Last Twelve Years in Canadian Festivals?	38
Chapter Two: Situating Indigenous and Immigrant Women as Structurally Separated Communities in Canada	41
Chapter Overview and Purpose.....	41
Indigenous People and the On-Going Colonialist Project of Assimilation.....	43
Lack of Safe Drinking Water	44

Migration and Assimilation	44
Assimilation Pressure Prevents Newcomers from Understanding Indigenous Histories.....	46
Neoliberal Imaginaries and Border Imperialisms	47
Forces Accelerating Human Migration and Removing Peoples from Homelands	48
Immigrant Women’s Positions in the Canadian Labour Market.....	48
Commodification of Immigrant Women's Labour.....	50
Border Imperialisms.....	54
Structural Racisms and Whiteness as Related Problems	55
Relevance of Anti-Racism and Critical Decolonial Feminism	62
Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Resistance against Canadian Structural Racisms	63
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework	65
Necropolitics and Biopower.....	65
Said’s Concept of Otherness	68
Strangeness	69
How Bias is Animated through Hierarchical Systems	71
Neoliberalism as a Prevailing System Animating Injustice	72
Subalternity: Enforced Disempowerment.....	76
Intersectionality Engages Complex Experiences of Social Systems	78
The Need to Develop Transnational Literacies to Unpack the Legacies of Imperialisms	81
The Contested Meanings of Empowerment.....	83
Cognitive Justice and Abyssal Thinking.....	85
Hybridity, Diasporic Subjectivities, Contested Cultures and Fear as Deterrent to Learning.....	86
Situated Knowledges	91
Decolonization as a Process of Unlearning and Learning Anew	92
Decolonization is Necessary to Reconciliation.....	95
Relationality as a More Life-Affirming Way to Approach Social Differences	95
Gentle Power.....	96
Chapter Four: Autoethnographic Research Methodology and Method—What, Why, and How.....	100
The Meanings of Autoethnography	100
Challenges in Autoethnographic Research	102
Why I Chose Autoethnography as My Research Methodology.....	104
Procedures in Autoethnographic Research	107
Collaborative Learning Stories	110
Findings Analysis.....	115

Research Analysis Process Step by Step.....	119
Outlining Key Stories through Narrative analysis (Step by step)	121
Procedures of Narrative Analysis	121
Chapter Five: Community Gardening: A Learning Space for Building Bridges.....	124
Our Cross-Cultural Community Garden	125
Data Used.....	127
Community Garden as Healing Place	127
Community Garden as Opportunity to Learn.....	128
Community Garden for Learning about Indigenous Peoples and Knowledge.....	128
Community Garden as Classroom and Curriculum	130
Community Garden as Food Security	136
Community Garden as Community Solidarity.....	136
Community Garden as Land for Decolonization and Reconciliation	138
Discussion.....	142
Chapter Six: Challenges for Racialized Artists of Colour in Canada: Learnings from the Community Radio.....	144
My Story as a Racialized Woman Artist in Saskatoon	144
My Artist’s Life in Bangladesh and Canada	148
Challenges to Continuing My Cultural Activities Abroad.....	150
A Hope Sparked Through Saskatoon’s Sargam Vocal Performance Group.....	153
Sargam Vocal Performance Group as a First Stepping Stone in Saskatoon	154
Marginalizing Artists of Colour Through Multicultural Policy	159
Lack of Funding for Artists of Colour	160
Permanent Death of Cultures	162
Canada’s Immigration Policies Are Assimilationist	164
Lack of Opportunity to Practice, Perform and Continue Artistic Activities	165
Racialized Artists “Perform as an Entertainer”.....	167
Racialized Newcomer Artists are Tokenized.....	169
Dominant Culture Versus Racialized Artists’ Community.....	170
Corporate-dominated, Profit-driven, Neo-liberal Artistic Representations are Harmful.....	172
Women of Color Artists Are Considered Less Desirable	173
Art Education Needs to be Valued from Home, Community, and State	174
Arts Programming is Necessary to Educate Audiences About Inclusion	175
Islamic Religious and Patriarchal Barriers Forbid Cultural Activities	176
Finding Solutions as a Minoritized-Artists-of-Colour Community	178

Artists' Resilience and Few Rays of Hope	180
Discussion	181
Chapter Seven: Learnings from the Community Radio: Indigenous People, Knowledge, Land, and Decolonization	184
Themes and Findings from Indigenous Elders' Radio Conversations	186
Indigenous Knowledges	186
What is Indigenous Land-Based Education?	187
Indigenous Knowledge is often Orally Transmitted	190
Learning About the Meaning of Indigenous Spirituality	191
The Meaning of Honorariums in Indigenous Cultures	193
Ceremonies and Traditional Practices.....	193
The Meaning of Music in Indigenous Cultures.....	194
Learning about Decolonization and Reconciliation	195
Indigenous Scholars' Stand on Decolonization	198
Challenges of Learning and Teaching About Decolonization and Reconciliation	200
Discussion	203
Chapter Eight, Conclusion: Taking Responsibility for Reconciliation and Making Change is a Lifelong Commitment	207
Becoming an Anti-Racist, Decolonial Feminist Researcher	211
Recommendations	218
References	220
Appendix A: Certificate of Approval	235
Appendix B: Certificate of Re-Approval	236

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Situating Myself as a Settler of Colour in Canada and as a Mainstream Woman in Bangladesh.....	21
Table 1.2: Deconstructing My Privileges	23
Table 4.1: Outlining Overarching Themes	123
Table 6.1: Situating Myself as an Artist of Colour in Canada and as a Mainstream Muslim Woman Artist in Bangladesh.....	148

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Layers of Racism.....	62
Figure 4.1: Decolonial Relational Auto-ethnography and Collaborative Co-Learning.....	119

Chapter One: Introduction

Land Acknowledgement

The University of Saskatchewan campus is located on Treaty Six Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. I pay my respects and gratitudes to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place, reaffirming our relationships with one another in the present, and with the Land that sustains us. I would also like to acknowledge that I have been living and working remotely during the global COVID pandemic on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which is home to the Siksika, the Piikuni, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina, and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations. Mount Royal University, Calgary, where I have lived while teaching and writing my doctoral dissertation is situated on Land adjacent to where the Bow meets the Elbow River. The traditional Blackfoot name of this place is "Mohkinstsis," now called the city of Calgary. Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. Through my acknowledgements I wish to situate my active commitments to learning about decolonization and reconciliation as a newcomer academic who is making relationships with the Land and all treaty people working to recover better ways of supporting each other through processes of reconciliation and decolonization.

A Land¹ acknowledgement is the first step in understanding who I am in this Indigenous Land as a racialized settler woman. During my twelve years of living in Canada, I have observed that many settler people of colour live here without knowing the country's colonial history, the stories of Indigenous peoples, and the meaning of Land in Indigenous ways of knowing. Similarly, many settlers live in Canada without building any meaningful relationships with the Land or its Indigenous peoples, for many systemic, social, and interpersonal reasons. Therefore, I open my doctoral dissertation by acknowledging the Indigenous Lands where I have had the opportunity to learn about Indigenous histories, cultures, and sacrifices and to undertake my

¹ Throughout this dissertation I have used a capital letter for 'Land' to express respect for its constituent geographies, water, insects, plants, animals, and all living and non-living beings and forces. It is also my responsibility as a racialized settler to take a political stand for Indigenous Land rights.

doctoral research. Decolonizing approaches have influenced what I have learned and, therefore, I acknowledge that I have benefited from my exposure to Indigenous worldviews, Lands, waters, living ecosystems, and relationships with members of Canada's original Indigenous peoples.

In my learning journey for this dissertation, I have come to respect the histories and heritages of Indigenous communities, who like mothers or today's unpaid caregivers, have long taken care of this Land. I have learned that Indigenous communities have treated this Land as a part of their bodies and communal lives within wide networks of human and more-than-human relationships. Thus, the violent installment of imperialist Land ownership informs our shared and painful histories. I care about the enduring relationships between Indigenous peoples and their traditional territories, how they share the Land with newcomers, and offer friendship less shackled to imperialist models of class, race, and gender, than I have known before my learnings over the past decade. As a more recently arrived guest in this Land, it is vital for me to understand the colonial history of Canada and the aspirations of Indigenous peoples, who continue to live here and shape our shared futures. As beneficiaries of Indigenous peoples' care for the Land, it is the responsibility of new arrivals in Canada to learn about the dynamics of settler colonialism in order to begin undoing its harms.

As a racialized newcomer settler woman of colour, I am invested in enabling mutual flourishing with Indigenous peoples and Lands, emphasizing gentler and more sustainable approaches to relational models of power and decolonial feminist knowledges. Land acknowledgements foster individual and collective actions, supporting shared social responsibilities that help to eliminate ongoing colonialist, racial, social, and environmental injustices, uplifting Indigenous views and minoritized voices seeking redress. Land acknowledgments also teach rootedness, responsibility, decolonization, and strong accountabilities. This notion of strong accountabilities shows how Indigenous ways of knowing extend the feminist concept of strong objectivities (Harding, 2013), by emphasizing deepened relational connections with Lands and peoples.

Self Positioning

I am a female settler of colour and a Bangladeshi-Canadian. I have learned from anti-racist practitioners, educators, activists, and Indigenous Elders that I am an uninvited guest in this Indigenous Land. However, I have been working to become a more responsible and accountable guest. As a community-engaged social justice activist, community builder/organizer,

change-maker, transnational cultural performer, anti-racist practitioner, educator, and critical decolonial feminist, I am continuously unlearning dominant colonialist narratives. I am in the process of becoming a decolonial, diasporic, transnational person, relearning the suppressed epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies that have shaped my journey. As a minoritized woman and lifelong learner, I want to challenge colonial power structures that create social injustices. My community cross-cultural relationship building, academic work, family caregiving, and anti-racist, decolonial feminist parenting of artistically tutored children, frame the aspirations of my life.

In their consideration of emerging efforts to Indigenize knowledge production in the Canadian academy, Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) contrast reconciling and decolonial approaches. They argue that reconciliation approaches envision Indigenization “on common ground between Indigenous and Canadian ideals, creating a new, broader consensus on debates such as what counts as knowledge,” exploring “what types of relationships academic institutions should have with Indigenous communities” (p. 219). They see decolonial Indigenization as a “wholesale overhaul of the academy to fundamentally reorient knowledge production based on balancing power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians, transforming the academy into something dynamic and new” (p. 219). As an academic learner, I take these aspirations seriously, and am still developing my understandings of reconciliation and decolonization, recognizing the necessity of both. I love to reflect on how such newly attained understandings have been helping me grow into community-building efforts that position my evolving roles in reconciliation within a process that moves toward developing effective intersectional, anti-racist, and feminist decolonial lenses that engage formal and informal learning environments, both on campus and in the community.

My project also engages women's reproductive labour as a way to learn more from Indigenous peoples about caring for the earth. Consequently, when I share in practices that build community relationships, protect cultural stories, ethnic community arts, and endangered languages, I see that work as part of taking responsibility for my place in this Indigenous Land, in the context of my family's social changes and challenges. Natasha Bahkt points out that although Canada's Multiculturalism Act does little to improve the substantive rights afforded to minorities, it signals a symbolic “policy preference for integration over assimilation,” simultaneously encouraging diversity while seeking to contain it (p. 161). As a collaborative

community learner, researcher, and educator committed to learning about anti-racism, decolonial feminism, environmental, gender, social, and racial justice, I have invested my adult life, engaging in transnational cultural activities and learning about Indigenous world views and decolonization, through cross-cultural community activities. These efforts help me to better understand the meanings and practices of mutual empowerment as I, and those with whom I share my communities, have lived it. As a result, I have both participated in and learned to be critical of the multicultural spaces made available to racialized settler artists, who try to keep our languages and cultures alive, through classical and creative arts. Newcomers have lost many living stories through multiple systemic failures to care for languages and cultures in ways that can help us understand the teachings of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers about sovereignty.

My trajectory of formal and informal community volunteer work and my diasporic personal and family life have evolved through three specific platforms for building my networks in Canada: 1) my casual community cultural activities, 2) my role in our local community garden, and 3) participation in CFCR Saskatoon's community radio programming, hosting an intercultural learning space that invites my diasporic Bangladeshi community as audience. I have lived for ten years in Saskatoon, followed by two years in Calgary. Before arriving in Saskatoon, I lived less than a year in Toronto, where I began my experiences in Canada and faced my first challenges as a newcomer working to raise a family, build community, and make cross-cultural relationships, creating networks that would extend my diasporic family into our local communities.

My biggest accomplishments in life are not centered on worldly goods, but rather on how well I have raised my children, guided my community's newly arrived women, artists, children, and youth, contributed to, and learned collaboratively with my many intersecting communities, all within our uniquely situated relationships. From day one, I have worked to raise anti-racist, decolonial feminist, and artistic children by exposing them to Indigenous worldviews, spirituality, and social justice learning opportunities. I have also engaged in related efforts to share the same knowledge with my Saskatoon diasporic and cross-cultural communities, through various events and engagements. In Calgary, I have been teaching courses in "Community and Society" and "Social Problems" to my undergraduate students, in efforts to facilitate their capacities for practicing mutual care in our processes of learning with and from each other.

My Inspirations

The biggest influences and inspirations for this research arise from my fierce commitments to promoting constructive social change, facing challenges, and supporting the children, students, and communities of my life. Minoritized people often experience injustices, exclusions, oppression, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, micro- and macro-aggressions, hate crimes, religious racism, marginalization, ostracism, and dehumanization along both horizontal and vertical axes of social violence. Due to the coercive systemic push-and-pull factors shaping global migration patterns, some settlers have stopped investing in mutual care and sustainable approaches to living together on the Land, because they have lost touch with their own cultural practices of sustainability and have not learned from Indigenous communities. Minority languages and cultures are endangered, and cultural identity loss tears into the futures of Canada's Indigenous, immigrant, and diasporic populations in targeted ways. Like me, many migrants loosen their ties to their homelands, ancestral teachings, languages, and cultures. These losses are normalized through integration and assimilation into the ever-present dominant culture. There is an invisible push away from the Land and toward capitalist consumption as newcomers learn to be "Canadian." Canada's "mosaic" is therefore contradictory, based on severing the connections between Indigenous peoples and the Land, and between immigrants and their homelands, with little structural or policy efforts to combat these effects of neoliberal capitalism. When I arrived in Saskatoon, I was unsure about what to teach the children and young people in my community to help us all create a greater sense of belongingness, together. I searched for ways to develop deeper connections with this new Land and its many Treaty peoples, to guide myself and my family, and to begin to feel more rooted.

Separations from homelands through global patterns of migration reflect long histories of imperialisms, and create conditions for misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and antagonisms within and between Indigenous and newcomer groups. Postcolonial scholar, Homi Bhabha (2018), frames such hegemonic contexts as follows, "One minority is attacked today, another tomorrow, and even if they have legal rights, they lose their dignity. This kind of exclusion is often more cultural than legal," (Bhabha, 2018; 0.44 seconds) relying on the operations of everyday biases to undermine and subordinate minority voices. Bhabha warns that this emergent politics of exclusion mobilizes a subtle language of denigration and dishonor through manufactured ignorance about and among minoritized communities. His positionality and

scholarly frameworks help me develop resistance to the ongoing visible and invisible injustices framing my integration into Canada as a nation-state. Such postcolonial, anti-imperialist, decolonial, and anti-racist insights and understandings help me engage with and develop more transformative community actions and research approaches, beginning with my own subject positions. As a mother, I cannot allow myself to become confused, to remain behind, broken, or silenced, without trying to make changes that support more generous and generative social relations. My resistance is embedded in my daily actions, my writing in diasporic and Bangladeshi newspapers, on social media, in my academic publications, in my efforts to produce and support artistic work within newcomer communities, including through public cultural performances and sharing stories with children and community members through my networking activities (community radio, community gardening, and sharing circles operating through various community venues).

I believe community can be a place for nurturing resistance and resilience. Community building gathers individuals with similar interests. As a racialized, stigmatized and sometimes ostracized Muslim woman living in Canada, I have been looking for a community where I could find acceptance, empathy, trust, laughter, confidence, solidarity, a chance to learn and grow together, and a welcoming feeling of friendliness and camaraderie. I struggled for a long time in this new Land to find my place and situate myself within social justice networks. I searched for a community where I could feel free and not be looked upon as an alien. I needed a community where my vulnerability could be seen as an asset, my open sharing encouraged, instead of being othered through collective community shaming. I wanted to become a community builder and social bridge-maker in order to empower myself and regain the vision of strength and freedom that shaped my decision to migrate for learning, in the first place.

Many types of communities exist, some more open or closed than others; however, my interest has always been in building inclusive, flexible, meaningful, equitable, active, relational, resilient, anti-racist, decolonial feminist communities. My goal is to listen to the people who want their voices heard in order to support their dignity, agency, hope, joy, and strength with my own. Because of my community engagements, I feel more informed on how I might share my knowledge, learnings, and transformational stories about making change as others share theirs. It is crucial to support those who have been set apart through exclusionary practices by creating shared spaces where participants can feel involved and included.

My dream and passion are to encourage constructive social change in inclusive communities. However, at times, it seems like an insurmountable task, an unachievable goal. As I observe and listen to the community's leaders, trailblazers, and the world's wise change makers, I follow their powerful wisdom and attentive actions and try to understand their positionalities and where they have learned their dedication to work for change. Gradually, in my 40s, I realized that fighting alone for justice and a better future for the next generations is challenging. I gave up on my dreams because of accumulated frustrations, a lack of family and community support, and not always finding the aware, wise, anti-racist feminist networks I was looking for.

One of the most significant barriers to pursuing my dreams involves the ways Abrahamic religions operate within ongoing colonization projects. The Catholic "doctrine of discovery" still informs the violent colonization of the Americas, through seizures of Lands from Indigenous peoples. As western nation states have grown powerful on the world stage, new imperialisms have led to the polarization of Judeo-Christian and Islamic faiths, instrumentalizing religious traditions through nationalizing imperialisms. I deliberately let many of my dreams wash away in the context of these agonistic conditions, and replaced them with "realistic" goals, because I realized I could only change myself first, maybe creating opportunities for my children, family, and community, but not the whole world; that is one of the biggest takeaways from my decade of involvement in community-building activities in Saskatoon, Canada.

During my doctoral studies, my thoughts have been inspired and shaped by the wisdom of many senior community leaders' actions, prominent Indigenous, post-colonial, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and decolonial feminist scholars' thoughts, and Land-based education practitioners. Shawn Wilson's work on "research as a ceremony" (2008) was influential in my learning journey. Wilson (2008) argues that Indigenous ceremonies and rituals, such as sweat lodges, are all about strengthening connections to each other through the Land and the cosmos, honouring and rebuilding links between humans and the more-than-human, while respecting our ancestor's spirits, their teachings, and maintaining balance and justice in the world. From Opaskwayak Cree scholar Wilson's (2008) work, I learned that research is also about strengthening relationships by making new knowledge together and taking responsibility for that collaborative work. I agree when Wilson (2008) says, "if your research doesn't change you, you haven't done it right." Therefore, I have tried to change my own life first. I transformed my life through my formal and informal research over the years, and finally, my research became my life.

Another Indigenous scholar, Brian Rice, advocates "seeing the world with Aboriginal eyes" (2005), which made me curious to learn about Indigenous worldviews. Renowned anti-racist, anti-oppressive Indigenous scholar, Professor Verna St. Denis' many scholarly teachings have inspired me too. For example, her article on "Silencing Aboriginal Curricular Content and Perspectives through Multiculturalism: 'There Are Other Children Here'" (2011), inspired me deeply. I am fortunate that I had an opportunity to work with Professor St. Denis as my direct mentor and anti-racist teacher. I am also inspired by one of the founding members of the Idle No More movement, Dr. Sheelah McLean. She is a third-generation white settler and an anti-racist activist with whom I connected through my community activities. Her scholarly thoughts, community activities and teachings, are summarized in a short article called "We built a life from nothing," about white settler colonialism and the myth of meritocracy (McLean, 2017). That brief publication has influenced me enormously, in terms of understanding how whiteness and maleness became central to Canada's nation-building story, and the different affective attachments to the nation-state that are cultivated through the colonialist lenses that frame its structures.

I also received direct teachings and guidance from Mikma Indigenous scholar, Professor Marie Battiste, who participated as a guest speaker in my community radio and garden activities many times. Her book *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit* (2013) has dramatically impacted my thinking. Her influence also led me to the work of one of the most prominent Indigenous environmental activists in North America, Winona LaDuke. Battiste and LaDuke's lives and written works encouraged me to document my own transformative decolonial learnings and disseminate what I have learned, working first with my three children, without much social or extended family or childcare support. While these efforts have been demanding, I did not give up my community activities or dissertation writing because they are also healing work for me.

Writing has been therapeutic and creates hope for change and celebration in my life. However, other essential logistical supports were absent during my doctoral studies, first as a woman and then as a graduate student. I am grateful for the ways people from many ethnic communities, activists, and academic friends have stayed beside and supported me, participating in the activities I joined and initiated, responding to my leadership efforts. Nevertheless, while many diverse people were a significant inspirational resource, some of my own diasporic

Bangladeshi Canadian ethnic community members practiced learned horizontal violence, which became one of the more significant challenges in moving forward with my dreams.

Anguish as Inspiration

I came from one colonial Land to another, carrying severe anguish and silenced voices from long ago, within. My early life was framed by the consequences of South Asia's patriarchal and colonial histories, with their damaging social and environmental legacies and internalized negativities. In Bangladeshi beauty standards, colorism flourishes; fair girls are seen as attractive and darker-skinned girls are socially undermined and dehumanized, due to a long colonial history of racialized subordination. Religious discrimination and classism among Muslim women in Bangladesh were common, and my life was not an exception. This situation is problematic for all girls and women. Beginning in childhood and as a young girl child with a "fair complexion," I was sexually harassed and targeted for unwanted sexually explicit behavior (directly and in gestures). I was teased, stalked, abused, and my purported moral limitations were policed. I could never share those stories and what I was experiencing with my mother or sisters. As a survivor of child abuse, I grew up with fear, trauma, and anguish – rooted in profound silences about male violence, such that I could seldom share those experiences privately, let alone publicly, until I wrote this dissertation.

I left my birth Land almost 20 years ago, because it became impossible to live there safely with dignity and freedom as a middle-class woman. Eighty-four percent of women in Bangladesh are routinely sexually harassed on the road, in the workplace, in educational institutions, in social spaces by strangers and even at home by relatives and close community members (*United News of Bangladesh (UNB)*, 2021). Ninety-four percent of women commuting via public transportation in Bangladesh have experienced sexual harassment in verbal, physical, and other forms (*Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) University Report*, 2018). From the ages of 7 to 23, until I left Bangladesh to go abroad, my life experiences reflected these research statistics, and I can recall many related incidents. I was forcefully sexually and morally abused because of my young age and "good-looking" female identity. Harassment and violence against women and young girls are socially normalized in Bangladesh. Therefore, many women survivors may not recognize harassment or violence against them as something to be taken seriously or shared with their family, colleagues, or peers, because women are afraid of the culture of shame and their powerful perpetrators. Targeted women want to avoid the moral panic

that would follow their disclosures and cause more policing and restrictions of movement by their families; there are few immediate solutions or actions available within either the local community or more formal institutions. Because families, communities and institutions constantly silence these gendered issues, even in the “Me Too” era, women in Bangladesh do not have the right to be angry or act against such endemic social abuses due to highly patriarchal family structures and social contexts, lack of law and order, and a victim-blaming culture. According to *United News of Bangladesh (UNB)* (2021) it is difficult to find any woman in Bangladesh who has not been sexually harassed at some point in her lifetime.

I decided to leave Bangladesh out of anger because I wanted to lead a decent, humane life as a bright young woman who dreams of women’s rights and eliminating gender injustices. However, it was challenging to leave my country as an unmarried Muslim woman without monetary support, except for a bit of scholarship, because parents and relatives created the first barrier. I took only \$200 USD from my father when I left my home country; I received the rest of my support from a university scholarship. At that time, despite a degree in Sociology, I was not much exposed to studies of race, racism, ethnicity, diverse social realities, and the challenges of leading a diasporic life abroad. Twenty years ago, I was the only one in my family, in fact, among the whole dynasty, who left home alone and studied abroad. Due to the lack of racial diversity in my early social environment, I had never been subjected to negative state discrimination based on my ethnic-racial identification in Bangladesh – only gender-based discrimination. I grew up as a member of the “majority” there, with many social privileges, through my Muslim religious identity and fair skin colour, as compared to other Bangladeshis. My decolonial education has since helped me understand that I used to exercise similar privileges in Bangladesh as those enjoyed by white, middle-class people in Canada.

After migrating abroad as a racialized settler woman, my life became subject to racism and to intimate partner violence, which is often exacerbated by the unexpected stresses of migration, an insecure livelihood, and psychosocial and mental health issues (such as random anxiety and panic attacks due to my uncertain life and its many challenges). Among these challenges was establishing a paper-trail of my relationship to the nation state. This included the requirement to secure university admission, acquire health insurance, extend my student and work permits, obtain permanent residency, then citizenship. Poverty meant finding whatever jobs I could to help support my family. As did Indigenous people before me, I learned that the

documentation of my status in Canada would frame my possibilities and impossibilities, day by day and year by year.

Through these diasporic processes, I discovered my evolving and complex intersectional identities as they operated in different stages of my life as a married woman and mother. I was a stay-at-home mother for my first four years in Saskatoon, then an international student with low socioeconomic status (zero income, then a blue-collar casual job, almost entirely dependent on my graduate student husband's meagre income). Before leaving my homeland, I had a highly paid job with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Bangladesh. But in Canada, I became utterly dependent on my partner's limited student income, due to many structural barriers, and our family's survival dependence on my reproductive labour. I realized that I had been transformed into an unpaid mother, caretaker of the home, and wife of the same age with an equally qualified man, who relied on my support, but as the primary wage-earner did not always recognize the value of my contributions. As the mother of small children, I lost a woman's bargaining power in the family, as I could not work outside the home due to many systemic barriers, some of which reflect an immigrant woman's unsupported social location. I realized that an entire oppressive system targeted me, and I had to hold my anguish for many years.

I had another new identity – being socially isolated as a “brown” community member with “poor” English and a South Asian accent, neither of which were in my power to change. Thus, I was targeted for exclusions again, but I learned to hold in that anguish, too. These new intersections of my public and private-facing identities gave me new challenges. On top, my inter-faith marriage created its own unique dimensions of difficulty. My identity was transformed into that of a “minority within a minority,” because, to my knowledge, only a few inter-faith married couples live in the Bangladeshi-Canadian community in Saskatoon. Others may hide their inter-faith relationships to avoid social stigma. I chose to expose our family's faith histories out of a desire to challenge these socially constructed religious dogmas and taboos. Therefore, I faced several moments of horizontal violence, confrontation, opposition and even threats of fatal interventions, as are common in Hindu-Muslim marriages in Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi-Canadian diaspora.

Bangladeshi national and diasporic media, social media, and online newspapers report that Islamic extremism and terrorism are rampant in today's Bangladesh (Ali, 2015). Sree Radha

Datta's (2007) research confirms that the Islamic militant groups have grown in strength and brought havoc to Bangladesh. Religious extremism is on the rise and they have advanced their intimidation strategies to such an extent that they can conduct organized terror campaigns all over the country. This situation influences diasporic lives abroad, too. Bangladeshi Muslims struggle to stay secular or moderate, even while living abroad. Islamic extremism has been rising for at least two decades in Bangladesh, in part, due to scapegoating by the West, criminalization by international Islamic militants, and the ongoing colonization of Islam (Malik, 1996, 2009). It is challenging to resist Islamicized nationalisms, produced in the crucibles of neoliberal capitalism and imperialist globalization, now embedded in social cultures at home and abroad (Fatah, 2008). Content analysis of media reports shows that Islamist militants carried out over 203 attacks, killing 164 civilians, and injuring more than 2658 people during the period from 1999-2010 (Rahman & Kashem 2011). Islamic terrorist attacks are now more frequent than before (*Daily Star*, 2016). Many secular activists, writers, and publishers are publicly labeled "Nastik" in Bangla and "Murtad" in Arabic, meaning "atheist;" some are even brutally killed on the street. Human rights activists, feminists, and secular humanists are not safe to speak up for justice, free thought, or freedom from religious oppression in Bangladesh. Many live in exile, like renowned feminist writer, Taslima Nasrin (who lives in India), Humayun Azad (who passed away in Germany), and blogger Asif Mohiuddin (who also lives in Germany).

The majority of extremist Muslims are able to target those who share secular orientations with impunity because they are politically influential (Patel, 2018). Extremist Islamic political parties target Hindus and other religious minorities and Indigenous communities by displacing them from their ancestral Lands through rampant looting, disappearances, molestation or rape, and abduction of women. These are everyday matters, and killing civilians is permitted, whenever the government and its political parties benefit. As such events have escalated, I have tried to hold my anguish again, because while I realize something is very wrong with a world that sustains so many oppressive systems, it is difficult to take effective action, without supports.

Living in Canada made my life better than in Bangladesh in terms of gender rights, leading a secular life, having good educational opportunities, and because here, I dare to speak against radical Islamists. However, I still do not feel safe and face routine micro-aggressions within Bangladeshi Canadian Muslim communities, mainly because I do not practice Islam anymore (due to complex family and social mechanisms), and can question religious

oppressions, extremist ideologies, and dogma from anti-racist and feminist perspectives. As I try to resist guilty feelings, my partner and my children are also neglected and bullied by Muslim community members who do not respect our critical, secular, and interfaith family values and beliefs. It is almost impossible to share my experiences with my Muslim friends, parents, siblings, and relatives back home.

In Canada, I understand that this type of horizontal social violence is a produced effect of competing imperialist forces on the global stage. Indeed, it is not consistent with the best of Islam. Every individual deserves respect for their integrity, every group for who they are as people. Religious groups do not have any right to forcefully convert or kill non-members. Living without a formal religious identity and rituals cannot be a crime or sin. My religion is about justice, Land, diverse people, arts, music, culture, feminism, anti-racism, spirituality, respect, and love. I experience daily how my Muslim community members (in Bangladesh and Canada) do not accept my right to define my own religious pathway. Therefore, I am still ostracized, isolated, and excluded, even here in Canada. My life is impacted by religious racism because I have grown up in and migrated to colonized countries, because I married a man from a non-Muslim community within Bangladesh, and because both of us have challenged colonizing religions from our diasporic positions. Therefore, I witness ongoing denigration and dishonor. I keep holding my anguish when I see people in my community enclave belittling us as human beings and our hard-earned social and academic achievements.

Political instability and human rights violations abound across the planet, and women often face the brunt of these systemic injustices, due to situated gender regimes and positioning. Interfaith marriages in Bangladesh remain taboo, especially between Hindu and Muslim, even in my diasporic communities. Meanwhile, I did not reveal our relationship to our families back home until I gave birth to my second daughter; the lack of safety I felt in that situation has not changed till today. As I write about this sensitive topic in my dissertation, my emotions flow through me. Growing up the way I did, it is perhaps not surprising that I have endured depression, trauma, and constant fear of radical Islamists and those influenced by them. These experiences have affected my dissertation writing process, family life, and mental health for a long time.

The related brutalities of Canadian colonialist histories have motivated me to seek justice in my diasporic life because I come from a Land where I grew up hearing and seeing a similar

pattern of colonial and racist injustices. As indicated, dominant mainstream and extremist Muslims are considered a “majority” in Bangladesh. In 1971, during the liberation war, Pakistani extremist Muslim militaries created a racist genocide against minoritized peoples (Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, LGBTQ+ people, Indigenous people, and women) in Bangladesh. Therefore, the peoples of Bangladesh experienced one of the bloodiest conflicts since World War II.

India also has a long and deep colonial and racist history, where minoritized people are still suffering in their everyday lives. Bangladesh is part of that larger South Asian colonial history. My generation carries the legacies and negative social consequences of the liberation war (as organized by extremist Muslim Pakistani rulers and militaries). Ongoing Islamist and Arabization oppressions have been politicized by Bangladesh’s dominant Muslims, who are trying to erase minority faith groups and introduce extremist Islamic ideologies, which contradict more progressive, moderate intellectual values and practices (Mahmud, 2017, Rahman, 2016). In Bangladesh, it is culturally accepted that Muslims may denigrate other people with different beliefs and rituals through claims of moral superiority, because most believe that “Islam is the best religion on earth.” Similarities to imperialist Christianity and its “doctrine of discovery” are no accident. Christianity and Islam have been polarized around their respective extremisms and colonialist projects for centuries.

My desire for justice has inspired me to learn about the interwoven racist, colonial, and genocidal histories of Canada. It took a couple of years for me to begin to learn about these histories, because Indigenous peoples’ histories, heritages, languages, cultures, and identities were targeted for erasure during the formation of the nation-state and today’s immigrant integration processes. Settler communities and social structures are built to ensure that settlers and newcomers unintentionally adopt a colonized perspective on Indigenous people and BIPOC communities. As a result of my learnings, I became passionate about anti-racist, anti-oppressive and decolonial feminist education.

Anti-racist, decolonial feminist education gave me lenses to understand how racism has been created and perpetuated in Canada. The lack of anti-racist policies is seldom questioned. Many people do not recognize the problems of racism, religious discrimination, or oppression. Despite Canada’s history of colonization and oppression against Indigenous peoples, white supremacy has only recently been more broadly acknowledged as a structural problem. But in

Bangladesh, it is still hard to address how the majority of Muslims and political leaders are playing an active role in systematically removing minorities from that Land in colonialist ways that trace the traumatic effects of the globalization of capital (Mohsin, 1997). Therefore, Bangladesh's history of injustice helps me understand something about how Canada, as a sovereign nation-state, is still intensifying racialization and minoritization processes through the politics of racial inequalities, exclusion, othering, and expanding social disparities.

Though I am not from this Indigenous Land of Canada, I am outraged after reading, learning, and seeing vivid racist injustices against Canada's Indigenous children, women, and peoples, because my own experiences of discrimination and racism are a resource for developing that empathy and solidarity. Because of my resilient personality, I do not fear being identified with my root cultures and languages or mingling with Bangladeshi Canadian Muslim ethnic groups, despite my lack of acceptance there. As a South Asian descendant, I am not ashamed or afraid to say who I am, who our ancestors are, and where I have come from, because that is my way of resisting erasures. I do not mind raising the point that many people have endured parallel painful, oppressive, colonized histories perpetrated by white colonialists in Canada and by Islamicist colonizers from central Asia (Mehta, 2020).

I can easily connect my own country's similar patterns of discriminatory, oppressive colonialist history and ongoing racist injustices in my new country, Canada. I can see how belief in the inherent superiority of one race, sex, gender, sexuality, or religion over others is an easy tool for promoting social discrimination and maintaining practices of supremacy. My long-hidden anger against these oppressive forces runs deep. Therefore, through my doctoral research on my community activities, I have sought to consider and make changes that directly respond to the "colonialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Hooks, 1992, p. 367) and the social and economic systems so founded. My active leadership and participation in community activities as a "minority within a minority woman" have helped me understand my own and others' navigation of racist attitudes/practices, religious and gender oppressions, and the many multi-layered social discriminations that frame our lives. Following the work of Audre Lorde (1987), I began to understand "The Uses of Anger."

As a vulnerable racialized woman from a low-income family living on colonized Land within a patriarchal culture, I do not have any visible weapons or power to be aggressive or angry and challenge or change the racist, discriminatory colonial institutions, legal system, and

racist social policies. But I want to respond to institutional, systemic racism because, during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, the Pakistani military killed three million people and raped four hundred thousand women (Singh 2022; Deb, 2021). The world witnessed that genocide silently then, only half a century ago. My in-law family still suffers, having lost their Land and many family members. My response to structural discrimination is silent anger and strong resilience in action. I have learned to express that anger through performing arts, radio conversations, social media, and academic writing, having lived with it from my childhood. Still, I did not yet know how to respond to systemic racism, violence against women, and everyday social injustices. I wanted to use whatever strengths I had available to me to help change the oppressive colonial systems I inherited.

As a mother and sister, I want to live in a world where my sisters, relatives, friends, and daughters can grow up safely and learn to co-create more gentle forms of power that challenge the aggressive hetero-patriarchal, racist, and destructive structures we have all endured. I want a world where our children can be loved and grow up with arts, music, dance, mother tongues, respected identities, and their grandparents' stories, while eating healthy fresh vegetables without GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms), health-hazardous pesticides, or preservatives. I am passionate about building a world willing to cultivate gentler, rather than more destructive forms of power. My anger has helped me to stand with Indigenous communities here in Saskatoon, even though I was not sure, as a newcomer, how to share that solidarity with members of my community.

I have been holding my anguish for a long time, thinking, who profits from these social injustices worldwide? I was angry when I had trouble finding my allies, community, people, the right networks, or funding support. I used to undertake many self-initiated community projects to make changes, using my silent anguish to contribute to better surroundings and to breathe more freely. I have been waiting a long time to see the same outrage among my allies. Through my own anguish, I wanted to challenge the politics of othering, exclusions, unquestioned hierarchy, privilege, misogyny, racial distortions, and the silence of their beneficiaries, including myself. Out of that anguish, I also wanted to challenge the oppressors, institutional abuses of power, social stereotyping, defensiveness, betrayal, and false claims of moral superiority through imperialist religions and white supremacy.

Evolving as a Researcher

Anti-racist, anti-oppressive education gave me new lenses through which to see oppressive systems and their consequences. This education has also given me a new resilience. These lenses have helped me understand that reconciliation cannot take place without knowing the racist history of any colonial flag, without teaching the meaning and processes of decolonization, and questioning racist power structures. As an anti-racist practitioner, I have asked critically how multiple systems of interconnected barriers prevent the implementation of justice. That is why I wanted to learn with my communities about how to disrupt settler colonialisms, white supremacy, and the systemic racisms that manifest as everyday oppressions and injustices. I wanted to take a stand to make a difference and love each other without conditions. I kept thinking: how could I disrupt harmful colonial discourses? What strategies shall I use to interrupt racist narratives and ongoing neo-colonialisms? I continue to stand up for justice with others, using decolonial and anti-racist education and critical decolonial and feminist lenses, wherever I can.

While recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and working to decolonize ourselves, educational and other institutions can become a vital resource for social justice. However, as Indigenous scholars Tuck and Yang argue, “Decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is about Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (2012, p.35). Therefore, it is urgent to decentralize dominant perspectives and keep questioning normative discourses in the Canadian context and beyond, to make room for decolonization and reconciliation. We need to learn how to stop the processes of 'othering' a person or any social group to prevent the normative violence that creates politics of exclusion.

I met many dedicated Indigenous and non-Indigenous advocates, academics, activists, advisors, and family and community members who have come out to stand beside Indigenous people in seeking justice around the community. Because they know the history of residential schools and family violence survivors, they want to support Indigenous people in navigating a problematic past, its consequences, and the present ongoing colonization. I learned from Black history that today's world could not discuss the African American freedom struggles or the civil rights movement without knowing, recognizing, or welcoming white and other allies working alongside Black people and supporting them wholeheartedly to achieve justice. Learning about

the dedication of white allies and allies from other racialized groups has made me hopeful for resilient advancements against racism and social inequities.

Anti-racist and decolonial feminist education and Indigenous worldviews have inspired me to take responsibility for fighting for racial and gender justice from the ground up. Indigenous histories and lessons from mingling with community people from many cultures have helped me learn how to connect my colonialist histories from India and Bangladesh with those in Canada, so that my own background has become the foundation of my decolonial thoughts. The struggle and resilience stories of Indigenous people and people of colour, their “second class existence” (Linton, 2006), and their processes of fighting to decolonize minds impacted by colonial legacies are empowering for the formation of a new kind of relational ‘self.’

Addressing and challenging systemic, institutionalized, and interpersonal levels of racism and everyday injustices became my daily life learning and practice. Because I learned from my lived experiences, I needed to find out how to decolonize my thoughts in order to understand the meaning of Indigenous Lands and of reconciliation. Therefore, I started to engage and focus academically, and at the personal and community levels, on different ways of challenging hetero-patriarchal and colonialist world systems, in part through collaborative efforts with heterogeneous groups of community people around me in Saskatoon. I began to pay more attention to learning about community people and my own “self” challenges, which helped me find a pathway toward everyday resiliency. I started to research, listen, observe my areas of doubt, and critically question common injustices, my socialization processes, and my own colonized thoughts, using feminist decolonial and anti-racist lenses.

At the same time, while I received academic training on anti-racism and intersectional feminisms, my doctoral coursework helped me understand the colonial past in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, and the reasons for ongoing injustices in those countries, through my research assignments. This helped me understand how immigrants carry colonialist perspectives from their home countries and past histories, unintentionally or intentionally practicing those learnings, even after living in Canada for some time. Anti-racism and critical decolonial feminist training are an essential part of my process of un-learning, self-empowerment, and re-learning, i.e., changing my ‘self.’ I have strived to become more equitable in my approaches to resistance through the learnings that are woven throughout my community activities and my doctoral education.

Responsibility to Indigenous Histories

After living almost a decade in Treaty Six territory and the Homeland of the Métis in Saskatoon, I found that learning Indigenous colonial histories is everyone's responsibility, including for myself as a racialized immigrant settler woman. My learning from Indigenous scholars, activists, and knowledge holders is that Indigenous worldviews can empower everyone, including all races, genders, sexualities, abilities, and ages. I also believe that learning about decolonial feminisms and anti-racism is also necessary for everyone. These ways of knowing are building bridges toward each other. I understand that learning is lifelong, an ongoing unlearning and relearning journey (Battiste, 2013). Through my various cross-cultural community activities over many years, I have taken responsibility to fight back against ongoing injustices and to find a pathway to connection in a world that too often emphasizes separation and exclusion.

My Decolonial Journey

I want to acknowledge that I grew up with colonial ways of knowing, because I was born in a colonial Land with many social privileges as a majority Muslim or mainstream woman, more or less equivalent to being "white" in Canada. I received formal and informal colonial education from Bangladesh, Sweden, Norway, the USA, and Canada. My educational background is in Sociology, Social Work, and Gender and Development. My upbringing and socialization processes occurred within the colonial mentality (social, political, educational, and economic) of national education systems in all of these countries.

My decolonial journey started more recently, in 2014, when I began attending classes at the University of Saskatchewan, in the College of Education, visiting the Aboriginal Student Center, hosting an CFCR Community Radio show and working in our international student residence community garden. Although I learned about sociology and feminism long before, in my undergraduate education in Bangladesh, the formal anti-racist education with Indigenous Professor, Dr. Verna St. Denis at the University of Saskatchewan, and direct engagement with many social justice movements through the College of Education and the USSU Women's Center, gave me a voice and awareness to take a decolonial feminist position for the first time, in Canada. This social justice education helped me speak back against the stigmatization of my inter-faith married life, share my untold child abuse story, disclose my ongoing racist sufferings, and attempt to raise our children without any traditional religious identity. My anti-racist, anti-oppressive learning engagement with the campus Building Bridges programme and the

Aboriginal Students' Center also gave me the power to teach my children and community members about Land-based, decolonial, feminist, and anti-racist education and spirituality rather than conventional imperialist religions. I engaged with the Land directly through community gardens, beginning around 2011 in Saskatoon, Canada, and started to disclose my resistance to colonizing approaches to religion; rather, I wanted to learn from my Indigenous relations how to practice Indigenous spirituality, relationality, and social justice, while still respecting religious people's views and rituals, where they do not harm others.

Challenges through Multiculturalism

After coming to Canada as a newcomer, I heard that Canada is known for its strengths in multiculturalism. At first, I was unsure what multiculturalism meant and how it works. I heard that multiculturalism has become an integral part of Canada's national identity and provides an image of a peaceful and non-racist country. As a newcomer, I unintentionally became a part of this popular policy system and understood my social actions for my survival within that frame, without knowing the heated debates and scholarly criticisms surrounding this façade of multiculturalism. As an ethnic minority, I wanted to keep my mother tongue, culture, and heritage alive. Therefore, I have participated in many multicultural activities as a cultural performer across the several nations I have inhabited as a diasporic woman. Over the years, though, through lived experiences and formal and informal education, I became more critical. Anti-racist scholars, educators, and practitioners opened my eyes and helped me understand the limitations of multicultural policies through academic writings and activism. Neale McDevitt (2017) points out that multiculturalism prioritizes other cultures over Indigenous peoples. This statement affected me deeply, and I became more curious about the connections between multiculturalism and Canada's colonialist histories.

These critical thoughts about multiculturalism helped me strengthen my commitment to decolonize my mind. I became more attuned to multiple ways of knowing and aware of needing to re-learn and un-learn. I have learned to acknowledge Canada's violent, racist colonial history, the history of breaking the treaty promises, of cultural genocide and Land theft, the ongoing racial injustices, and racism toward Indigenous peoples and settlers of colour. Enslavement of Indigenous and racialized peoples were enacted to benefit white settlers. Situating our BIPOC bodies within this context, feminists, anti-racist researchers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, leaders, and social activists of colour have identified white supremacy, patriarchy, and

racism as the root causes of this ongoing colonial violence. (St. Denis, 2007). There should not be any denial that racialized people live in an environment of white backlash when resisting racial injustices. Racial inequities operate through colonial histories, unequal power structures, and socially constructed identity categories.

My Life in Bangladesh and Canada

In the following table, I provide a simplified exploration of my lived experience as a settler of color in Canada and as a mainstream woman from the dominant culture in Bangladesh.

Table 1.1: Situating Myself as a Settler of Colour in Canada and as a Mainstream Woman in Bangladesh.

My Life in Bangladesh	My Life in Canada
No work permit required	Have to acquire a residence permit, work permit, and citizenship (in complicated processes)
Fewer systemic obstacles	Systemic obstacles are higher for BIPOC people
Financial savings are possible	Financial savings are difficult
Obtaining a Bangladeshi qualification is accessible	Obtaining Canadian qualifications/ degrees needs time and is difficult for newcomers
Language advantages (Bangla speaker), and no accent issues	I had to learn new languages (English, Norwegian, Swedish) and have ongoing accent issues.
Foreign credential recognition was quick	Non-recognition of foreign credentials or it is extremely complicated
There was no weather shock. The natural environment was well known and familiar	Weather shock (extreme cold) and not familiar with this new natural environment (plants, animals, etc.)
Cultural familiarity	Cultural shock requiring many years to learn about the different ethnic groups of people, whiteness, and Indigenous people
Had Land and property from parents	No Land or property
Had parents, siblings, extended family nearby	No extended family supports
Available private and public transportation	No driving license; reliance on public transportation accessibility
Had a decent income, high-level job	No income/ low income/ survival entry level jobs
Potential for a decent/prestigious job	Little hope of getting a decent/prestigious job
Grew up as a mainstream majority	Othered as an ethnic woman and minority
Member of the dominant religion	No religious identity resulting in stigma in my diasporic community
Affordable child care at home	No affordable child care
Cooking support, affordable food from markets and restaurants	No cooking /groceries support, and food in restaurants is not affordable.
Affordable cost of living	High cost of living

Affordable public university expenses	High expenses for international students
Established community connections and support in a known city	Time and effort required to build community in unknown cities
Professional networks and friends	Investing time and energy to seek opportunities and build a community network Navigating challenges in making cross-cultural friends and nurturing supporters
Social integration process through upbringing	Social integration processes through unfamiliar systems
Highly populated country	Less populated country
Easy access to social organizations	Difficult to join the board of social organizations
Easy connection to mainstream media, society, social context, politics, and culture	Hard to engage mainstream media due to lack of connection with the new context, politics, community, culture, and social system
Established social networks and supporters facilitate confidence and taking leadership in community initiatives	Lack of confidence as a newcomer, feeling isolated leads to lack of motivation and access to leadership roles

Table 1.1 makes visible an outline of some of the privileges I experienced in Bangladesh, while I grew up. This picture is necessarily incomplete, but introduces how my shifting social positions help me see inequities more clearly. I was born with those privileges I have outlined above, and did not recognize how they reflected inequitable colonial power structures, at the time. My family (parents, siblings, relatives) benefitted from their privileged positions much like white citizens do in Canada. Because my family benefitted as part of a “majority” social class, I received many advantages and opportunities as a member of this privileged community. After immigrating to Canada, I got a new identity as a “minority” member and was therefore constructed as “inferior,” and faced many structural barriers to my survival as a newcomer with aspirations for justice. This experience made me realize yet again that my “majority” and my “minority within a minority” identities are socially created. My life’s progress traces the effects of unequal colonial power structures, gender bias, and racism in both my country of origin and my new home country.

The Myth of Meritocracy: Deconstructing My Privileges

As a young “Muslim majority” girl growing up in my relatively privileged family, I recall hearing stories of my parent’s and grandparents’ hardships. It was common for my parents to explain how they built their lives, starting out with very little money and goods. It was not until many years later, after having been exposed to anti-racist education and getting married to a

“minority” Hindu man, whose family was victimized in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, that I understood how my family stories reproduced the idea that our collective family wealth and status was earned through ingenuity, extraordinary merit, and backbreaking hard work. My parents never spoke about the many social advantages (prestigious jobs, education, Land ownership, assets, Muslim majority identity, etc.) of their mainstream positioning, even after liberation. This became more evident when I learned about the myth of meritocracy in an anti-racist class and listened to many narratives and lived experiences from my husband and his family members. My interfaith marriage helped me deconstruct my privileges in preparation for my doctoral dissertation work. I have provided a simplified comparison of Bangladeshi majority Muslim and minority Hindu experiences by juxtaposing some of the factors affecting my own and my partner’s positions in Bangladesh, in the chart below.

Table 1.2: Deconstructing My Privileges

Advantages of a Majority <i>Sunni</i> Muslim (My life)	Disadvantages as a minority Hindu (My Partner’s life)
During the liberation war, my family was not attacked	During the liberation war, my husband’s family was attacked
Our family’s Land ownership increased. Muslims got the opportunity to buy Hindu Land at a lower price	Displaced from the ancestral Land three times, faced violence and family members becoming homeless
No family members died during the war	Lost many family members and school age children went missing
Received privileged access to preferred schooling, college, and university education	No access to high school/college/university education in Bangladesh
Three meals a day on the table	Little food on the table
Houses in which to live	Housed temporarily with relatives
My father had a good govt. job	Father died when he was only 30 years old, and my husband was a baby. Mother of five did not have a job (later very low-status third-class status, poor jobs)
No fear about being a Muslim. Grew up as a woman with the fear of sexual assault and rampant harassment	Lived with tremendous fear because of targeting their minority religious identity
Opportunity to practice religion, language, and culture	Hindus were afraid of practicing their religion, rituals, and culture or reveal their religious identities
Middle-class social status	Low social status
Everyday life included recreational opportunities (TV, cinema, reading books for pleasure, visiting grandparents or friends etc.)	Few recreational activities (lack of TV, film, books, few socialization opportunities)

I grew up with extracurricular activities (singing, dancing, recitation, libraries, stage, TV, and radio performances)	My husband and his siblings did not have any comparable extracurricular opportunities
Good physical and mental health	My husband did not have good physical and mental health, dealing with intergenerational trauma, stress, tension, and inadequate health supports since his childhood
I grew up with confidence, aim and pride	Lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and inferior feeling as he faced discrimination
I grew up in a settled community with belongingness	Lack of belongingness in a colonized Land in a society that was not supportive

Comparing my privileged upbringing and analyzing the challenges of my minoritized husband's childhood, using anti-racist and decolonial lenses, has opened my mind and eyes to the political and cultural mechanisms of inequitable social systems. Through my life-long observations, my informal Saskatoon community activities and from my formal anti-racist, decolonial feminist education, I have come to realize that influential, privileged people build social systems to serve their interests. Therefore, many people unconsciously and sometimes consciously participate and invest in oppressive, racist colonial systems, because they benefit from them and learn how to maintain them. While it is challenging to unpack the colonial ideologies and histories of racist practices, to re-contextualize the past and understand how racist oppression is maintained and has devastating impacts on minoritized people, particularly in close familial relationships, it is also helpful to see the links between privilege and ignorance.

Decolonizing My Own Ethnic History

I was not aware for a long time, as a privileged mainstream *Sunni* Muslim in Bangladesh, that Indigenous people and religious minorities (Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, *Shia* Muslims² and *Ahmadiyya*³ Muslims) were being actively marginalized, as direct targets of religious racism and

² *Shia* Muslims are the second-largest branch of Islam. There are tensions between *Sunni* and *Shia* Muslims in the Muslim world, including in South Asian countries, leading to controversies between these communities. *Shias* are members of the branch of Islam that regards Ali as the legitimate successor to Mohammed and rejects the first three caliphs or leaders. *Shia* and *Sunni* communities are divided, and they have conflicts with each other about who held legitimacy to lead the Muslim *ummah* after the prophet Mohammad (Chitwood, 2017).

³ The *Ahmadiyya* Muslim community emphasizes the nonviolent aspects of *jihad* or religious "effort." Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), the South Asian Muslim scholar who founded the movement, argued that the *Quran* only authorized *jihad* as a defensive military action in certain contexts and otherwise encouraged peaceful initiatives in support of Islam. This

colonial oppression in my country. There was always an implicit denial of this truth in nationalist accounts of Bangladesh's liberation war history. Minorities faced looting, burning of households, destruction of Hindu and Buddhist temples, churches and religious artifacts, murder, rape, forced religious conversion, forced migration to neighbouring countries (India and others), illegal appropriation of their Land or other property, extortion, threats to family members and relatives by the Islamic *Jihadist*⁴ militants and majority mainstream Muslims. The recent rise of political and *Jihadist* militancy in Bangladesh helped open my eyes. I have shame and guilt for not being aware of this ongoing colonialism in Bangladesh and the systemic racism that arises from and fuels it. Bangladesh's national politics have enabled the *jihadists* to marginalize Indigenous and minority religious groups through ethnic cleansing policies (Mohsin,1997).

Arriving at an adult understanding of the ways that Bangladeshi Indigenous and religious minorities have been marked by oppressive and unjust histories has helped me situate myself in this new stolen Land and to better understand Canada's colonialist past in relation to Indigenous peoples. I am aware of the importance of learning more about why I must seek justice with and for Indigenous people here in Canada and in Bangladesh. I have learned that Indigenous people have faced injustices worldwide. Although as a youth, I was not aware and could not take a stand for Bangladeshi Indigenous people and minorities, I do not want to carry the same guilt and shame for not being an ally for Indigenous rights here in Canada, my new homeland and with my

movement and its arguments have not persuaded most *Sunni* Muslims, but the Ahmadiyya Muslim community continues to stress *jihad* of the pen, that is, efforts to promote and defend Islam in various media. (Hanson, 2007). *Ahmadiyya* Muslims are depicted negatively as 'the non-believers of Islam,' 'the hijackers of Islam,' 'the enemies of Islam,' and 'the traitors/betrayers of Islam.' 'They are not Muslims' (Irawan, 2017).

⁴ The Arabic word *Jihad* has many meanings in religion and practice. I refer to it in my learnings within and from my Muslim family, community, and state practices in Bangladesh. As an insider of the Bangladeshi Muslim community, I have observed that many Islamic militants in Bangladesh and in the Muslim world use the term *jihad* to justify domination or warfare against non-believers or non-Muslims, in order to extend Muslim domains. I have also observed many Islamic militants who are trained to be Jihadists being involved in violent activities, including working as suicide bombers, and through various kinds of hate crimes against non-Muslims, Queer people, and sometimes even against Muslims in Bangladesh, and beyond. I am also aware that there are people and institutions who participate in academic debates that may camouflage these material practices.

new relations. My decolonial journey empowers me to stay committed to justice for all, and to care for subsequent generations, our future caretakers.

Identity Dysphoria

Today, I experience dysphoria around the contradictions that frame my Muslim identity in ways that I have never dared to express. Dysphoria refers to a sense of feeling disconnected, disoriented, disassociated and oppressed, because the religious identity imposed at my birth was not my choice. My Muslim parents and ancestors gave me a vivid, religiously identifiable name in Bangladesh, as appropriate to their culture and lives. However, I have grown into a more secular identity, after learning the use of Arabic languages to say “*Namaz*” (Islamic prayer) five times a day, to follow *Ramadan* (which involves a month of daily fasting) from the age of 7 years, keeping a distance from, yet answering to male relatives (brothers, father, grandfather, cousins, and unknown men outside the family), wearing restrictive clothes (*Purdah/Orna/full sleeve dresses/pants during hot summers*). How are the prohibitions for pre-marital relationships connected with women not having equal property rights with Muslim men? Why may Muslim men marry four times but queerphobia is normalized? Why does Islam legitimize violence, and even deception (*Takiya*) to achieve its goals? Since childhood, I have been aware that Islam supports the subordination of women and girls. But people are afraid of protesting. Yet, change needs to come from within the community, in part, because Islamist nationalisms are responses to western imperialisms. Muslims are not born with hatred toward other groups. Yet, like multiculturalism, nationalistic Islam contains contradictory messages. On the one hand, it says: “There is no compulsion in religion” (Qur’an 2:256) and “Whosoever will, let him believe and whosoever will, let him disbelieve” (Qur’an 18:30). On the other hand, it threatens punishment by death for the person who renounces Islam and determines to move toward kufr.” (Husain and Hahn, 1994). This kind of polarizing biopower, by targeting living persons for their thoughts and feelings, produces people as strangers to ourselves and each other.

The most significant Quranic verse about apostasy stipulates “Indeed, those who have believed then disbelieved, then believed, then disbelieved, and then increased in disbelief – never will Allah forgive them, nor will He guide them to a way” (*Quran*, Chapter Nisa : 137). An apostate (“*Murtad*” in Arabic) is a former Muslim by birth (*Murtad Mitri*) or by conversion (*Murtad Mili*). The Sharia law of killing apostates violates Article 18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acknowledges every person’s right to change or abandon religions.

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 2017). Anti-racist, decolonial feminist education has empowered me to ask questions, despite the threat of punishment by my parents or institutions, or the ridicule that arrives from friends, neighbors, or relatives.

Being able to name this dysphoric feeling, and ask critical questions that challenge religious bigotry, helps me draw upon my upbringing as a resource in compassion for others who feel oppressed by dominating power. Few if any cultural or community spaces are provided to talk about the people who have become non-believers in any religion or system of oppression. In Islam, public disclosure of such questions may involve risking lives. There are many examples and incidents where religious leaders or preachers claim the right to spread hate or kill dissenting voices or world views to establish false claims to superiority. My background becomes a resource in understanding the harms of the religious idea of *terra nullius* and the *doctrine of discovery*, too.

As an insider of the Muslim community, I have learned to recognize neocolonial practices, like mixing Arabic words with the Bangla or English language based on a sense that Arabic culture and language is “holy,” “pure,” and prestigious. This helps me to understand Anglo-imperialisms. Muslims in Bangladesh still read the *Quran* in Arabic without knowing the meaning of the Arabic words and without learning the Arabic language. There is a social sentiment that Muslims will earn less credit for the after-life if they read the *Quran* in the Bangla language. This causes me to reflect on the ways that globalization fosters colonial mindsets. Because Bengali people have a proud history of their own language movement in 1952 and achieved the right to speak in their mother tongue after a bloody war, I appreciate the desire of Indigenous peoples to sustain their sovereign languages.

Bangla is a mixed language, linguistically. But today, Bangladesh has been transformed by Arabization and Islamicization, itself a response to circulating western imperialisms. I can see that the Bangla language and culture have been Islamicized because of the role of the history of Muslim colonizers in colonialist Indian history and the lack of anti-racist and decolonial education. I was not taught to consider the effects on British colonization in terms of Indian and Muslim rulers, embellishing and adopting their own practices as “colonizers.” Although Muslims were not from South Asian Indian Lands, they migrated there from central Asian countries (Mehta, 2020). Like Canadian students in public schools were trained to praise colonialist leaders from Britain and France, I was trained to call the Muslim colonizers “heroes” through my

early educational systems and social institutions. Even using decolonial lenses, it remains challenging to call out colonial practices publicly because formal institutions and the people who lead them are seldom ready to revise course and take responsibility for ongoing colonialist approaches in educational systems, with reputational issues rooted in hierarchical norms.

In my formal and informal relational networks, growing up in Bangladesh, I have observed the societal notion that Muslims can go to “*Behesht*,” which means they will go to heaven if they have an *Arabic* name and live in compliance with Muslim doctrines. Because a majority of the people find peace in their minds and their community through alliance with the dominant culture, they are less concerned when minoritized faiths, languages, and cultures are neglected. My concern is that such peace is bought through the levels of hatred and obstruction that minority people face in their daily lives, as they are systematically undermined and silenced by prevailing rules and regulations. The negative narrative of minority faith groups in Bangladesh is ingrained in societal institutions and among the dominant mainstream which imposes heavy pressures on children to follow strict codes of conduct and rituals, without supporting freedom of consciousness.

My decolonial and anti-racist education has helped me to see that my name is part of a series of colonialist histories tied to the legacies of British and other imperialisms circulating in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh’s long histories. My name does not have any connection with the Land of Bengal. It represents the privileged religion of Islam, part of a colonial history of patriarchal partitions on the Indian sub-continent. Understanding the imbricated intersectionalities of oppressions has helped me deconstruct the power systems framing how I came to my name and early identity, and to see that such autoethnographic deconstruction is necessary to the healing opportunity for reconciliations among peoples divided by objectifying social categorizations. Depending on my own social locations, I find myself on unequal footing within competing dominating discourses.

Although my decolonial feminist understanding helps me to question my own production as a racialized settler colonial woman in Canada, it remains a crime to ask such questions in front of my Bangladeshi community and extended family members. In extreme cases, the person is ostracized or might be killed even where there is silent support for these very questions. When I met my transgender and other queer community friends as a doctoral student at the University of Saskatchewan, I began to learn the importance of breaking with hegemonic family stories,

religious barriers, and dominating community values to name my mental agony, and constant anxiety around navigating religious and the other oppressions that become part of a person's upbringing, before they can appreciate the contradictions.

It took many years to realize that I have been suffering internally, including through my inter-religious marriage, which I chose to support greater solidarities among divided peoples. Because I value creative connective solutions that do not yet have social acceptance in my home country, living with the effects of religious normativity helps me appreciate the ways Indigenous people seek sovereignty from systems that name and frame the oppressive practices they endure in Canada. In Bangladesh, children adopt the religion of the family they were born in. Polarizing constructions of religious difference mean that pious people cannot even imagine that a child might have a right to choose their last name or decline to take a husband's name after their marriage. Similarly, my husband's name represents the Hindu religion. As a result, in Bangladeshi or South-Asian community events, people treat me like a ghost, due to a phobia about secularization, which has itself been used as a wedge in geopolitical imperialisms. Many Muslim community members have suggested that I should convert my husband's name into an Islamic one.

Others have suggested that I should use my husband's last name, in a version of gender policing that still results in various microaggressions. Many community members have tried to embarrass me by describing my world view as *haram* (illegitimated by the Islam), sustaining life practices that construct my children as victims of my increasingly secular practices of spiritual solidarity with oppressed groups. I didn't want to change my birth name because I did not want to carry the last name of my husband and father as well. Taking the Hindu last name of my partner is considered shameful in my Muslim community enclave. Because of the way I resist binary systems, I am confusing to some people, who may feel uncomfortable around my presence. My efforts to build a more fluid identity and decolonial positionality for my own survival, and to make this world a better place for people who find ourselves to be a minority within a minority, can generate bafflement and hostility at times. My community activities have helped to create some positive and safer spaces, even though they can also become triggering at times. The intersections of class, race, gender, and religion have affected every layer of my life, but I am not often in a position to seek psychological support to navigate such complex conundrums.

My research and academic interests are interwoven through questions of ethnicity, race, labour, and migration, minoritizing processes and human rights violations. I am also keen to understand Islamophobia, Indigenous Resurgence, Newcomer-Indigenous Relations, Black Feminism, anti-Black racism, and Black Liberation, and many other sites of resistance to prevailing structures. My anti-racist, anti-oppressive, decolonial feminist education has given me a whole new way to un-learn my socialization processes and deconstruct myself, so that I can be more present to my many communities. Today, I have learned to embrace my new identity, “anti-racist decolonial feminist,” with love and respect, knowing the meaning and context of my name and with the power to see how others engage with labels in ways that turn my difficulties into rich compost, helping me find ways to move beyond identity dysphoria.

Decolonial Feminist Relational Autoethnography and Cross-cultural Collaborative Learning

My doctoral dissertation research questions have evolved from my lived experiences and volunteer community-building activities as a racialized settler woman. Both informal and formal cross-cultural community activities and intersectional feminist networking can provide critical empowerment tools that are not yet equally recognized or available to everyone (Verma, 2008).

In my research, I chose decolonial feminist relational autoethnography as a research methodology, because as a diasporic Bangladeshi Muslim woman who became a racialized settler in Canada, my journey has generated shifting positionalities and perspectives. Autoethnography examines one person’s lived experience as they negotiate meaning in their culture or cultures. By analyzing their experiences and relationships, a decolonial autoethnographer develops and shares a deeper understanding of the forces shaping their lives and communities. Using a critical lens that combines critical anti-racist, decolonial and feminist lenses illuminates how those forces are structured through prevailing norms. Dibyash Anand (2009) argues that this effect of diasporic experience may create new ethical lenses with which to understand our worlds. Intercultural experiences are necessarily relational. Therefore, telling my own story reveals my relational pathways toward new understandings, as I navigate the ways meanings shift as my evolving locations shed new light upon them. According to Bochner, “Autoethnography is not only a research methodology but also a way of life” (p. 84, 2020). Decolonial feminist relational autoethnography affords me an opportunity to investigate how my own embedded and evolving

contexts reframe my learning journey through time and space (Chawla & Atay 2018; Dutta, 2018).

Through my informal community activities, I have learned how reconciliation and empowerment can be better understood as mutually constituted. Integrated feminist “transnational literacies” (Spivak, 2008) acknowledge women’s efforts to build stronger communities, even when those efforts may be rendered invisible or unrecognizable by interwoven hegemonic systems of domination. Dominating systems interact across “contested cultures,” a concept introduced by feminist scholar Uma Narayan (1997), to emphasize how scattered patriarchal hegemonies collude to place women’s self-actualization outside of normative pathways. Therefore, understanding my own evolving positionings, as a racialized settler woman in Canada, can expand intercultural literacies in support of new ways of understanding reconciliation and decolonization as empowerment toward other possible futures than those projected by colonialisms. The baseline of feminist transnational literacies (Spivak, 2008) requires engagements with more than one culture and an understanding of the role of nation-states in shaping intersectional identities. For me, transnational literacies have emerged as much through my informal community activities as through my formal education. This dance among my many learning contexts forms the basis of this dissertation.

For the last twelve years, I have been involved in a wide range of community activities to survive and build belongingness within this Indigenous Land and to begin to acknowledge the long-standing impacts of colonialism in Canada. When I first came to Saskatoon, I began to facilitate community radio, community gardening, and transnational cultural sharing circle conversations as a host, garden coordinator, and performer. The radio studio and garden activities were conducted within informal community learning spaces, much like classroom activities. Those were relaxed learning spaces for me, with guest speakers and community members, children, and youth. We learned from each other’s conversations, lived experiences, guest speakers’ knowledges, and women’s everyday challenges. Our collaborative discussions were not only about voices echoing together. These shared social spaces were occupied by community members from all walks of life in consciously equitable ways and assisted my understanding of my new positionings and cultural surround.

While I was engaged with these community activities, I made several observations, outlined below:

- Many racialized and white settlers are not interested in nor committed to learning the colonial history of Canada and about the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples. Because newcomers face many challenges, they may not have access to learning Indigenous histories through decolonial educational opportunities. Like me, many settlers bring colonial histories from their countries of origin.
- Immigrants are seldom aware of their positioning as settler-colonial subjects. They do not examine their roles critically in local and global colonial systems, in order to ensure a better and more equitable world for future generations, because their attention is occupied elsewhere.
- I have faced many challenges from newcomer ethnic community members in my efforts to learn about the Indigenous meaning of reconciliation and to chart new ways of shared empowerment and decolonization, because of these structurally produced knowledge gaps.
- My community experiences have helped me challenge my own ideas and biases as a racialized settler woman and to take responsibility to unlearn complicities by working collaboratively to relearn new meanings of empowerment, reconciliation, and decolonization with my community members in Saskatoon.

Therefore, as a racialized settler woman, I have chosen to examine my efforts to build bridges or relationships of understanding within and beyond my Bangladeshi and South Asian communities. My goal is to name, delineate and theorize the ways gendered and racialized diasporic identity formations operate in the context of my efforts, as situated on the Canadian prairies, to analyze and find constructive ways to live within a white settler colonialist state that claims to care about reconciliation. My community-engaged journey has often required me to engage with complex and uncomfortable experiences and aspects of knowledge-making, which is why I feel it is crucial to undertake this work.

Advancing substantive change requires me to transform myself first, through learning the meaning of decolonization and reconciliation processes in my new Land. As a Bangladeshi-Canadian settler woman who lives as a “minority within a minority,” I remain invested in understanding Indigenous histories as a way to build healthy relationships between me, my family, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous settler communities. My study examines how collaborative community practices may provide decolonial tools for mutual empowerment through learning about Indigenous histories and the meaning of reconciliation by sharing cultural

stories and gifts. My decolonial autoethnographic study examines how my co-labours as a decolonial social justice activist, working within resistant communities invested in cross-cultural feminist solidarities, can recognize the value of community activities in generating new modes of decolonial feminist theory from the ground up.

Highly skilled and educated racialized South Asian settler women are under-represented in academia or higher-level jobs, but over-presented in informal, low-paid, and precarious labour and beauty markets, and home-based work (Agarwala & Chun, 2018; Gupta, 1996; Khan & Baruah, 2021). I aim to use my lifelong learning, empowerment journey, and lived experiences among new and established settlers and with members of Indigenous communities, to explore the cultural, economic, and social challenges and aspirations shaping our parallel and divergent journeys. I also want to highlight my learned ways of expanding personal and collective pathways toward empowerment to contribute to and influence the ways integration processes for Canadian citizenship can be reimagined through critical understandings of Canada's history, reconciliation, and decolonization. I will examine my decolonial learning journey within my Bangladeshi and cross-cultural settler communities, through University of Saskatchewan campus and Saskatoon community efforts to build bridges between Indigenous peoples and new settlers. My research will contribute greater understanding of needs not yet addressed in current integration processes and empowerment discussions in Canada, specifically on the Canadian prairies.

Research Questions

I have pursued the following research questions:

1. As a racialized settler woman, how have I taken responsibility to become more relationally accountable for and committed to practicing substantive decolonization and reconciliation through personal and shared processes of community and Land-based learning with members of Saskatoon's diverse social communities?
2. How could careful analysis of the informal cross-cultural community activities I have engaged in (community gardening, hosting community radio programs, facilitating feminist, anti-racism workshops, and offering transnational cultural performances) contribute to learning practices that might enhance empowerment opportunities for other racialized settler women?

3. How might understanding my experiences help newcomer women grow their knowledge of Indigenous histories, Land-based learning, decolonization, and feminist critical anti-racist and mutual empowerment practices?

Exploring how I have learned new pathways to empowerment through both formal and informal learning pathways will help me support cross-cultural knowledge development for service professionals seeking effective programming solutions for women, who may not enjoy the privileges I have accessed as a doctoral student in Canada. Achieving gender equity and empowering Indigenous and racialized women depends on valuing their voices in Canada's public discourses. My experience shows that when a racialized settler woman is supported in Canadian public life, including to participate in reconciliation and decolonization processes, she may be better positioned to shape the institutions she inhabits in transformative ways. Those opportunities may affect the lives of other marginalized women, by amplifying their voices through community and civic participation.

Original Contribution of this Study

In this research, my original contributions have developed from examining three years of relationship and community-building activities among racialized newcomers, Indigenous, and white settler communities. My understandings of what empowerment might be in the context of substantive reconciliation has benefitted from solidarities that foster greater belonging and appreciation for Indigenous Land-based knowledge(s), cross-cultural community activities, and decolonial feminist autoethnographic research, grounded in community. By examining my informal empowerment tools and my active role in engaging leadership and professional development processes within broader community conversations about reconciliation, my study may contribute to practice and policy discussions that center on those most affected by hegemonic systems.

I use relational, decolonial, feminist autoethnographic approaches to better understand "empowerment," based on my evolving conceptions (Kabeer, 2012b) of how and where belongingness emerges and community engagement unfolds. As prompted and verified by the participants' voices in my self-initiated cross-cultural radio, community garden, and cultural activities, I reflect on how reconciliation and decolonization may occur in the community, both formally and informally. Taking those informal shared spaces and the learning that happens there

seriously may reveal some of the ways gender positioning informs their emergence. My research study interrogates critical issues in existing “empowerment” rhetorics, by analyzing everyday patriarchal forms of dominance, including the domestic violence, poverty, and religious racism (Ahmad et al., 2004; Hall, Matz, & Wood, 2010) affecting my own life and new settler communities. My written reflections, captured in a series of common-place books on some of the specific forms of discrimination mobilized against Indigenous peoples and racialized members of settler enclaves, have also contributed to my analyses.

Objectives of the Research

1. My research examines how collaborative community activities may provide decolonial tools for mutual empowerment and model how newcomers may take responsibility to learn about Indigenous histories and perspectives on reconciliation. As a racialized Bangladeshi-Canadian settler woman who lives as a “minority within a minority,” I remain invested in understanding Indigenous histories in order to build healthy relationships between my family, Indigenous peoples, and non-Indigenous settler communities.
2. My decolonial autoethnographic research examines how my reproductive labour as a decolonial social justice activist working within resistant communities committed to decolonial feminist solidarities, in particular, could draw upon cross-cultural community activities that generate new modes of decolonial feminist theory from the ground up.
3. My study seeks to develop new empowerment frameworks focusing on practices of “gentle power” that challenge Eurocentric ways of knowing by affirming the perspectives of marginalized people, with a focus on disrupting the operations of hegemonic power, based on exclusions as organized around race and gender in colonialist states.

Through a close examination of my own settlement experiences on the Canadian prairies, my research addresses a gap in the literature by examining diasporic subject formation both as a function of neoliberal state systems, where access to social equity has been sidelined by structural adjustment and austerity measures (Chiu, 2009), and as a resource in shifts in consciousness toward new decolonial understandings. There are numerous North American studies focused on language and employment training in shaping the economic welfare of immigrant women. I have learned through personal experience that engaging with the Land and local communities through volunteer work, taking leadership roles, and ethnic/transnational

cultural performances and practices reveals unrecognized informal learning spaces. These activities shape social integration, survival, and coping strategies that, in the long run, promote better settlement experiences, more substantial mental health outcomes, and empowerment in racialized immigrant women's lives. I am concerned about the challenges of acquiring English language ability, daycare, and access to other integrative processes, such as obtaining a driving license or engaging settlement organizations that offer a degree of ethnic community support. I believe that support from informal, intentional community engagements can significantly improve efforts to overcome such daily life challenges and to enable meaningful engagements in reconciliation and decolonization with Indigenous peoples earlier in the settlement process than occurs at present.

What is This Dissertation About?

The main goal of this dissertation is to reflect upon formal and informal decolonial processes of learning, un-learning and re-learning through community activities and building relationships. This research helps me to practice responsibility for my role in this Indigenous Land, which empowers me as a newcomer woman to find more equitable relational pathways and practices in learning what it means to be a racialized newcomer settler in Canada. I believe similar pathways could be made available for many other newcomers. By sharing and analyzing my own stories about learning with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community people about Indigenous histories, cultures, traditional knowledges, and worldviews, I can reflect on the processes that frame newcomer women's community building efforts in Canada. Therefore, I want to share what I have learned about building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as a racialized newcomer woman.

Another important aspect of this work is demonstrating the importance of engaging with unpaid, unrecognized, undermined, informal learning spaces and the cultivation of mutual care work that often goes on within them. Although I left my colonial life in Bangladesh when I started my new life in Canada, I could see that my thoughts remained colonized. As a woman my body is colonized, the religions with which I am most familiar are colonized, and social systems are colonized. Negotiating with aggressive colonial models of power in order to find my own decolonial space to grow and understand my responsibilities as a racialized settler woman can be exhausting. Because I dream of gifting my children with a decolonial and just society, I started to cross the complicit boundaries I had internalized growing up, in order to appreciate the

decolonial, anti-racist, sources of gentle power available through Indigenous teachings and in shared spaces.

My vocal commitment to understanding and learning more about anti-racist and decolonial feminist frameworks are grounded in the intersectionalities of class, race, gender, and religion in cross-cultural communities. Therefore, I tried to find and create informal, safe spaces for dialogue on anti-racism to learn about Indigenous histories, racial injustice, and the need for decolonial gender justice in navigating the challenges facing newcomers. Safe space supports such as community radio conversations, community gardening, and transnational cultural activities permit people to express their candid opinions and impressions, critical thoughts, and attitudes, without fear of being ridiculed and attacked. A safe space can be as small as between two people or expanded to include larger groups, gathered according to people's interests.

My Position Around the Arts and Artists

I am a performing artist who uses artistic activities (song, dance, saree wrapping, acting, poetry recitation which is called spoken word artist here in Canada etc.) to express anti-racist, decolonial feminist perspectives and share my own political and emotional landscapes. Apart from performance, I act as an organizer to create social spaces for the artists of colour or minoritized ethnic artists. I sing Bangla folk, spiritual and devotional songs to represent the deep Land-based knowledge that frames my heritage, to share my ancestral cultural practices and to frame my approaches to anti-racist, feminist, and social justice knowledges. Many professional artists have elements of the artisan or social consciousness in their works, producing aesthetic commissions based on the orders of those who pay them. It is common for performing and visual artists to have a number of roles to fulfil in different aspects of their lives. The arts are used to make money, to gain recognition, to make a statement, as a form of therapy, as an emotional release, and as entertainment. Often, due to alignments with oppressive structures, commercial performers, illustrators, graphic designers, and industrial designers may be co-opted into hierarchical structural processes that obscure the work of local artisans.

In our neo-liberal world centered around social media and the internet, art can be co-opted to support oppressive narratives. I am more interested in how people can benefit from valuing their creativity through learning artistic activities, which can be a catalyst for social change, feeding our minds, sustaining our languages and heritages, reflecting our relationships with nature, and soothing the soul. My critiques of popular culture coincide with Roxane Gay's

(2014) thoughts on being a “bad feminist.” I often express my feminist anguish regarding popular culture where women are being commoditized for profit, in ways that normalize objectification of the female body. I critique misrepresentations that serve patriarchal, capitalistic, and shallow colonialist content. To clarify, I will share one example of my artistic activities below.

Why Have I Done Saree Wrapping for the Last Twelve Years in Canadian Festivals?

Newcomer women are involved in many kinds of invisible and unrecognized community and relationship-building activities in support of smoother integration with their new land and culture. Isolated newcomer women often feel helpless, as the cultural surround seldom appreciates who they are and where they come from. I found saree wrapping at cross-cultural community events and music festivals invaluable in making my ancestral history, culture, and heritage visible to white settlers in Canada. I also found it to be an interesting way to share my colonial history and to practice ally ship with the Indigenous people of this land, as many of us share similar colonial oppressions.

Many newcomers shift from one colonial context to another, without a deep understanding of how they are connected. As a newcomer, I was not initially aware of my socially constructed position as a recent settler either, or how to build bridges with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. I have used saree wrapping at the Ness Creek Music Festival to share my family’s colonial history and to engage empathically with the pain of Canada’s Indigenous peoples over the past eleven years. Few are aware of the British atrocities targeting Indian saree weavers. Bengal had brilliant saree-weaving artists. They used to produce the finest cotton Muslin textiles in the world, for more than one thousand years, earning fame, appreciation, and respect.

There were hundreds of thousands of saree weavers, scattered around vast tracts of land within Bengal, stretching from Dhaka to several places in present-day West Bengal, India. I grew up hearing since childhood, stories about how British colonizers cut off the hands, thumbs, and tongues of Bengal weavers to destroy their famous Muslin textiles industry, even though some academics and historians debate the extent of the violence. This story argues that British rule entailed the deliberate destruction of Indian industry for the benefit of British imperial commerce. I often wonder why local artisans the target of this erasure was and who is served by denials and diminishment of this history. As an artist, I find that contexts may change, but that

the imposition of cultural death through the exploitation and diminishment of the lives of ethnic artists quietly persist.

While destroying India's textile industry led to a loss of local tax revenue for the British empire, England was also trying to play a larger role in international trade by developing its own textile industry in Lancashire, Manchester, and Leeds. Ultimately, we must go deeper to understand this story. Saree wrapping allows me to share the resilience stories of the Bengali saree weavers while inviting settlers to reconsider the "benefits" of imperialism and living in colonial nation-states that suppress public knowledge of their violent histories. It is a way to create a generative, long-lasting relationship with many unknown cross-cultural local and global community people. It is a way to connect with our Indigenous neighbors, and relatives and express our willingness to share the pain of oppression, and fight back together to prevent the erasure of our histories, languages, cultures, and pride. I have been doing this saree wrapping for the last twelve years because I have learned by doing year after year that it is a practical, hands-on way to make relationship with new community members, to let the community people who I am, my colonized history, building of trust while exposing the difficult truth and pain.

My emphasis is always on cultural connections, cultural continuity, and building bridges. It makes me look at the "mosaic" of Canada in a new light. The "mosaic" description suggests that Canada is culturally diverse, that all the little tiles of diversity are separate and distinct, and kept apart by grout. Yet in fact, there is a dominant cultural context that newcomers to Canada are expected to assimilate to, which means those "tiles" of diversity do not keep their own colors, but are captured in the processes of interlocking subjectivities that uphold Canadian hegemonies.

My saree wrapping practice at multicultural festivals disrupts expectations of assimilation, crossing over the grout between tiles in the mosaic by making a space to inform people on the prairies who may not know these histories. Sharing our histories creates dialogue for allyship, and calls people to collaborative action for justice. It takes a lot of courage to be vulnerable, but it is so important in building community through decolonial learning, re-learning and un-learning.

This doctoral research, then, examines the social contexts of my research, through its objectives, research questions, theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and the findings of my collaborative community learning analysis, to reconsider how my own life is interwoven with the needs for justice that shape both my local diasporic communities and the Indigenous Lands

where we have the opportunity of becoming potential partners in reconciliation and decolonization. While this chapter introduces my life story, Chapter Two provides a deeper contextualization of the forces shaping the activities I examine over a three-year period, in terms of the relational positionings of Indigenous and racialized newcomers in Canada. Chapter Three outlines key terms informing my theoretical framework, while Chapter Four provides an overview of my autoethnographic methodology. Chapter Five gathers my learnings from working with Indigenous community leaders and international student gardeners. Chapter Six explores a discussion of cultural, language and creative losses among artists of colour who are critical of Canada's multicultural policies, which set newcomer and Indigenous populations on a so-called level playing field, ignoring how colonialist abuses affect these communities differently. Chapter Seven traces the ways my learnings from Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and scholars has deepened my understandings of anti-racism and decolonial educational processes. Chapter Eight provides my concluding remarks.

Chapter Two: Situating Indigenous and Immigrant Women as Structurally Separated Communities in Canada

Chapter Overview and Purpose

As a settler-colonial country, Canada is founded on gendered, racialized, and other social inequities, woven directly into its systems of governance and norms of social and political life. These systems work together in visible and invisible ways to create disparities (Bannerji, 2000; Dua 2004; Denis, 2011; LaDuke, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Walia, 2013). Not everyone enjoys equal opportunity in Canada, despite its claims to democratic inclusion. Indigenous peoples, settler Canadians, and newcomers all start their lives as community members and citizens from different stages, levels, and angles, which shape how our social subjectivities are formed. Settler-colonial socio-economic and political systems still foster more ready access to success for white Canadians in ways that also ensure barriers for the marginalized, regardless of their skills, educational qualifications, and hard work. People immigrating to Canada may not be fully aware of how these inequitable colonialist processes work to position their aspirations, prior to their arrival.

Coming from all over the world, immigrant women find themselves caught up in multiple, complicated settlement processes, grounded in Canada's failures to recognize Indigenous sovereignties, through its on-going colonialist regimes. Immigrants may, therefore, not be fully aware of how colonization has shaped and contaminated their own histories. On the top, few have been exposed to critical educational opportunities to learn about the interwoven effects of imperialism, colonialism, capitalism, nationalism, racism, sexism, classism, fundamentalism, anti-Semitism, casteism, ableism, ageism, queer phobia, heteropatriarchy, or white supremacy. As a result, they may also remain unaware of the importance of social activism in achieving social justice. Both the links and the irreducible differences in the push-pull forces shaping Indigenous relations with successive waves of new settlers may remain obscure to both established settler-Canadians and newcomers. Indigenous communities have not had the luxury of ignoring the effects of these historically produced forces, nor the lost opportunities for more collaborative and resilient futures. Given these challenging conditions, my goal in this dissertation is to draw upon my own experiences as a racialized newcomer settler woman, who

has been working to build active bridges between newcomer, settler, and Indigenous communities, in order to reimagine more collaborative approaches to empowerment.

Indigenous sovereignty remains an important site of contestation in Canada and elsewhere, informing the evolution of nation-states and ongoing operations of globalization, migration, and settlement. Empowerment, therefore, cannot be understood in linear terms, moving in a smooth pathway from being less to more empowered, because the issues of class, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and social location all intersect with histories of colonialism and imperialist violence to produce systemic obstacles to mutual flourishing. These old hierarchies are wrapped up in new packaging via the project of neoliberalism, a global model of capitalist domination based on economic and political policies and practices designed to reduce state, institutional and economic accountabilities for the harmful impacts of free-market policies on peoples and places.

Newcomers in Canada seldom know how Indigenous people's lives and cultures have been disrupted and reshaped by colonization or about Indigenous perspectives on reconciliation processes as they have evolved to date (Abu-Laban 2018; Marom, 2016). Due to settlement pressures, it may take a long time for a deeper understanding of Canada's imperialist histories to surface. As a non-Indigenous racialized newcomer immigrant woman, I was not aware of my role in settler colonialism. I did not yet know why I need to be an ally of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. I was not aware of the problems inherent in multiculturalism, nor the effects of ongoing settlement on the socioeconomic conditions of Indigenous peoples and the ways unequal neoliberal systems prevent collaborative efforts for change. Most immigrants do not recognize their roles and responsibilities in appropriating Indigenous Lands through ongoing state settlement policies. After spending a decade building informal networks with and among my communities here in this stolen Land, while pursuing my formal anti-racist, decolonial feminist education, I have become more aware of my complex social positioning and who I am in this stolen Indigenous Land.

My research is designed to examine how my understandings of social positioning and empowerment have been framed and reframed as a racialized settler woman seeking to find my responsibilities as a Canadian citizen through informal community activities with members of wider newcomer communities and with Indigenous people. Therefore, I will outline what I have learned about the histories of Indigenous peoples and the current social, political, and economic contexts of immigrants as I have come to know them. I am interested in how parallel processes

of assimilation promote estrangement between and undermine decolonization efforts across our communities. By examining my own efforts to orient to my new communities in this stolen Land, I will begin to outline what I have learned about pathways to reconciliation and resilience.

Indigenous People and the On-Going Colonialist Project of Assimilation

According to their oral histories, Indigenous peoples have inhabited Turtle Island from time immemorial. Turtle Island is the name used by some Indigenous groups for what is presently called North America. More than 1.7 million Indigenous people live in Canada, and only 1.2 million people (about 3.8 percent of the population) self-identify as Indigenous persons (Census of Canada, 2016). The federal government spends nearly \$10 billion per year on Aboriginal programs and affairs (Government of Canada 2007, p. 90), yet because of the per-capita disparities between investments in Indigenous and settler communities, Indigenous people more generally live in poverty. Available funds may also be spent on settler experts, rather than serving the needs of Indigenous peoples, directly. First Nations peoples across Canada share a common experience of colonial encounters that have left them economically marginalized, politically weakened, and culturally stigmatized. The colonization of Canada changed how Land and resources were used and interfered with Indigenous ways of life. The effects of the colonial experience include a loss of Land base and access to resources that allowed First Nations to engage in sustainable livelihoods in pre-colonial times.

Canadian policies were also designed to separate Indigenous children from their parents, families, and communities. Government-run residential schools promoted assimilation efforts to minimize and weaken Indigenous family ties and break links to their cultures, languages, Indigenous knowledges, values, and identities, in order to indoctrinate Indigenous children into the new white colonial culture—based on the now dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society. In justifying the government’s residential school policy, Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, told the House of Commons in 1883:

When the school is on the reserve, the child lives with its parents, who are savages; savages surround him, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on me, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of

thought of white men. (Canada, House of Commons Debates 9 May 1883, p. 1107–1108).

The emphasis on white men is no accident. Colonial policies targeted women, girls, children and Two-spirit members of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities for disenfranchisement through differential education. As a result, social connections were breached, and life pathways altered. Consequently, many Canadian Indigenous people today experience health inequities, loss of tradition and traditional practices, breakdown of the family and identity crises (Macdonald & Steenbeek, 2015). These historical events have affected generations of Indigenous people, leading to the current rates of violence, death, and suicide among Indigenous populations in ways that newly arrived non-Indigenous people do not understand, sufficiently. This leaves newcomers vulnerable to falling in line with Canada’s colonialist, sexist, racist patterns of settlement.

Lack of Safe Drinking Water

Indigenous communities continue to face a safe and clean drinking water crisis and high poverty rates. Many Indigenous reserves do not have these basic needs met and are still experiencing water advisories. Despite improvements, according to Statistics Canada (2021), “as of March 9, 2021, 58 long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves are in effect” (para. 3). Therefore, some families have left their communities and temporarily lived in a hotel, with children continuing their schoolwork in hotel ballrooms. A bored child living in a hotel said, “Sometimes, I feel like we don’t exist ... like we’re just ghosts, just put in a drawer, in a box. We’re suffering in that box with no clean water.” When a person lives his/her/their whole life without tap water that is safe to drink, they can start to feel like they are invisible. (CBC Kids News, 2020).

Migration and Assimilation

Canadian immigration is an economically and politically driven project. Castles (2016) have called the twentieth century “the age of migration.” Indeed, for many decades, scholars have used various terms such as transnational, global, environmental, international, economic, political, regional, internal, and even feminized migration (Guémar, 2019; Mahler, 1999) to describe the complex conditions shaping flows of people around the globe. More recently, Meissner & Vertovec (2017) have coined the term “super-diversity” to describe the ways emerging migration patterns have created variable combinations of social groupings and revised

power relations, which have, in turn, “produced new hierarchical social positions” (p. 126) in both sending and receiving countries. Each migration pathway has its own history, causes, and consequences, each with targeted gendered effects.

According to Alan B. Simmons (2010), there are two types of migration systems 1) utopian systems, founded on liberal principles, where poor people from the least developed countries move to wealthy nation-states and developed countries that need cheap labour, and 2) dystopian migration systems, founded on colonial and authoritarian principles in which a few actors gain and many lose. To my mind, it is possible to claim utopian motives for dystopian systems. Simmons explains that Canada claims liberal values and nation-building principles advanced through a “non-racist,” “multicultural,” whiteness-centered Canadian immigration framework (Simmons, 2010). However, as an anti-racist learner and practitioner, I would argue that Canadian immigration policies are both colonialist and racist, impacting new immigrants and Indigenous peoples through a self-colonizing practice that is good for settler societies, economic elites, and national political leaders, but not for visible minority racialized settlers and Indigenous communities.

As indicated above, Canada has institutionalized racism since its emergence as a nation-state, beginning with its displacements of Indigenous communities from their homelands, and then instituting reservations, residential schools, starvation policies, pass laws and the like. In fact, displacement of peoples at home and abroad remains profitable for Canada. As a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Zaman, 2012), Canada now relies on immigrants’ labour to boost its population growth and to address labour shortages. Federally orchestrated immigration plans help bring more than a quarter of a million immigrants to Canada every year, even as xenophobia rises (CBC, June 28, 2016). Women, who are already at a market disadvantage, may experience these effects in intensified ways. Zaman’s research (2012), for example, shows how ongoing labour exploitation practices affect South Asian immigrant women’s lives in deregulated work environments in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Although assimilation remains the goal for both populations, Canada differentiates between racialized Indigenous and newcomer settler immigrant women and communities. Statistics Canada (2006) reports that *The Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” Thus, the bar of imagined equity or its failure in Canada is set at whiteness, even though

immigrant and Indigenous populations are growing quickly, and it is in Canada's best interests to that all Canadians are optimally employed and actualized. Still, change is slow, because alternative knowledges and ways of being are not valued, or part of establishing what equity means in policy terms.

Assimilation Pressure Prevents Newcomers from Understanding Indigenous Histories

Assimilation and settlement pressures prevent newcomer settlers from understanding Indigenous histories and engaging with them. I have learned through my lived experiences that as a woman of colour, I am racialized into a position of dominance in relation to Indigenous people here in Canada. When I arrived in Saskatoon more than a decade ago, newly arrived racialized settlers did not see the connections between Canadian discrimination against Indigenous peoples, their loss of languages, histories, and cultures due to assimilation stress, lack of Indigenous histories in Canada's biased education systems, and their own constantly disrupted social integration processes. I have learned that when we know our own histories, they can become resources in developing the compassionate connections needed to enact substantive reconciliation.

In 1952, Bengali people had to fight against language oppression and erasure by western Pakistani rulers. Through bloodshed, Bengali people achieved the right to speak in their mother tongue. As a Bangladeshi, I grew up with the results of the language movement. Thus, when I heard about residential school histories, the language losses and cultural genocide toward Indigenous people, I felt deep empathy. Like Canada, Bangladesh oppresses Indigenous languages through systemic injustices. Both nation-states marginalize Indigenous peoples, as happens in many countries in the world. Yet, until recently, within my Bangladeshi diasporic community, people did not talk much about Canada's residential schools and those missing Indigenous children who never came home. Today, non-Indigenous citizens of Canada have learned more about the lives and deaths of Indigenous children, after thousands of unmarked mass graves have emerged on the grounds of residential schools. It is no longer possible to deny this reality, including in Bangladeshi diasporic communities. This uncomfortable truth and sorrowful reminder of Canada's painful history reveals brutal systemic oppressions, having very little to do with educating Indigenous, or indeed any, children.

As a racialized newcomer woman, I also face routine individual, institutional, and societal racism (Rahim, 2014). Despite these similarities, however, there is little socio-political support

for developing relationships in which immigrants and Indigenous communities can begin to understand our respective social locations and histories. As a newcomer and a new Canadian, I have come to see that it is part of my shared responsibility to build positive relationships and alliances across our cultures. By studying these colonialist effects, non-Indigenous people can better understand how structural disparities are often hidden in mainstream media or platforms. Building transnational solidarities is supported by making the meaning of reconciliation evident through public education.

Neoliberal Imaginaries and Border Imperialisms

My critiques of neoliberal development (Duflo, 2012; Kabeer, 2012), both locally and globally, arise from the daily challenges I have faced as a racialized settler woman in Canada, attempting to build relationships between myself, my family, my community enclaves and with Indigenous people, primarily in my settlement city of Saskatoon. As newly arrived immigrants facing life challenges to our ways of knowing (Abu-Laban, 2018), many are seeking approaches to empowerment and reconciliation together, although this may not be an intuitive experience for many. Canadian immigration is a broad topic to study. But as members of hyphenated Canadian diaspora, immigrants need to know Canadian immigration histories. It is crucial to understand who benefits from the immigration process and how. Canadian immigrants also need to be aware about the lived effects of the inequalities embedded in Canadian institutions.

Scholars have critiqued imperialism and neoliberalism because of its strong market orientation and profit-making ideologies, in part, from the point of view of radical political economics, which examines how the roots of social and environmental problems are produced through prevailing political structures (Alfredo Filho & Johnston, 2005). Lovejoy (2012) shows how racialized settler women's lived experiences reflect neoliberal market policies (consumerism, profit-making, commercialization, and commodification). This, in turn, affects their quality of life and decision-making power (p. 492). Numerous structural barriers prevent racialized settler women from establishing authentic relationships within their new homeland because of the ways market distortions fuel individual and public ignorance about their instrumentalized roles in occupying Indigenous Lands. Even while Canada claims to support efforts to reconcile with the First Peoples of this Land, this unexamined gap in knowledge politics is central to my learning journey, which illuminates both opportunities for and limits placed upon bridging the structural divides between newcomers and Indigenous peoples.

Forces Accelerating Human Migration and Removing Peoples from Homelands

Neoliberal imaginaries produce nationalist discourses both inside and outside the territorial boundaries of Canada. Therefore, it takes new immigrants time to understand that Canada's invitation is conditional. The settlement process will be dehumanizing for them, developed through the national project of dehumanizing Indigenous peoples before them. They do not yet understand how immigrants constitute a tool of colonization, in state processes based on discourses of whiteness. Thus, their compelling aspirations toward Canadian citizenship are not simply about neoliberal or global capital, but are manufactured by both sending and receiving nation-states invested in erasing histories of colonial violence in Canada and elsewhere.

Many immigrants do not know why they must learn about the history of Canada or, indeed, how prominent imperialisms have shaped their own experiences. They may not immediately grasp why immigrants need to support Indigenous rights and worldviews, or how they can benefit from learning about them together. Speaking from my own experiences in the community, I can affirm that many racialized newcomer settlers do not have time to consider how their life struggle is a legacy of the world's colonialist histories. Immigrants' lives are still targeted by colonial violence, cultural genocide, and the knowledge and identity politics that shape them. Most of them face daily racial discrimination as members of minority groups in the larger, white-identified settler-colonial society, navigating challenges that may blind them to critical issues of Indigenous sovereignty.

Immigrant Women's Positions in the Canadian Labour Market

According to Statistics Canada (2011), 52.3 % of the total immigrant population is female, compared with 50.8% of Canada's total population. Immigrant women are also more likely to be university-educated than Canadian-born women. Despite being more likely to hold a bachelor's degree or higher, immigrant women are more likely to be underemployed than their Canadian-born counterparts. The Immigrant Women and Precarious Employment Core Research Group (2014) describes how racialized women settlers are getting pushed into precarious jobs and the dire economic, health, and social impacts that accumulate from being stuck in these positions. Their labour market experiences negatively impact their physical and mental health (due to lack of or insufficient income, loss of skills, social status, and family maintenance pressures), and may impact family dynamics.

The 2016 Census shows that 20.8% of racialized people in Canada are low-income compared to 12.2% of non-racialized people. Racialized women earned 58 cents and racialized men 76 cents for every dollar a white man earned in Ontario in 2015. The ‘colour-code’ persists for second-generation workers of colour. Within the core working-age group, in 2015, 8.8% of immigrant women were unemployed, compared with 5.2% of Canadian-born women. According to Statistics Canada’s *Immigrant Labour Force Analysis Series* and the *Canadian Immigrant Labour Market’s Recent Trends* from (2017) African-born immigrants had the lowest employment rates. The gaps in labour-market outcomes are typically wider for employment-aged immigrant women than their male counterparts and Canadian-born women.

Research by Hudson et al. (2015) shows that the employment rate for immigrant women is much lower than that of their Canadian-born counterparts (72.0% versus 82.0% in 2017), with their unemployment rate almost double the mainstream norm (7.2% versus 4.3%). Immigrant women are also more likely to face persistent challenges becoming employed. According to Statistics Canada (2017), for female newcomers, the unemployment-rate gap (with Canadian-born women) was large: 8.5 percentage points in 2017, unchanged from the gap observed in 2006. Premji’s (2017) study shows that precarious employment is on the rise in Canada, increasing by nearly 50% over the last two decades. Big cities like Toronto have increased polarization among neighbourhoods, resulting in low-income immigrants increasingly moving from the centre to the edges of town. Therefore, racialized women face everyday commuting difficulties. Many newcomer women do not have a vehicle, initially, and it takes time to get a driving license. Therefore, they face the daily delays, infrequency, or unavailability of public transportation. Finally, the impact comes as pressure on their family life, children, and physical and mental health. Racialized newcomers do not have extended families to provide childcare support, long-time friends, or professional networks for transportation support; therefore, they may not know how to alleviate some of the difficulties described above, and may even be fired.

According to *Women in Canada: a gender-based statistical report 2018* (7th edition), Immigrant women have fewer local social connections than their Canadian-born counterparts. Any individual’s social network comprises connections to the extended and nuclear family, friends from the workplace and educational or extra-curricular (school, college, university) activities, and acquaintances from community engagements, with resulting benefits defined as social capital. When immigrants leave their home country or place of birth, they typically leave

behind a large part of their family, friends, relatives, acquaintances, co-language speakers, and shared cultural or religious communities. Therefore, they must invest considerable effort to rebuild support networks in a new social and physical environment.

In many cases, immigrants cannot rebuild their social networks to pre-migration levels, even if they have lived in the new country for fifty years. Many do not have a Canadian education. Due to cultural and language differences and prevailing classism and racism, many fail to expand their social networks across cultural communities, except their country-of-origin groups. Elgar et al.'s (2011) research found that "investments in groups yield both personal and public good in terms of better health and education, less crime and more charitable donations and tolerance of gender." (p. 1044).

According to Statistics Canada (Loyser, 2018), Immigrant women had fewer social connections than Canadian-born women (24 compared to 29, respectively). Even with access to digital communications, there is still a gap in building networks within the new environment. Local community connections are essential to accessing specific resources, such as employment, childcare, community education, and other emotional supports, such as cultural, faiths-based or spiritual group supports, which can provide important survival or integrational pieces of information.

Commodification of Immigrant Women's Labour

Several studies (Daoud et al., 2012; Dlamini, Uzo, & Barat, 2012; United Way Toronto, 2013) on immigrant women in Canada show that they are among the most visible racialized groups. Immigrant women's communities are vulnerable in access to fundamental rights, education, and jobs. They are subject to governmental and NGO development policies, both in Canada and abroad, reinforcing patriarchal perspectives about and within family structures (Chui, 2009; Chui, T. & H. Maheux. 2011). This is part of the more extensive reproduction of co-substantive border-crossing patriarchal structures inherent in imperialism and globalization. Siegel's (1995) study shows the effects of everyday racism in the lives of immigrant women of colour. She notes,

In the United States and Canada, women of colour, no matter how well-educated or wealthy, have limited access to positions of power and privilege. They are members of an oppressed minority even when they are the majority. The colour of their skin usually leaves them no choice about their visibility, even when it would be safer or less painful to 'pass' as white. (p. 298).

Saskatoon is also a site of political struggle for immigrant women's rights, power, and control over our bodies and minds, in contexts that include poverty, discrimination, religious racism, underemployment, and limited awareness of the ways that Indigenous and immigrant movements are mutually implicated.

Zaman's study predicts that two-thirds of the urban population in major cities such as Vancouver and Toronto will be made up of racialized groups, especially Asian immigrants, by 2031. Meanwhile, Aboriginal people would represent between 4.0 and 5.3 percent of the total Canadian population by that same year (CBC, 2021). Her study shows that most Asian immigrants are eventually concentrated in low-wage, non-standard, and part-time jobs and how neoliberal policies target racialized groups in Canada and elsewhere for devalued labour. Many Indigenous and immigrant people maintain two jobs at a time. Job-hopping becomes their alternative mechanism for coping with workplace insecurity, including getting fired for trivial reasons, and negotiating daily racism, sexism, and job-related health issues (Fuller-Thompson, Noack, & George 2011).

Zaman (2006) shows how understandings of gender, class, and race are linked to and emerge from the immigration process, resulting in the commodification of immigrant women's labour, "where workers are treated as things that can be bought and sold and must rely on the sale of their labour-power for economic survival" (p. 74). Commodification operates in three significant ways: 1) restricting their social mobility through numerous stipulations, 2) denying the credentials and skills these women have acquired in their countries of origin which leads to erosion of skills and reconstructs their labour as "un-skilled," "low paid, and "flexible" . . . and 3) setting up strict but ambiguous and costly immigration and employment procedures. She also explains how non-or under-commodified sectors, such as households, hospitals, schools, elder care, and childcare, are increasingly commodified. In part, I am attempting to revalue this kind of work in my dissertation and situate it as a site of potentially empowering reconnection among marginalized subaltern groups in Canada.

Zaman's study shows how commodification grows social inequalities, but does not engage directly with how it relates to the nation state's instrumentation of Indigenous peoples and places. I will argue that the commodification of immigrant women's labour functions to obscure their structural relationships with Indigenous communities and the Land, both in their countries of origin and in their new host country. Although immigrant women are awarded entry into Canada,

in order to fill labour gaps, many Indigenous people cannot access even to those jobs, because they are often underserved, overpoliced, and criminalized, and thereby subject to much higher incarceration rates than newcomer or settler populations. Zaman argues that immigrant women become exhausted because of their working conditions, organized in relation to underpaid and unpaid reproductive labour. Indigenous people have endured the consequences of harsher marginalizations, even longer.

By challenging the current profit-oriented labour market, Zaman shows how to de-commodify low-wage labour in Canada. She explains that “de-commodification indicates that the welfare state grants benefits and entitlements and social rights, irrespective of participation in the labour market” (p. 92). She argues that low-wage labour deprives workers of many state benefits, such as extended health care, employment insurance (EI), sick leave, vacation, retirement savings, and so on, which ultimately results in material insecurity throughout their lives (see also Vissandjee et al., 2001). General income maintenance, employment security, maternity leave with pay, health insurance, worker’s compensation, and equitable access to all social benefits and services could lead to the de-commodification of low-wage workers. Indigenous peoples also live under unique federal and provincial sub-economic structures, suggesting that solidarities and knowledge sharing across these groups can help shape new approaches to cross-cultural relationships in step with the understanding that we are all Treaty people with a vested interest in more relationally accountable policies.

Zaman’s research on South Asian immigrants (2006, 2012) argues that this stratified policy approach produces “two Canadas,” in which white settlers are more privileged and powerful while South Asian immigrants constitute a vulnerable population that is structurally marginalized. I want to extend Zaman’s analysis by understanding how the marginalization of immigrant women operates in a country that already marginalizes First Peoples, in part through devaluing Indigenous, Métis and Inuit women.

Zaman's research (2012) also examines how lack of basic security, including the inequitable labour market, incomes, employment, skills, access to public voice and representational and workplace security reflect processes of racialization, marginalization, gendered spatialization, and deregulated work environments that impact Asian immigrants' integration in Canada. Her research provides a comprehensive picture of how "workplace hazards, violations, and deregulation due to neo-liberal policies including the Employment

Standards Act (ESA), compromise the work security and daily lives of Asian immigrants" (p.85). Her conception, research, and analysis often stem from the view that the government has been increasing competition in a deregulated market and has exercised too much power and control over the behaviour of citizens, companies, non-profits, the private sector, state and local governments, and other types of regulated entities. Zaman's research findings (2006, 2012) show that Asian immigrants are often unaware of their rights and afraid of losing their jobs because, in order to have an adequate income, they need to hold more than one casual or part-time position. She argues that the "absence of basic security creates dilemmas, conflicts and tensions within a family" (2012, p. 67), which can result in domestic violence.

Asian immigrants experience discrimination due to bias against their race, accent, religion, dress, country of origin and sexual orientation (p. 77). Bangladeshi-Canadians face severe discrimination in the form of racism and Islamophobia, which can eventually affect their mental health (p.78). Many women are stuck in casual or part-time jobs without any real chance of upgrading in their field or finding a full-time position, as they are the sole child and elderly care providers at home. Most immigrants do not secure jobs in the areas where they are trained, but rather find jobs requiring little skill and minimal opportunity for significant occupational and professional advancement. Therefore, most are not internally satisfied, which creates a lack of internal self-esteem, impacting their daily creativity and productivity. "Without basic security, Asian immigrants in Canada do not feel settled and do not feel integrated into Canadian society" (2012, p. 68).

Many of them want to go back to their country of origin. Still, they cannot decide for many practical reasons, including the negative experiences and consequences of breaking up families. Domestic violence has therefore increased. According to Zaman, men's first jobs in Canada were mainly in production and warehouses. At the same time, women often begin working in stores, restaurants, and as caregivers for the elderly, children, and people with mental and physical challenges. Women face the hazards of sexual discrimination and other forms of abuse. As a result, newcomer women do not get the opportunity to learn about intersectional feminisms or to engage routinely with community feminist activities. On the top, it is hard for them to deal with their own cultural, religious, and patriarchal norms and to liberate themselves from related social, religious, or gender barriers.

Border Imperialisms

Harsha Walia defines these racially exclusionary processes of establishing citizenship and strangeness as “border imperialisms” (Walia, 2013). Walia’s intercultural feminist research inspires my work and is based in Vancouver, British Columbia. She addresses the concept of border imperialism in the processes of ‘othering’ immigrants. Her study, in Vancouver, Canada, offers examples that help to explain Achille Mbembe’s concept of necropolitics. This concept refers to ways of using the colonial nation’s structural, social, and political powers to control people’s lives within and across borders (Narayan & Harding, 2000). Invisible systemic state power dictates whether people live, die, or are relegated to a liminal zone between the two, a space which Mbembe (2003) bluntly refers to as “bare life” (p. 12), after Giorgio Agamben (1998). Walia describes how the nation-state treats immigrants as “other” through dehumanization and marginalization processes grounded in the historical and contemporary abuses of Indigenous peoples. She challenges these oppressive ideas and mechanisms through *No one is Illegal (NOII)* groups across Canada.

Walia (2013) presents a comprehensive analysis of borders and related claims to dominating power, arguing that borders are not just abstract lines on world maps. Each national border separates people in ways that create numerous social inequalities. Border imperialisms are a manifestation of Indigenous and immigration controls by the nation-state that maintain structural state power by re-enforcing control over the Land. Her study shows how border enforcement agents (as representatives from the state) are randomly allowed into people’s workplaces, homes, and public spaces to harass, intimidate, deport, and incarcerate people who have been defined as illegal migrants or, the ultimate strangers.

Walia's analysis highlights the legacies of colonialism and the exclusion of First Nations Peoples from settler communities in Canada. She suggests that dismantling prevailing systems of injustice demands an examination of how each works concerning the reproduction of othering so that collaborative forms of opposition grounded in communities of resistance can emerge. Her study explores how immigrant and Indigenous rights movements, understood within a transnational feminist analysis of capitalism, labour exploitation, settler colonialism, state-building, and racialized empire provide alternative conceptual frameworks to challenge border imperialisms and support decolonization processes. This is where my study can flesh out how

relational approaches to autoethnography reveal sites where such collaborative learning can occur, even in contexts where the nation-state mobilizes multi-directional discrimination.

Walia's concept of border imperialism offers an essential analytic framework for exploring the vulnerabilities and strengths of diasporic populations in relation to Indigenous peoples and communities. She explains how "border imperialism is characterized by the entrenchment and re-entrenchment of controls against migrants. Migrants are displaced as a result of the violence/s of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies" (p.38). According to an ILO report (2004), eighty-six million migrant workers are active in the global economy, much of which is predicated upon the seizure of Indigenous lands.

Even in places with less harsh judicial systems, being undocumented can lead to incarceration without a projected end date. "It is estimated that there are a half-million undocumented people in Canada, and eleven million undocumented people in the United States" (p. 69). The noncitizen status and undocumented life of migrant workers create vulnerabilities that lead to abuse and tremendous stigma within their communities, with adverse effects on their diasporic identity construction. Capitalism, where constant profit maximization is the goal, creates a disparity producing search for cheap labour and effective mechanisms to control workers, primarily through "permanent precarity" (p. 70). This strengthens the state's protection of neoliberal transnational capitalisms. But other possibilities persist.

Structural Racisms and Whiteness as Related Problems

When I started to pay attention to racialized settler, Euro-descended settler, and Indigenous relationships, my study of anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars and their critiques gradually shaped my thoughts. It helped me understand my positionality as a racialized newcomer woman and my research problem more thoroughly. I could see that stereotypes about Indigenous peoples were easily adopted by immigrant communities, who are already subject to fears and anxieties about their often-precarious positionalities, as newcomers. The demands of establishing a new life also limit access to more informed understandings of colonialisms, Indigenous peoples, and the larger social forces that affect newcomer lives.

Anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars challenge such dominant ruling relations (Abu, 2018; Datta, 2020) and their effects on positionalities within racialized colonialist white settler nation-states. Through an intersectional exploration of proximities and distances between settlers of

colour and Indigenous peoples in Canada, anti-racist scholars have unravelled racialized settler complicities in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and Lands. Racialized diasporas live at the intersections of colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy, but are positioned differently than Indigenous peoples within the settler-colonial. As Winona LaDuke (2002) explains, “the origins of this problem lie with the predator/prey relationship that industrial society has developed with the Earth and the people of the earth” (p. 213). She adds that “some of those transnational corporations and their international financiers [have] annual income[s] larger than the gross national product for many countries” (p. 212).

Treaty agreements can support better relationships between racialized settlers and Indigenous peoples. Still, most immigrants do not have access to post-secondary training and community resources that emphasize treaties and reconciliation. Thus, the othering in which they participate does not happen naturally. In an interview with Jocelyn Thorpe, Bonita Lawrence (2005) points out that recent settlers do not recognize Indigenous others right away, owing to the mediations of the settler state. By investments and inclusion in the Canadian settler state, racialized immigrants learn who the “Native” is through the discourses of settler society. New settler inclusion in the state is designed to encourage them to identify with the “better,” “civilized,” and “white” Canadians. Their racism toward Indigenous peoples is thus animated and orchestrated by a nation-state that offers newcomers access to citizenship, better positions, and more privileged status than the Indigenous-other. This is how colonialist discourses emanating from many nations encounter each other on the Canadian prairies and affirm the logic of Native exclusions.

Bannerji interrogates the terms “new Canadian,” “newcomer,” “immigrant,” “visible minority,” and “ethnic minority” as mobilized in the multiculturalist discourses of the Canadian nation-state. Bannerji (2000) argues persuasively that Canada, when examined under the microscope of racism and difference, exposes a “hegemony compounded of a racialized common sense and institutional structures” (p.114). Because of this, racism has become normalized, invisible, and taken for granted, particularly by those who suffer least from its effects, in Canada, Euro-descended settlers. From this state of acceptance, bureaucracies can churn out labels, such as “visible minority,” that do not disturb most people acculturated here. Bannerji warns that multiculturalist perspectives and frameworks support a certain degree of tolerance, but ultimately discourage non-white “others” from making claims about and of Canada. She presents a whole

discussion of Eastern Europeans and how their ethnicity differs from settler communities of colour. Eastern European immigrants, she states, are desirable because of the possibilities of including them in the imagery of whiteness. Bannerji encourages social activism among settlers of colour that bite the hand that feeds because “what it feeds is neither enough nor for our good” (p. 118). She argues forcefully that internal discourses of elitism and traditionalism create the notion of homogeneities within communities of colour, complicit with the racism and othering built into Canadian society.

The issues are vital because they undermine cultural heritage as a resource in building resilience and reconciliation in efforts to decolonize the nation state. The roles of BIPOC artists are often undermined in their capacities to build inter-community networks, as a result. Pakistan-born Toronto-based diasporic artist Shakir (2011) argues that multicultural space remains ghettoized, perpetually outside of mainstream norms. Artists of colour cannot be a part of the mainstream; they can work as a cultural translator, interpreters, or as native informants because they can speak English and another language, so they end up working primarily within ethno-racial communities. Multiculturalism distances people of colour from the mainstream, but never changes the mainstream itself. Natasha Bakht (2011), a South Asian diasporic Indian classical dancer, says that, in the Canadian context, diversity emphasizes multiculturalism's “song and dance” aspect, in ways that fetishize and essentialize cultural differences. They also ignore issues of Indigenous sovereignty, so that it is difficult to build intercultural relationships on the firm foundation of historical accuracy. Newcomer immigrants and Indigenous people need to be aware of their capacities for challenging or contesting the nation-state and its structural racisms. Imperialist capital is a vast and vital political project requiring a revised understanding of empowerment among marginalized groups. I would argue that the best approach is to develop understanding at the level of lived experiences within and across affected communities.

Razack, Smith and Thobani’s (2010) study shows how Indigenous women are oppressed and displaced because of ongoing colonialist Land-based politics in Canada and elsewhere. Thus, understanding intersectional oppressions is necessary for building relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities. Misunderstandings between Indigenous communities and racialized women settlers continue, because immigrant women and their communities have seldom learned about Indigenous people, Indigenous women, and sustained colonialist histories, a subject which is too often left out of settlement and integration processes, or grossly

underrepresented. Using the concept of intersectionality, these authors discuss “the revival of Indigenous knowledge systems and the rejection of Eurocentric discourses and values” (p. 8), based on processes that bring immigrant women into deeper awareness of the potentials arising from commitments to decolonization.

Anti-racist Indigenous scholar, Verna St. Denis, explains racialization as a process that has been used “to justify inequality and oppression of Aboriginal peoples” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1071). She suggests that it helps to understand why and how race matters in colonialist processes by developing cross-cultural awareness training. Such training helps people understand “how racism disadvantages some and how racism advantages others, and how whiteness gets produced and constructed as superior” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1087). St. Denis (2011) also unpacks the history of Canadian multiculturalism as an instrument used to marginalize people of colour and Indigenous peoples. St. Denis (2011) examines how Aboriginal perspectives are silenced through multiculturalism and explains why the nation-state needs to privilege Aboriginal history, knowledge, and experiences, including in a prairie context, where she once endured a provincial discussion about the high school social science curriculum, including a publicly funded educator who commented that, “Aboriginal people are not the only people here.” (p. 306). The politics of multiculturalism helps to obscure differences between ethnicity and race and hide racial injustices (Bannerji, 2000).

Othering is common among racialized settler immigrant communities, even for the second generation born here. Creese (2019) explains that the processes of racialization are linked to power relations that are “deeply rooted in histories of colonial domination” (Creese, p. 1481). Creese (2019) also explores how the question “Where are you from?” is central to processes of racialization in Canada and how such encounters shape identities and belonging among second-generation African Canadians. Although the second generation embodies the usual local languages, accents, attire, education and place-based knowledge, other residents frequently question their country of origin as if they cannot be immediately recognized as “local.” These routine interrogations and daily interactions clarify that a Black or Brown body is seen as out of place, rather than at home, which shapes the negotiation of Canadian, Black and Brown identities. It became evident that a “white world” informs the Canadian imagination; the expectation is to see white Canadians, rather than people of colour.

The possibilities for constructing a radically different Canada require centring the perspectives of those who have been “othered” as the insider-outsiders of the nation. Drawing upon lived experiences of multiple exclusions, excluded standpoints can be politicized as oppositional, using lenses that take experiences of gender and race seriously, while challenging class structures through a critical rethinking of socio-political “ruling” relations (Smith, 2002). In our lives, politics, and work, racialized “others” can expose the hollowness of the neoliberal state and the refined and crude constructions of “white power” behind Canada’s national imaginary. Our stories serve to remind us of the Canada that could exist. (p. 81).

Maillé, Razack, Smith, and Thobani (2010) critique Canada’s white settler society for targeting both Indigenous and ethnic minority communities in specific ways. They show how terms like “immigrant” and “newcomer” marginalize more recent arrivals and elaborate oppressive structures (p. 5). Colonialist state policies construct and politicize gendered, raced, and classed identities to create disharmonies among subaltern groups of people (Spivak, 1988). Invoking intersectionality as a theoretical frame, the authors mentioned above explain how women of colour face sexism compounded by racism in workplaces and public spaces, partly because they fit the category of “stranger” in a white supremacist ethos.

Drawing on histories of colonialist appropriations, racialized Canadian immigrant citizens are created as strangers whose nation-state animates “strangeness.” In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Sara Ahmed (2013) applies a critical lens to constructing the notion of strangers, otherness, and differences. Her book is not about actual strangers (or aliens). Instead, it attempts to question the assumptions informing any purported ontology of strangers, including whether it is possible simply to be a stranger or to meet a stranger in the street. Ahmed’s notion of strange encounters outlines the ways national models of belongingness, such as patriotism, contain hidden mechanisms or techniques for creating and mobilizing socially constructed differences by identifying insiders and outsiders. Ahmed explains how the alien is a source of fascination, desire, revulsion, and fear.

Racialized diasporas are thus orchestrated, designed, produced, and structured by colonialist systems of the nation-state. Sunera Thobani (2007) argues in her book, *Exalted Subjects* that despite the magnitude of their dehumanization and exploitation, racialized immigrants and refugees are also participants in and beneficiaries of Canada's colonial systems. This occurs especially when they seek equality with white Canadian settlers through the social

capital they bring with them (assets, educational degrees, foreign job experiences, etc.), thereby placing their political status above that of Indigenous peoples in Canada's racial hierarchy. Thobani's (2007) research lays bare the state's enduring use of race to re(produce) Canadian national identity as white-supremacist. She also focuses on "strange" encounters. Her major theory is that Canadian national subjects are constructed through the hierarchical process of "exaltation" and advocates for all settler immigrants to stand up as allies with Indigenous peoples against colonial injustices, to create spaces for resistance. Therefore, I am interested in differentiating processes of exaltation from meaningful experiences of empowerment that operate in solidarity with Indigenous claims to sovereignty and Lands.

Hage (2012) dissects a White Nationalist fantasy among Euro-descended settlers in Australia who are particularly worried about the presence of 'Third World-Looking People' (p. 18). He examines the role of the failure of the relationship between the nation and the state in reproducing this dynamic by exploring the relationship between nationalism and racism. Hage is more interested in the discourses of tolerance than what people tolerate because his emphasis is on the historically constructed structural framework that has shaped these relations. He examines "the look" that is important in tracking whiteness, an organizing principle that controls and positions "ethnics" within the Australian social space. His analysis is applicable in Canada, another British colonialist state, because each has developed a multicultural environment under the control of white culture. His book suggests that white racists and white multiculturalists may share more assumptions than either group suspects. He depicts processes of control and normalization within multiculturalism that reflect a dominant white imaginary.

As a racialized newcomer settler, it took many years for me to understand colonial Indigenous-settler relations as a political issue. Since I have lived in Saskatoon and have worked with its community members for some time, I found Jaskiran K Dhillon's (2017) study, *Prairie Rising*, pertinent for my research. She investigates and provides a series of critical reflections about the changing face of settler colonialism in Canada and Indigenous-state relations in the city of Saskatoon. In her study, she unpacks how various groups, such as state agents, youth workers, and community organizations, seek to intervene in Indigenous youth living under conditions of colonial occupation and marginalizing conditions. Dhillon's (2017) analysis sheds light on the changing forms of settler governance and shows how the push for inclusionary governance ultimately reinstates colonial settler authority through assimilation. She raises further questions

about the federal government's commitments to justice and political empowerment for Indigenous Nations. Indigenous youth have been facing tremendous systemic racism and related injustices within the context of their everyday realities. They are being ignored and overrepresented in custodial programming, where criminalization operates as a racialized issue.

From my many years of community activities, I have learned that racism is socially constructed through power relations, embedded in colonial legacies, and connected with ongoing colonization. Racialization is a process that has been used "to justify inequality and the oppression of Aboriginal peoples" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1071). The United Nations Association in Canada defines racial discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life." Through STARS and our community radio programme, I connected with many local faculty members, community educators, and activists, and developed an interest in undertaking doctoral studies. Through this radio programme, I had the opportunity to talk with Drs. Verna St. Denis, Sheelah Mcleen, Alex Wilson, Marie Battiste, Janet McVitte, Priscilla Settee, Marie Lovrod, and many more scholars, community activists, leaders, and artists from the Saskatoon community. Because my exposure to anti-racism started from my community activities, I recognized my need for formal education in this area. As part of my doctoral studies, I took an anti-racist, anti-oppressive course with Dr. Verna St. Denis, to prepare myself to do this work professionally. Before undertaking this formal education, I had learned to see racism operating on an interpersonal level. But Dr. St. Denis' class gave me a critical lens through which to examine racism from structural, systemic, institutional, interpersonal and internalized levels, for the first time.



Figure 2.1: Layers of Racism

Her anti-racist class introduced me to a wide range of anti-racist scholars and approaches. I struggled to understand my position here in Canada as a racialized settler woman, and how I could take responsibility for racial, gender, environmental, and social justice. I learned from her class that “Racism is a particular prejudice that legitimizes an unequal relationship. In other words, racism is political; it facilitates and justifies socioeconomic mobility for one group at the expense of another. While there may be mutual dislike, there is no such thing as mutual discrimination in an unequal relationship” (LaRocque, 1991, p. 75). I also learned that racism is everywhere, but there is a prevailing myth of finding ‘no racist’ because of denial and avoidance.

Relevance of Anti-Racism and Critical Decolonial Feminism

In this research, critical decolonial feminism and anti-racism frameworks are vital. It is essential to know about racism, racial inequity, racist policies, racist ideas, and anti-racism as intertwined with gender and identity politics. Ibram X. Kendi (2019) defines racism as: "a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities." (p. 17-18). Kendi (2019) defines racial inequity as occurring "when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing" (p. 18). He also defines (2019) racist policy as: "any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups. By policy, I mean written and unwritten laws, rules, procedures, processes, regulations, and guidelines that govern people" (p. 18). Racism arises from racist ideas; therefore, it is necessary to understand what a racist idea is. As Kendi (2019) states: "A racist idea is any idea that suggests one racial group is

inferior to or superior to another racial group. Racist ideas argue that the inferiorities and superiorities of racial groups explain racial inequities in society" (p. 20). Kendi (2019) argues that:

The opposite of racist isn't 'not racist.' It is 'antiracist.' What is the difference? One endorses either the idea of racial hierarchy as racist or racial equality as an antiracist. One believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies as an antiracist. One either allows racial inequities to persevere as a racist or confronts racial inequities as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of 'not racist.' Antiracist ideas argue that racist policies cause racial inequities (p. 9).

Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Resistance against Canadian Structural Racisms

Indigenous people have been speaking up against structural racism for a long time. Non-Indigenous people may not wish to listen to avoid the guilt they may feel as a result. Nevertheless, some Canadians and Canadian institutions have been taking significant steps to help shift the paradigms and enhance Indigenous people's rights, particularly after discovering unmarked mass graves at the residential schools. More non-Indigenous activists and scholars are also taking a stand against white colonialisms. For example, white people have been demanding justice for Coulten Boushie. Similarly, a motion to rename Sir John A. Macdonald Road in Saskatoon's the street in the Confederation Park area was unanimously approved at a Saskatoon city council meeting recently (CBC, Feb 18, 2021), to acknowledge the ongoing harm of residential school systems and Macdonald's role in it. Many non-Indigenous people argue that we need to rename all of the colonialist commemorations in public places, because they cannot remain our national heroes in a reconciling nation. Racist proponents of genocide should have no celebrated place in our diverse communities.

My anti-racist and decolonial feminist education have helped me learn how to challenge ideas through practices such as resisting colonialist naming practices, while working with living people to help create change. This educational training enabled me to be more open about confronting my prejudices and those that affect me and my intersecting communities. From my lived experiences and Saskatoon community activities, I also learned that we all need to challenge the discomfort, versus being vulnerable, in order to achieve racial justice. My life has been exposed to many religious prejudices, patriarchally-grounded gender issues, social stigmas, and stereotypes as a Muslim woman in different stages and situations of life. I was initially afraid to be vocal and take a stand to address my daily racist and religious discrimination experiences.

In my study, I encourage all Canadians and specifically racialized settler newcomers to learn more about their own and the histories of Indigenous peoples in Canada. For the last twelve years, I have been trying to reach out to Indigenous community leaders and ask how I can be an ally in the fight for meaningful progress toward reconciliation and for taking the responsibility for those changes in my everyday practices. As an ally, I also believe, like the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners, that “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one” (July 2015 summary of the final report, n.p.). It is clear from this research that processes of assimilation have been impacting Indigenous and settler immigrant people for centuries. The specificities of these processes need to be addressed in order to create resistant, decolonial learning spaces.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

My experiential learnings from long-term community activities suggest that understanding mutual empowerment requires a critical appreciation of competing models of sovereignty, choice, community, and desire. Centrist and hierarchical models of development shape the conditions that produce “voluntary” actions, limited options, and forced migrations, and the circumstances under which Indigenous peoples and new immigrant communities negotiate processes of relationship building in Canada and on the prairies, where the shocks of ongoing colonialist settlement remain active in living memory and contemporary structures. All of these simultaneous processes need to be much better understood in relation to one another. Therefore, my research challenges constructions of empowerment as primarily labour-market related, using a critical integrated feminist framework that combines decolonial, anti-racist, critical race, and empowerment theories, including but not limited to the works of Ahmed (2013), Bhabha (1996,2004), Battiste (2008, 2013, 2017), Bannerji (2000), Thorpe & Lawrence (2005), Carr (2003), Chak (2016), Chen (2012), Crenshaw (1989), St. Denis (2008, 2011), Dhillon (2017), Dua (1999, 2004, 2007), Hage (1998), Kabeer (2000, 2012 a,b), LaDuke (2002), Mahmood (2005,2015), Maile, Tuck, and Morrill (2013), Mbembe (2003), Mohanty (2003), Narayan (1997, 2013), Santos (2007), Said (1978), Spivak (1988, 2008), St. Denis (2008, 2011), Thobani (2000, 2007), Tuck and Yang (2012), Verma (2008), Walia (2013), and Zaman (2006, 2012). These scholars outline a series of concepts that are critical to my theoretical framework, discussed in detail below.

Necropolitics and Biopower

I use the concepts of necropolitics and biopower from Achille Mbembe and Michel Foucault, to explain how Indigenous and BIPOC community people face targeted challenges that undermine their well-being in relation to more privileged groups. Achille Mbembe's (2003) concept of necropolitics helps illuminate the contemporary nation state's role in constructing exclusive modes of sovereignty that undergird socio-economic neoliberalisms and their ultimate relationship with the politics of death, by establishing conditions in which targeted groups are more likely to die young due to racial profiling, health disparities, and slow starvation. Foucault's (1978) terms biopower and biopolitics are further elaborated with Mbembe's critical emphasis on necropolitics.

Foucault's works, *History of Sexuality*, and *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the Prison*, offer helpful background knowledge for understanding the concept of necropolitics. Foucault provides a historical genealogy of power from the classical age to contemporary neoliberalism in the West. In the *History of Sexuality*, he focused on the relation between life and death under the biopolitical regime of the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, where the right of kings included the power to kill citizen subjects. His analysis of the history of punishment illuminates how this same kind of power is constituted today, but in a much more diffused form. According to Foucault, the shift from public torture to modern techniques of imprisonment and surveillance reveals a more effective form of social discipline. The idea of the public sphere as the site of punishment, ranging from making a public spectacle of the body to the internalization of punishment directed at the soul, took several decades to develop. Today's disciplinary society and contemporary practices use modified forms of control and punishment, such as prison sentences, state policing, and corporatized education to train people to self-monitor for compliance with societal norms. Power is dispersed through governmental, non-governmental, and other social institutions, such as universities or education systems, hospitals, and prisons. According to Foucault, biopower applies institutional power to the embodied human, considered a living being capable of disciplining herself into conformity. Mbembe argues that Foucault's idea of biopower does not go far enough because it does not account for the various ways in which the threat of death continues to prevail as a technique of governance in our contemporary time.

Mbembe (2003) uses Foucault's conceptualization of biopower, which is the "domain of life over which power has taken control" (p. 12), to define necropower in terms of: "Sovereignty, power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (p. 12). Both scholars address racism in their analysis. Foucault argues that the concept of racism operates as a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower by those who claim to classify humans as "same" and "other." Mbembe critiques this view by arguing that the politics of race is the politics of death. He says, "The notion of race has been the ever-present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples" (p. 17). Thus, necropolitics informs state-endorsed violence and death of people, often through the suppression of women, as in Canada's Indian Act, producing a culture of genocidal impunity that the state and government authenticate. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics

addresses the mass oppression of diverse peoples by arguing that "the relationship between politics and death is essential for understanding how states emerge through the reproduction of death, including its meaning and representation, as the counterpart to life" (p. 16). Mbembe refers to Foucault's theory of biopolitical processes that "make live and let die" by proposing a new version of "to let live and make die" as a way to illuminate the logic of death that has been rationalized by contemporary neo-liberal, capitalist structures to decree life and death of subordinated peoples and places.

The Foucauldian term "biopower" refers to how prevailing norms invade human embodiment, conditioning people to accept violent structures and conform to them. Mbembe argues that biopolitics is not a sufficient category of analysis because normalized practices of structural violence produce forms of life that can barely be recognized as such due to their degradation, and because the chances of dying under such conditions are much higher, a situation that applies to the majority of people and places on the planet. He introduces the term "necropolitics" to explain how social and political control, often exerted from afar, renders voiceless people nearly lifeless in their struggles to survive (Mbembe, 2003). Foucault argues that racism and sexism, among other forms of discrimination, are technologies aimed at the exercise of biopower. Mbembe extends this point to argue that the politics of race are the politics of death, especially but not exclusively under colonialism/imperialism, which depends upon imagining so-called strange or foreign peoples as inhuman (p. 17). The oppressive tools of bio and necropower are animated by mobilizing ideas and practices that identify strangeness on different stages and scales through informal, institutional, national, and international policies, rules, and regulations, which are almost never developed by those most affected as they are excluded unless assimilated.

It is hard to mobilize ethics of care under necropolitics because people are taught how not to care about one another through the operations of concepts involving strangeness, estrangement, and biopower. If people want to care about or help each other, state systems and policies can be made so that they cannot effectively support each other or are more generalized victims of hierarchical power. For example, many people are detained by immigration enforcement and live under deportation orders or are sequestered in indefinite detention (Chak, 2016). Migrant justice activists try to help them, but many newcomers are afraid to support them

for fear of their futures in the host country, while most settlers are not even aware of the practice, part of the ignorance that undergirds their privilege and its foundation in practices of othering.

Said's Concept of Otherness

I have used the postcolonial concept of *otherness* in my research because it is vital to understanding my researcher positionality. According to Said (1993), *otherness* is a colonial idea that positions one group of people as inferior to another group of people in binaries, such as first world versus the third world, east versus west, women versus men, Indigenous versus non-Indigenous, and so on. This attribution of *otherness* represents Western hegemonic knowledge politics which privilege the westernized self. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) portrays how western scholars purposely stereotype and dehumanize the East to construct an imaginary *Other*. Said's *otherness* concept has created a framework and opportunity to produce new scholarship using non-dominant lenses or methods that examine the power held by scholars of the West and their institutionalized capacity to reproduce colonial misrepresentations of the East. His *otherness* concept shows how the construction of a European identity that is believed to be superior to non-European cultures has served as a pretext for colonialism and continued Western dominance over the Muslim and Arab worlds. Said explains that Western scholars and media portray the Orient as inferior, regressive, primitive, and irrational.

In contrast, the West has been represented as consistently superior, progressive, and rational in its frameworks. According to Said, *Other* translates as inferior, less significant, less necessary. In feminist literature, we need to move from categories of others to a more inclusive models of collaboration through a critical understanding of what it means to be part of a diverse group organized under the pronoun, *we*. Within *we*, there shouldn't be *other*. Said argues about the objectification of the *Other* and proposes how *they* can be moved toward inclusion in *we* and *us*. He emphasizes the hegemonic processes through which western scholars and imperialists make reductive constructions of the Orient and orientalist peoples.

Otherness undermines local people's experiences and their everyday local and cultural practices. According to Said, the concept of *otherness* is not a fact of nature. It is, instead, a hegemonic cultural production of the institutions constructed through language and the systematic production of experts, often operating an Anglosphere of privilege. *Otherness* can be understood better in relation to intersectionality. My understanding of my hybridities includes awareness of my relationship to the concept of *otherness*. The production of *otherness*, according

to Said, translates to being read as inferior, less significant, and less critical. In my theoretical framework, the concept of *otherness* will be applied to how I understand my position concerning the larger Canadian society, and how that society interpellates me to view Indigenous Peoples and the project of reconciliation through state-enforced lenses of *otherness*. As a critical intersectional, transnational, decolonial feminist scholar, I have enjoyed opportunities to reflect on the operations of *otherness* and reconciliation in ways that may not be available to all racialized settler women if, indeed, they were ever considered by the nation-state in relation to reconciliation processes, or whether those processes may be recognized by newcomers as relevant to themselves, as they seek to overcome the stigmas of their social constructions as strangers.

Strangeness

I have used Sara Ahmed's (2013) concept "strangeness," because the social construction of strangeness is animated through and dependent upon prevailing forms of biopower, necropower and necropolitics, each mobilized in specific ways by the nation-state, dominant economic models, intergenerational, intergroup, and interpersonal social relations. In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, she applies a critical lens to constructing the notion of "strangers," "otherness," and "differences." Her work is not about strangers (or aliens). Instead, it attempts to question the assumptions informing any ontology of strangers, including whether it is possible to be a stranger or to face a stranger in the street (p. 3). Ahmed's notion of strange encounters outlines the ways national models of belongingness, such as patriotism, contain hidden mechanisms/techniques for creating and mobilizing socially constructed differences by identifying both insiders and outsiders, as Trump did in discussions of erecting a border wall along the American border with Mexico. Ahmed explains how the alien is both a source of fascination and desire and revulsion and fear (p. 2), which applies as much to fact-checkers as it does to the purported need to generate transborder violence (Walia, 2013).

The nation-state has many power mechanisms to manage its situated populations and generate multiple forms of inequalities that align gender, race, class, ability, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, citizenship status, etc. Citizens provide the labour that sustains prevailing political power systems and the institutions that are its building blocks, where women and other marginalized groups are not treated equally. Their overall well-being is too often marginalized or ignored altogether.

The neoliberal mobilization of aggression as a normative aspect of capitalist economies is deeply invested in socio-political polarization through the animation of strangeness and the construction of some people as having more agency or currency than others. Thus, there is a black market in human organs for transplant, which preys upon the impoverished and most vulnerable people in the world, treating the bodies of those most affected as cadavers before they are dead. The wealthy person, who can afford to purchase a black-market kidney, or child, is engaged in a deep form of interpersonal violence. They do not have to acknowledge the pain or suffering of the people or communities from which they draw their resources, and may even argue that remittances to under-developed countries justify that violence. Furthermore, these days, the fertilized egg, or embryo from an anonymous donor, can be transferred to a surrogate who carries the baby to term. This means women can rent their wombs to wealthy foreigners. When the intended parents fulfill their contractual obligations, the surrogate mother has no legal claim to the baby, and the baby will not even carry the DNA of the surrogate mother. Most parents in such situations do not allow the surrogate to see or hold the baby, after birth, for fear that she might get attached as a biological mother. Surrogates get paid right after giving birth, and the baby is treated as the property of the parents whose DNA they carry.

In such scenarios, members of dominant and subaltern or minoritized groups learn to view one another with suspicion, which profoundly affects migrant and immigrant people entering into new environments about which they cannot be as well informed as those who already live there. Thus, they end up living in poorer conditions, serving the privileged populations with their subordinated labour. I would argue that biopower, biopolitics and necropolitics are forms of social organization that animate the strangeness which normalizes otherness, insecurity, racism, and other forms of violence resulting in uneven development, war, minoritization, militarization, poverty, injustices, terror, and death. These scholars and the concepts they provide help clarify how the agency of minoritized people of all genders is diffused by larger power structures and systems of abstraction in ways that can also undermine resilience.

I would argue that in more gentle and generative forms of power, such as those engaged by community gardeners, community-engaged artists and through cultural sharing activities, participants mobilize more connective than divisive forms of agency, which enable minoritized peoples and groups to explore their capabilities for empowering women and communities to

resist techniques for fostering investments in strangeness. Cultural activities (such as singing, dancing, storytelling, saree wrapping, co-preparing ethnic foods in a community kitchen, knitting, or making baskets together, and talking across differences) can help those who are treated as invisible and silenced, to recognize the felt absences frame our realities. Even though prevailing structures may fail to recognize the contributions of many individuals and communities, those quiet, connective community actors can learn to be less afraid to challenge the forms of strangeness animated by bio and necropolitics.

How Bias is Animated through Hierarchical Systems

Mel Y. Chen's (2011) concept of “animacies” helped me to understand the complex positions of Indigenous and BIPOC community groups of people, and the ways that practices of othering, creating categories of strangeness and necropolitics become part of state and social structures. I use this concept of “animacies,” because it illuminates my arguments by providing an intersectional account of animality, gender, queerness, race, class, and ability through a biopolitical reading of normative articulations of "humanness" within language and linguistic practices. Chen's work focuses on *animacy* or attributing the qualities of "agency, awareness, mobility, and liveness" to beings, objects, or nouns (p. 2). Animacy is meta-linguistic in the sense that it works to determine who and what are more likely to be treated as passive objects or agentive subjects.

For example, the idea that a garden has agency is much less likely to be understood by most people because they assume that it is primarily the human gardeners who have agency, although most of them would recognize the agency of what they consider weeds, certainly. This example shows what Chen refers to as an animacy hierarchy: living, moving, human gardeners are generally thought to be more appropriate subjects of sentences than gardens or plants. However, many people who work with community gardens argue that the gardens animate communities. The hierarchy described by Chen is a familiar one, where white, male, able-bodied, upper class, heterosexual humans live at the top, followed by other humans who fall outside these normative categories, then nonhuman animals, plants, fungi, microbes, viruses, synthetic nonliving objects, and abstract concepts. Chen argues that human value systems animate ideas about who and what might be considered insensate, immobile, or deathly in ways consistent with dominant forms of power. I want to use this idea of animation by human judgments to talk about intersectionality as a way to unpack biopower and necropolitics.

However, I will cite the example of ongoing police violence against racialized people in North America to make my case. A restorative system of justice that takes the needs of the victims of violence seriously would help educate the police about their impacts on targeted communities. Donald Trump's promise to wall out Mexican, Central and Latin American migrants from the USA to "Make America Great Again" was designed to create a hierarchy of animacies that enabled necropolitical forms of "law enforcement" to police access to military-industrial privileges. The proposed walls are a barrier to acknowledging that people are fleeing dangerous situations created by foreign policies originating in the United States. The wall is a metaphor for the creation of "law-abiding" citizens versus "illegal aliens." (Few wish to engage with how the "Doctrine of Discovery" mobilized colonialisms by imperialist aliens.) Similar arguments have been made to support the expulsion or registration of so-called illegal migrants, by refusing care for targeted groups and justifying degraded conditions for people detained in border prisons. Another example involves Trump practicing classic colonialist exceptionalisms by making inflammatory and exclusionary statements, to which his adherents fall prey. He framed the situation at the southern United States border as a "crisis" that demanded exceptions to human decency, and he refused to show care for those affected by his tweets and the policies they proposed and animated.

As an alternative to Trump's necropolitics, I would like to affirm more gentle and generous forms of creative and communicative power through music, dance, cultural activities, stories, sharing ethnic colonialist histories, and practices of community building with neighbours and people whose experiences may differ from, but are nevertheless integral to, our own. These practices, among others, animate more inclusive approaches to building communities and solidarities; they can help people be resilient and fight back together against all sorts of injustices and institutional forms of violence, as animated by contemporary neoliberalisms, by appreciating and valuing our differences.

Neoliberalism as a Prevailing System Animating Injustice

The term, "neoliberalism" reflects the economic and social system, currently dominant in most places of the world. According to economist Kean Birch, neoliberalism refers to an economic system in which the "free" market is extended to every part of our public and personal worlds. The state is transformed from a provider of public welfare to a promoter of markets and competition, and unions are discouraged, thus enabling the shift to "free" markets (Birch 2017),

where capital structures determine what has value and appreciates. Neoliberalism has faced criticism from academics, journalists, religious leaders, feminists, environmentalists, and social justice activists, mostly from the political left. It is common among scholars to argue that neoliberal regimes are colonialist and patriarchal in character. The global financial crash of 2008 and the related European Sovereign Debt Crisis triggered a decade of economic volatility and insecurity that boosted the fortunes of one percent of humanity (almost all of them white and male, from North America and Europe) while saddling 99 percent of humanity with declining wages and precarious work. As a result of this Great Recession, neoliberalism has faced increasing criticism (Steger & Roy, 2010).

Naomi Klein (2021), one of the most articulate and investigative-oriented activists against neoliberalism, illustrates the “three trademark demands of neoliberalism” in practice as:

- 1) **Privatization** – turning the operation of education, roads, and health care over to private companies. This policy encourages the sale of all state-owned enterprises, goods, and services to private investors. Privatization would include transportation, electricity, schools/universities, hospitals, and fresh water. The belief of neoliberals is that those who work hard will be rewarded, and the free market will ensure that the most deserving of merit will move forward.
- 2) **Government deregulation** – removing environmental protections, workers’ rights, and monitoring the financial industry, which includes banks as well as industries, with the belief that the “free” market will ensure appropriate levels of protection.
- 3) **Deep cuts to social spending** – In the United States, neo-liberalism is destroying social welfare programs, attacking the rights of labour (including all immigrant and Indigenous workers); and cutting back on safety nets for the vulnerable, by cutting food stamps, access to family planning services, and mental health programs. Neoliberals will argue that the poor must be motivated to feed and house themselves and their families and that providing free or subsidized services will merely ensure laziness.

Economist Kean Birch notes that neoliberalism is generally associated with policies like cutting trade tariffs and barriers, thus decreasing individual nations’ “sovereignty,” opening to the international flow of capital (while also managing the flows of people). What this means is that state regulation of inequities and injustices is reduced and waylaid. Neoliberalism has

broken up state-owned enterprises, sold off public assets and generally opened human lives and natural environments to dominance and devastation by market thinking, enabling what Klein calls “disaster capitalism” or profiting from necropolitics. Neoliberalism is criticized for giving markets too much power over people’s lives (Birch 2017). Some of the more subtle influences of neoliberalism are the reinforcement of the belief in meritocracy and that only money measures a person’s value. Thus, society is structured around the market, and people serve the ends of economic production.

Feminist Nancy Fraser (2017) argues that neoliberalism has co-opted feminism by making the feminist ideal into one that serves as a kind of false market-based meritocracy, where the aim of feminism is for women to achieve high status in a world that has marginalized women, in general. If feminism shifts its focus from social justice, marginalized women remain pawns to the neoliberal economy. Much of the labour for multinational corporations is provided by marginalized people (almost always women) and often, although certainly not exclusively, in marginalized countries.

Neoliberalism has been criticized for undermining democracy and local sovereignties and sustainabilities. Under the guidance of the World Trade Organization, and with funds from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the concept of the free market has controlled governments in newly emerging democracies to legislate in favour of multinational corporations, not for the people, nor the environment. The effect of these policies is to harm people’s ability to make their own social justice and environmental regulations, from the ground up, because those rights were traded away as part of the perks for multinational corporations to do business in once self-governing states.

Women in Bangladesh, for example, are exploited by markets in North America and Europe, with people there purchasing clothing at very low prices. These prices are only possible because people and the environment are accorded few if any rights in Bangladesh. In countries which have higher social and environmental standards, labour is more costly. This has the effect of eliminating most of the clothing production industry in North America and Europe, and thus, once employed Europeans and North Americans begin to fall out of the middle class. Inequalities between both rich and poor countries and individuals within those countries, continue to increase, and this inequality itself undermines democracy, but generates lots of cheap and desperate workers. Not only do the poor have limited access to information on election issues,

but they are often unable to get the time, energy, or finances to mark their ballots, or may be persuaded to do so in ways that undermine their own best interests. Meanwhile, those with considerable means manipulate electoral access, to place additional barriers before those with the most to lose in neoliberal dominated political races.

Neoliberalism, in its efforts to control nation states, especially those ravaged by imperialisms, has been critiqued as being neo-colonial. The United States' false projections that it is a utopia have been spread through media, including movies, songs, and stories. This projects the view that a deregulated market economy is appropriate to democratic nations, not only in popular cultural education, but in public and private educational institutions as well.

Pierce (2013) notes that, "schooling and education ... cannot be understood outside of the economic renewal projects and national security crises that are framing education reform debates in the United State today" (p. 3). This impacts not only the terms of how economic interest grows through educational marketization, but also the terms in which subjects are governed and how individuals understand and articulate themselves, their lives, their opportunities, and their desires. More and more, children are being inculcated into a system where the conversation is about merit (work hard and you will earn good grades; the corollary is that those who do not earn good grades did not work hard), and only take those subjects that will lead to "good" employment.

Public education is increasingly feeling the effects of neoliberalism. Schools, as state-owned services, are subject to surveillance, as described by Foucault (2014/1975). Rather than observing teachers interact with students daily, standardized tests serve to survey schools and individual teachers. These tests are also used to measure student learning. The complexity of public schools, with huge diversities among students in their first languages, abilities, special needs, communities, family resources, etc., is ignored when the scores of public schools are compared to those of private schools. By further decreasing funding for public schools, those who began life with less find themselves even less able to get a meaningful education. The children of the rich attend very elite schools, and the contacts they make there serve them as they go on to set up or take over family businesses.

Some of the reforms in pedagogy that were introduced in the 1980s, such as cooperative education (so children can learn to get along with one another, despite differences in backgrounds), decreasing or eliminating grades (so that students will focus more on learning than

on measurement), and environmental education (to learn about the need for relationships with all living entities and their environs) have been pushed aside in the rush for high student scores on standardized tests. Since creativity is hard to measure and often invisible, the arts are considered unimportant in the world economy. Art education is marginalized in favour of math and science. Currently, in the United States, there is strong push back against the imagined dangers of critical race theory being taught in public schools, and thus, social justice education is also being eliminated. That is because prevailing elites want to avoid critical analyses of the ways neoliberalisms produce disparities, and blame people targeted for poverty, including via processes of immigration, who are increasingly targets of xenophobia.

South Asian Feminist scholar Habiba Zaman (2006) shows how understandings of gender, class and race are linked to and emerge from the neoliberalization of immigration processes. She examines sexual, racial, class and other oppressions from the standpoint of immigrant women in both public and private domains to show how their labour becomes commoditized. She argues "immigrants have become commodified, their labour bought and sold for the benefit of national and global markets. This commodification of labour has become especially true for immigrant women "due to their massive entry into the labor force" (p. 2). Her study of transnational migration, globalization, and the immigration policies of Canada reveals the processes through which immigrant women workers become commodified, occupying subordinate class-based positions in the labour market (p. 3). Zaman's study thus shows how commodification fosters growing social inequalities because neoliberalism builds society around a cash nexus. Even if it boosts economic growth, it also increases economic inequality because it is based on a set of economic policies whereby the rich grow richer, and the poor grow poorer. Neoliberalism reproduces the aggressions of colonialisms, by generating subalternities.

Subalternity: Enforced Disempowerment

The concept of subalternity has significant relevance in my study. Postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak (1988), in her influential article "Can the subaltern speak?" uses the concept of subalternity as a way of recognizing groups of people who are socially, politically, and geographically located outside hegemonic power structures, those whose subordinated condition is created by colonization and other forms of social, economic, and cultural domination. Spivak (1988) explains hegemonic power structures through the work of Antonio

Gramsci (1971), in order to produce the subaltern as a concept that describes how certain social groups are separated from society's established political and social structures. Spivak argues that subalternity can be explained in relationship with any person or group of people who hold inferior rank or positions in society due to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability, or religion. She explains that not all oppressed people can be considered subalterns if they have access to public voice. These are not interchangeable terms. Oppressed peoples may have access to revisionist approaches to representing their histories in ways that the subaltern does not. Therefore, she suggests employing both terms, subalternity and oppression, appropriately. She explains this further by noting that one would not state, 'I am a subaltern' (p. 80). Making this claim would require access to the means of the broader public and state-level discursive exchanges, from which subalterns are structurally excluded.

Through the concept of subalternity, Spivak (1988) challenges post-structuralist ideas of practice with her question, "Can the subaltern speak?" (p. 78). She provides an example from the Indian context where subaltern groups do not have the privilege of representing themselves. Indian subalternity, as she outlines, is different from Western definitions of the subaltern. As Spivak explains, the subaltern groups in India are socially subordinate. They do not have any decision-making power and do not participate equitably in social and state decision-making processes. Spivak discusses the traditional '*Sati*' practice to illustrate. She points to the British outlawing of *sati*, which translates as "true" or "honest." *Sati* refers to a funeral ritual once common in some South Asian communities, where a recently widowed woman would commit suicide by fire, typically on the husband's funeral pyre. Outlawing this fading practice served to secure British power in India. In fact, *sati* was already disappearing, but became an expedient indicator of the "savagery" of local customs. The British formed an anti-*sati* law to stop the traditional practice by consulting with Indian men, arguing that more "modern" and "civilized" ways of engaging women would be learned from their own culture. Women's voices were not brought forth, and they were excluded from the decision-making process, which was ostensibly about them. So, the British, as they did all over the world, excluded women from discussing their own fates, which is what they were accusing Indian men of doing. Spivak argues that the British abolition of the Hindu rite of *sati* in India has been generally understood as: "White men are saving brown women from brown men," which also explains how it serves to justify colonial interventions in the lives of racialized and minoritized women in post-colonial nation states (p.

93). The process was never about brown women or white ones. It was about asserting the superiority of white men through laws made by the British to ignore how Indian women were doubly silenced.

Spivak's essay opens with a critical discussion of an exchange between Foucault and Deleuze. These scholars reject the idea of speaking for oppressed or marginalized people. They insist that the oppressed speak for themselves, and they need to learn how to do so in ways that can be heard and understood. Spivak critiques Foucault and Deleuze, however, because they ignore the epistemic violence of imperialism in which their own scholarship is steeped. Foucault and Deleuze insist that the oppressed “can speak and know their conditions,” which led Spivak to formulate her question (p. 78) of whether the subaltern can speak. If Spivak had suggested in her essay that the subaltern *cannot* speak, then the “subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow” (p. 83). By citing the example of the British ban on *sati* in colonial India, she notes how the subaltern was caught between imperialist discourses and patriarchal traditionalisms, neither of which enabled her to voice her experiences and position: “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (p. 102). After reading the article, I became worried that there might be no space from which the subaltern woman can speak. I kept thinking about understanding how the voices of subaltern groups of women and their communities could become audible in public spaces. After so many years of struggle as a racialized settler woman, I realized that this inner power can be aroused through community spaces, so subalterns can speak for themselves one day.

Intersectionality Engages Complex Experiences of Social Systems

The term “intersectionality” was coined by the American feminist, critical race theorist, and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989). In the late 1980s, she wrote several articles and started to talk about new ways of understanding discrimination against socially marginalized people. At that time, she reviewed several legal cases. It became apparent that Black women were being doubly discriminated against (by race and gender); their sufferings were being ignored by class-action lawyers who demanded that all women be representative of all other women. White women were being hired at different companies for reception or administrative jobs. African Americans were being employed, as well – but most were men. The

Black women, Crenshaw illustrates, faced multiple vectors of discrimination, including, but not limited to sexism and racism. Thus, she introduced intersectionality, the notion that numerous social forces simultaneously impact marginalized groups in more complex ways than single identity categories, such as "women," might allow.

As a concept, intersectionality recognizes various and interrelated forms of identities which impact several forms of discrimination, including racism, ableism, ageism, sexism, xenophobia, and religious or other belief-based bigotries (Crenshaw, 1998; Mirza, 2013; Zaman, 2012, 2006), all of which operate to compound one another. She shows that multiple forms of structural and ground-level oppression are interrelated and produce an intersection of various forms of discrimination. Through intersectionality, invisible systemic injustices and compound inequities can be understood in multiple ways. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality helps illuminate the multiple dimensions of social power relationships and related forms of discrimination. Razack, Smith and Thobani (2010) show how decolonial, Indigenous, anti-racist and feminist perspectives can be juxtaposed to explore the intersectional biases that inform the history of Canada. Mirza (2013) uses the concept of 'embodied intersectionality' to propose a feminist critical theory of race and racism. Through this concept, Mirza shows how women's intersectional agencies challenge various forms of oppression that target women's bodies within static ideas of race, gender, class, and religion. She explores how the intersections of race, gender and religion combine to construct experiences of the body.

Mirza's study examines the narratives of three transnational Muslim women of Turkish, Pakistani, and Indian heritage who have multiple place attachments (The Netherlands, Mumbai, Pakistan, Britain, Canada, Bangladesh) informing identities shaped by living and working in Britain. Her study shows how these transnational groups of women use embodied practices such as choosing to wear the *hijab* or *burqa*, which one woman describes as her "second skin," differently in different places. These women are being gendered, othered, and racialized due to biases projected onto their use of the hijab, even though they were raised in the western world since childhood. The women in the study were conscious of the disjunction between how they see themselves as Muslim women and how they are racially constructed as Asian because of their appearance, food cultures, and accents. Postcolonial feminist Lata Mani's (1989) calls these symbolic projections as being "out of place" and identifies racism as a "kind of gaze" (p. 9) that reproduces strangeness. This study shows how Muslim women's agency challenges and

transforms hegemonic discourses of race, class, gender, and religion in some transnational diasporic spaces.

Drawing from Crenshaw, Mirza, and Zaman, the concept of intersectionality shows how white women and privileged women of colour can also play a role as oppressors at diverse and complex experiential crossroads. Intersectionality proposes using methodologies that identify multiple threats of discrimination when an individual's identities overlap with many minoritizing structures such as class, race, gender, age, ability, and other components of socially constructed biases. The concept is not simply additive, but rather, exposes the ways that prevailing systems overdetermine outcomes for diversely positioned citizens, whose identities are mutually imbricated. To resist such overdetermination requires wider literacies of power, and understanding how they intersect with the processes of subject formation.

Interlocking Subjectivities

People are trapped by hierarchical power systems in frameworks of competing marginalities and interlocking subjectivities (Fellows & Razack, 1998). Interlocking structures of dominance need to be better understood, more broadly. To understand this concept, I was looking at the brick pavers at my backyard garden. I observed that all the bricks are rotationally, horizontally, and vertically interlocked with each other. My understanding of this concept is that, as the brick pavers sit in their position, so, identity processes and structures hold people in their respective positions and it takes considerable work to challenge those norms and patterns. The main principle of interlocking subjectivities is the dependency between each brick with its neighbors. Therefore, interlocking simply means that, the brick pavers can not really move independently from their neighbors. All are affected when any moves. The structure of dominance shows how women are positioned in hierarchical relationships with one another, which contributes to making the dominant group and subordinated identities interlocked. "It is a structure that causes us to secure our own toehold on respectability by disavowing other women" (Fellows & Razack, 1998, p. 336). In this way, participants in toxic structures are able to maintain innocence and to consider that the systems that oppress us are unconnected from the ones in which we are privileged. Fellows & Razack (1998) suggest that women must recognize how they are implicated in other women's lived experiences of oppression, if they wish to change, the system(s) that is (are) marginalizing them. To achieve that change requires the development of transnational literacies.

The Need to Develop Transnational Literacies to Unpack the Legacies of Imperialisms

Postcolonial feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak (1992) first suggested and elaborated the concept of transnational literacies. The meanings of *transnational literacies* are multiple and complex, particularly as articulated through Indigenous, feminist, post-colonial, and transnational theories. However, Spivak leaves it for her readers to follow her illustrative discussions of selected texts. Transnational literacy as a concept and method develops a critical intersectional approach that foregrounds issues of colonization, nationalism, global capitalism, and empire in an analysis of gender and sexual oppression, resistance, and other socially constructed biases (Mohanty, 2003; Spivak, 1992). They are always partial and arise from intercultural experiences informed by different languages, histories, multi-faith practices and religions, geographical locations, cultures, cross-cultural ways of knowing, learning, and understanding, and the multiple roles of nation-states. Transnational literacies require a dialogic exchange between theory and practice achieved through repositioning, and co-positioning projects. Educating for transnational literacies requires a deep understanding of the structural formations that create intersecting identities and practices of targeting differences as they inform experiences of hybridity.

I have used this concept to understand my research more deeply because the feminist approaches to transnational literacies highlight how gendered identities are mediated by race, culture, class, age, ability, religion, sexuality, citizenship status, and historical and geographic locations. Thus, feminist transnational literacies use intersectionality to challenge culturally normative sex/gender binary structures, whereby all persons and bodies are assigned as either male/female, masculine/feminine, or hetero-/homo-sexual, to explore different articulations of gender variance across borders (Brydon, 2014; Kabeer, 2012; Mohanty, 2003; Zaman, 2012, 2006).

Brydon (2014) explains that intersectional, transnational co-positioning is a form of literacy that dominant cultures need to learn. Under colonialism, dominant cultures have assumed that their forms of literacy were the only ones that really matter and that their local ways of knowing were the only valid ways to interpret reality. As a result, they imposed their forms of literacy on the rest of the world. Within decolonization scholarship, these imposed literacy myths are finally being questioned. Spivak suggests significant variability in potential meanings of texts and events in diverse contexts, which must all be understood in relation to one

another, an approach that recalls de Sousa Santos' "ecologies of knowledges" working collaboratively, without coercions. She also suggests that dominant cultures need to learn, relearn, and unlearn what literacy means in order to appreciate the complex interpretive negotiations that characterize transnational contexts. She proposes that transnational literacies move beyond conventional notions of reading and writing by insisting that they include an awareness of the power relations built into knowledge production in local and cross-cultural contexts. This approach to critical literacy is necessarily always partial and depends on the situated perceptions implied in any advocacy for establishing "cognitive justice," or more equitable ways of knowing. Many feminist scholars, post-colonial educators, and anti-racist activists from Indigenous, settler-colonial, queer, and immigrant communities are working together to think more deeply about what transcultural literacies could mean, both locally and transnationally, for the development of cross-cultural dialogue and solidarities (Brydon, 2014; Spivak, 1992).

Transnational literacies offer a bridge between theory and practice. They provide more than a theory of the multiplicity and instability of identities and identifications. They also discuss critically how multiple systems of barriers are interconnected in preventing immigrant and Indigenous women's empowerment, delineating how those barriers come into existence in and through each other and uphold and sustain one another. Transnational literacies offer a critique of Western feminisms and highlight exclusionary scholarship that treats systems of oppression for immigrant and Indigenous women as somehow distinct. In so doing, they reveal a space for what Mohanty (2003) calls our "common context of struggle" (p. 7), founded on a profound critique of the operation of the nation-state and its institutions.

Transnational literacies comment on the politics of normalization and legitimation within Canadian and other nationalist power systems. By focusing on the concepts of decolonization, reconciliation, necropolitics, subalternity, situated knowledge, hybridity, Otherness, strangeness, animacy, relationality, intersectionality, cognitive injustices, and abyssal thinking, I hope to challenge any construction of transnational literacies as a static and uniform entity. However, my intention is not simply to outline the diversity of transnational literacies using these concepts. Instead, I want to uncover how transnational literacies' complex and variable meanings can be applied in diverse contexts, grounding intersectional thinking in meaningful and community-engaged actions that support mutual decolonization across minoritized groups.

The Contested Meanings of Empowerment

There are many contested meanings of empowerment. I used Naila Kabeer's explanation as foundational to my own understanding. Kabeer (2012a) associates women's empowerment with three ways of resisting dominating power, drawing upon the power within, power to, and power with. She explains these forms of empowerment as involving: first, a critical aspect of subject formation in the agentic process of seeking change (power within); second, a capacity to exercise greater control over key elements of lived experiences and to participate in broader social and political processes (power to); and third, a need for women and communities to come together collectively to face challenges beyond individual and local community capacities for change (power with). Subramaniam's (2012) study in India shows that hybrid forms of empowerment engage all of these political dimensions to "raise women's confidence to recognize their abilities to organize for change" (p. 73). Because immigrant families stretch across geographical boundaries, it becomes possible to transfer lessons of empowerment across host and home environments. At the same time, I would argue that engaging with Indigenous understandings about the human connection to the Land adds another significant dimension to empowerment models, impacted by how imagined, social, geopolitical and geographic distances are used in dominant knowledge-power systems to hide multiple waves of abuse within and across generations, through cultural erasures, reinforcements of patriarchal structures, and the mechanisms of imperialist disparity production to which they give rise.

Several studies have analyzed aspects of immigrant women's access to empowerment in Western contexts (Kabeer, 2005; Zaman, 2001), exploring how immigrant labour has contributed to Canada's nation-building processes, often without engaging Indigenous frames of reference. Thus, immigrants are attracted to Canada's labour market, but are discouraged from examining how it is founded on the disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of women's reproductive labour. Labour market-based empowerment does not adequately recognize women's hard work in paid and unpaid contexts, nor does it address the larger structures of reproductive ecologies that inform Indigenous perspectives. Therefore, in step with Chandra Mohanty (2003), I am interested in imagining different understandings of and "destinations for capital" (p. 530), based on decolonial practices of empowerment that challenge uncritical integration with and assimilation to state imperialisms.

In citing Zaman, Mohanty, and others, I am not arguing that the labour market lacks empowering tools for women. Instead, I am challenging the idea that the labour market is the only empowerment indicator, mainly since it is also a significant source of disempowerment. Koggel (2006) states, "The concept of empowerment highlights the importance of being able to transform the very social and political context that hampers a person's power to be an effective agent" (p. 1-2). Like Uma Narayan, Kabeer (2005) argues that empowerment relies on contested ideas of power; she argues that "power" involves making meaningful choices and entails the capacity to effect structural change, individually and collectively. Through my own settlement experiences, I have developed a deep interest in alternative forms of empowerment. I have found my relational explorations and efforts to learn, unlearn and relearn how to reposition my efforts and agency to be more meaningful and empowering than mere assimilation. In my experience, feminist decolonial empowerment learning emerges, in part, through precarious informal community engagements, developed through cross-cultural relationships, performative transcultural activities, and anti-racist knowledge practices, in lived reflections upon everyday life. To become decolonial, such empowerment practices must engage human relationships with and dependence upon the Land.

My own experience in building survival networks emphasizes relational empowerment with the Land, cross-cultural immigrant communities, and Indigenous and dominant cultures. Collaboration practices are familiar in newcomer, Indigenous and settler communities, although collaboration projects are often quite different within these structurally produced enclaves. Empowerment processes are continuously shifting, changing, transforming, and becoming more complex because multiple systems of power are always in play. Examining the roles of alternative forms of empowerment in fostering structural changes can help to reveal the kinds of spaces that create new hopes, better-engaged citizens, and more empowered communities. Carr (2003) explains that "empowerment is an inherently interpersonal process in which individuals collectively define and activate strategies to gain access to knowledge and power" (p. 18). She argues that "empowerment is praxis, a cyclical process of collective dialogue and social action to effect positive change" (p. 18). Drawing on this notion of mutual empowerment as a process, I want to examine how cross-cultural community activities have affected my efforts to develop decolonial practices of personal and shared empowerment through community building.

Cognitive Justice and Abyssal Thinking

Portuguese theorist Bonaventura de Sousa Santos's ideas about cognitive justice and post-abyssal thinking are deeply pertinent to my research. De Sousa Santos's concept of abyssal thinking identifies the failure to acknowledge the roots of contemporary thought in Indigenous and other subordinated knowledge frames. De Sousa Santos advocates and embraces "an ecology of knowledges" framework (2007) that originated from Latin American Indigenous cosmologies and the critiques of European modernity provided by Latin American anti-colonial thinkers (p. 15). He explains that understanding knowledge development in an ecological frame enables scholars to have a much broader vision of what remains outside of prevailing knowledge systems and the regimes of ignorance that condition human potentials. He argues that modern Western thinking continues to operate along abyssal lines that divide the westernized human from the projected sub-human. According to de Sousa Santos, "the struggle for global social justice must be a struggle for global cognitive justice. To succeed, this struggle requires a new kind of thinking, a post-abyssal thinking" (Santos, 2007, p. 1). Emphasizing self-critical and reflexive forms of interaction, de Sousa Santos asks the vital question: "How can we ensure that intercultural translation does not become the newest version of abyssal thinking, a soft version of imperialism and colonialism?" (Santos, 2007, p. 460). Like Mohanty, Zaman and Walia, he works from an anti-capitalist perspective that posits constructive alliances across diverse forms of knowledge, cultures, and cosmologies in response to forms of oppression that enact coloniality as a way of amalgamating dominant modes of knowledge and power: "The epistemological privilege granted to modern science from the seventeenth century onwards, which made possible the technological revolutions that consolidated Western supremacy, was also instrumental in suppressing other, non-scientific forms of knowledges and, at the same time, the subaltern social groups whose social practices were informed by such knowledges" (Santos, 2007, p. 465).

In the case of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and of enslaved Africans, this suppression of knowledge, a form of epistemicide (Santos, 2015), operates as the underbelly of genocide or necropolitics, creating an epistemological foundation for the capitalist and imperial order that the global North has been imposing on the global South via globalizing neoliberalisms. De Sousa Santos' work explains some of their destructive consequences and how "another knowledge is possible" (Santos, 2007). He offers an alternative epistemology that, far from

refusing science, places it in the context of the vast diversity of knowledges operating in contemporary societies. His idea is that cultural and epistemological diversity are reciprocally embedded and that the reinvention of social emancipation must be premised upon replacing the "monoculture of scientific knowledge" with an "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2007).

Whether in agriculture or intellectual practice, monoculture is neither ethical nor sustainable because it does not work to preserve social or biodiversity, nor the robust flourishing of all peoples and places. Dominant capitalist and neo-liberal systems displace and colonize human needs, constructing notions of profit and progress inconsistent with equity and justice while discouraging accountabilities and pluralities, except for unsustainable growth economics, which is a deeply destructive form of monoculture. As a person who has been ridiculed in my immigrant community for pursuing decolonial feminist knowledge, I am interested in finding ways to unseat monocultures of oppressive knowledge power.

Hybridity, Diasporic Subjectivities, Contested Cultures and Fear as Deterrent to Learning

In the context of challenging oppressive epistemologies and related processes of subject formation, I have used the concept of "hybridity" from postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1996) to explore my own contested and contentious identities. According to Bhabha, the idea of hybridity is important to understanding women's complex, socially constructed identities. Hybrid identity means having access to two or more ethnic identities. One person can have various identities, and all are significant and interconnected. Understanding hybridity offers the possibility of repositioning and empowering marginalized voices within mainstream discourses. The concept of hybridity is essential to understanding women's complex socially constructed identities (Anand, 2009). Postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (2004) uses the concept of hybridity to argue that cultural production is always most productive where it is most ambivalent or where there is more than one compelling case to be recognized at a time. One of Bhabha's major contributions to hybrid identities (having access to two or multiple ethnic identities) is that he closely examines these interlocking intersections and avoids simply listing them or elevating one aspect of his analysis over others. Bhabha explains how hybridity challenges colonial fixity and rigidity. For Bhabha, hybridity takes meaning as a continuous process that disobeys any colonial fixed authenticity by mixing partial, limited, and subjective viewpoints. Hybridity, according to Bhabha (1985), uses a process of "the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" by challenging any fixed

authenticity or fixed meaning (p. 154). Through informal connective or exclusionary practices, women are often the agents of evolving hybrid engagements with diverse contexts.

In my intersectional empowerment analysis, Bhabha's definition of hybridity is beneficial for understanding complex relationships as forms of becoming rather than as fixed ways of being. My understanding of hybridity arises from my diasporic and community builder positionalities' knowledge. This concept has been elaborated by Dibyesh Anand (2009), who suggests that a diasporic positionality is a hybrid one that produces an ethical capacity to see from multiple perspectives. The concept of hybridity has significant implications in illuminating why multiple identities are integral to exercising rights without abusing others. For instance, Bhatia and Ram's (2004) study on South Asian immigrant women highlights how hybridity helps define women's multiple identities, by helping people understand the complexity of mixed of identity formation processes in practice.

Diasporic subjectivities and multiple layers of positionality impact access to intersectional feminist consciousness, ethical participation in knowledge development, and relationships with the cross-cultural groups of people, including Indigenous communities. Various experiences of diasporic privilege and vulnerability interact in specific ways that can simultaneously engage, support, and interrogate received power systems. I would argue that multiple social, political, and historical processes prevent people with diasporic subjectivities from building intersectional feminist consciousness, accepting new knowledges, and building relationships that would aid their mutual empowerment through decolonization and reconciliation. However, many are enabled to participate in prevailing knowledge production systems. Such diversely distributed hierarchical positionings produce barriers, but also potentials for boosting intersectional consciousness, which are more likely to emerge in supportive communities.

Diasporic identity construction is complex, and diasporic experiences impact people's lives and actions in critical ways. According to Anand, "diaspora is a collective entity – a single person cannot constitute a diaspora" (p. 104). The term "diaspora" emphasizes the ongoing negotiations that many immigrants undertake at multiple levels with their host cultures and native homelands (Hall 1991). Any single person living abroad could be a rebel or an exile, but not a diaspora. Anand adds that "there needs to be a collective of people with a reasonable level of self-consciousness of their existence as a collective. Diaspora thus is a group of people sharing a cultural and ethnic background that separates them from where they live and links them to

where they come from" (p. 105). Bhatia (2013) argues that "Diasporas are usually formed when the immigrant community in question does not find its culture represented in the mainstream host culture and when immigrants experience the absence, erasure (e.g., through intentional efforts to promote assimilation into the host's mainstream culture) and silencing of their culture by members of and practices within the host culture" p.118). Because subjectivity is contextually derived, it comprises human consciousness, agency, personhood, and learning approaches to realities and situations. Embodied subjectivities are also shaped by the economy, socialization, political and social institutions, culture, communities, and entanglements in the natural world. Anand argues that the diasporic subject position, in particular, emerges as a dialogic hybrid positionality that produces a critical ethical capacity to see interlocking structures of oppression from multiple perspectives, if that diasporic subject chooses or feels compelled to look.

The conditions informing diasporic subjectivities tend to deteriorate over time. If the people who have lost all sense of belonging to their homeland and migrated to a new country no longer have emotional connections with their home Lands, they are no longer diasporic (p.104). According to Anand, "Diasporas have a manifold relationship with the notion of national identity. They are forced to confront differences in daily life. One must inevitably be aware of similarities and differences from the majority in the host state " (p. 106). Diasporic people may have access to two or more ethnic or racialized identities in the ways they have been formed in two or more geopolitical locations. Some people in the diaspora find it hard to reconcile their original beliefs with prevailing values in a new context. Therefore, they face difficulties participating in new knowledge development systems. Racialized discourses often come into play.

For example, my culture of origin and the Land I grew up on is in Bangladesh. Still, I also have significant cultural and ethical connections with particular social and advanced educational contexts in Sweden, Norway, the USA, and Canada. I have a Muslim identity, but I also have lasting cultural and ethical connections with Hindu culture and identities due to my inter-religious marriage. Such complex relationships with multiple peoples and places engage diasporic subjects in shifting forms of becoming, rather than in more fixed ways of being. People living in diaspora may share a fixed or over-simplified idea of their culture of origin, as a defence mechanism for responding to prejudices they may encounter in their new homeland. One can learn to fit into multiple places and identities, which provides opportunities to access new

ways of thinking about care practices and survival as inherent parts of developing a sense of belonging in migration and displacement. While achieving a sense of belonging is often portrayed as a desirable part of cultural integration, there are some problematic characteristics of belongingness that impact both mainstream communities and the members of the various diaspora (Sassen, 2005). Bangladeshi diasporic members may maintain a Bangladeshi identity, a Canadian identity, and go back to visit their home country, when they have developed a Bangladeshi-Canadian identity. It is easy to get confused about which part of the hyphenated identity should come first and in which contexts.

Anand suggests that some members of diasporas may claim to move beyond national identities to a more global one. Rejection of narrow national identity does not automatically indicate a progressive broadening of intellectual and social horizons, however. Some radicalized Bangladeshi-Muslims are loyal to neither the host nor their home country. Such a universal placeless identity is still mediated through concrete places but may invent a place-free notion of Islam and universal *ummah* that disrupts homeland–host Land interactions. Therefore, diasporas may contribute to hyper-nationalism in their homeland without paying attention to integrating with the new host society.

As an insider from the Bangladeshi Canadian community, I have observed that some Bangladeshi community people are not interested in learning about Canadian Indigenous peoples and their histories. They are busy establishing a new life themselves and partly because the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada can strike very close to home. It is much easier to let economic striving obscure morality and inter-relational care. Because I have access to higher education after immigrating to Canada, I had the opportunity to become familiar with the national project of reconciliation. I started to learn about intersectional feminisms through my higher studies. I became curious to know more about the deeper meanings of these terms, particularly since, as an immigrant woman, I have been positioned as part of the colonialist project myself, in occupying Indigenous Lands.

Since I was born in a colonized country where Indigenous people are also minoritized, I have found Canada to be a colonized country where Indigenous people are racialized and minoritized through the gendered impacts of the Canadian Indian Act. I could see huge gaps and layers of ignorance operating among racialized settlers, white settlers, and Indigenous peoples due to many structural barriers, oppressions and privileges that condition their respective social

positions. That structural ignorance is part of what produces intersectional processes of subalternation. Given that immigration is implicated in the injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples, I became aware of the need to decolonize migration processes. That led me to learn about Rita Verma's work. She argues that an economically and socially coercive 'culture of fear' prevents diverse South Asian people from engaging in knowledge production systems and working for changes. After 9/11, that sense of fear increased among newcomer South Asian immigrants. Most newcomers felt "uneasy" and "scared" of the post 9/11 anti-immigrant backlash. It created many challenges for newly arriving families in North America and western countries. In her research (2008), Verma shows that South Asian working-class communities are seen as backward, poor, and dangerous. She captured the experiences of newer immigrant arrivals facing complex challenges. Blue-collar worker immigrants are associated with negative portrayals and connotations of "Other" and welfare dependence (p. 30).

Verma's research engaged Sikh communities in the United States after the attacks of September 11th, 2001, who were facing severe racism and threats in their workplace and social lives, in part, as a result of the prejudice of mistaken identity, arising from international polarization between countries deemed to be Christian or Muslim at that time. Extreme oversimplifications falsely linked Sikhs with terrorism, when they have actually contributed significantly to nation-building in the Americas. Failures by the citizens of settler nations to recognize the complexities created by local and transnational political situations, enables such targeting through the perpetuation of misinformation that targets minoritized communities unjustly. Canada is not immune from these kinds of extremist oversimplifications. Many of us know how Canada's NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has faced negativity around his Sikh turban in Canada as a member of a Sikh group still facing backlash. Verma's research resonates with my own experiences as a racialized newcomer woman, who is often misread and mistreated in the communities in which I live.

Newcomer immigrants have lowered self-esteem, isolation in a foreign Land, fear of company layoffs, termination from jobs, are scared about protecting their own national identity and faith, and fear becoming westernized by feminisms, Many fear losing their cultural authenticity, Indianness, and "Desiness."

Uma Narayan argues in her chapter on "contesting cultures" (1997) that both home and host countries are patriarchal. Each sustains defences against feminisms through family, culture

and economics that pose barriers to intersectional feminist consciousness.. As an insider, I have observed that newcomers have a negative impression of "western" life and the ideologies of the feminists. Policing and surveillance around girl children and people's genders or sexualities are normalized. Therefore, newcomer women/people do not dare to explore those new avenues of knowledge. It is hard to make them understand without anti-racist, decolonial feminist education that women's bodies are symbolic of the colonized. Idealized bodies, traditional families, accepted sex practices, and gender norms become spaces for contestation against narrow, socially constructed identities and sites of backlash and punishment, but to enter into such contests takes courage.

Bhabha, Anand, Bhatia, Sassen, Verma, and Narayan's research explore the experiences of diasporic populations, their challenges, and the contested dialogical conditions that shape the construction of their new identities. In the global North, Indigenous peoples, non-European and non-white immigrants have been more likely to face exclusion and discrimination than their European and North American counterparts. These oppressive situations have played a prominent role in constructing and maintaining diasporic identities, which become a barrier to developing feminist consciousness and learning about Indigenous ways of knowing. Narayan shows from her own life and experiences that feminist consciousness is caught between different cultures and identity politics. But my argument is that seeing the various iterations of colonialist patriarchy allows one to think through the similarities and differences if one chooses or gets the chance to recognize how knowledges are situated.

Situated Knowledges

I have used Donna Haraway's (1988) concept of situated knowledges in my research because, as a racialized ethnic minority woman, it is essential in my study to understand who I am in this Indigenous Land and why I am here as an uninvited guest. According to Haraway (1991), situated knowledge is a form of strong objectivity that accounts for both the agency of the knowledge producer and that of the "object" of study. Haraway's situated knowledges offer an excellent intervention in understanding my racialized settler position. She argues for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating—where partiality, and not universality, is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. Haraway argues that feminist studies also reshape knowledge that has been taken for granted. She discusses how the visions of western feminist studies are often structured as a techno-centric project. Like western science,

feminist studies may also shape ways of looking, seeing, and understanding. Therefore, their visions can become an illusion (p. 189). She says all feminist studies, but mainly Western cultural narratives, are sunk within the scientific doctrine of discovery, which can be traced back to the colonialist affiliation between imperialist and religious institutions.

Haraway suggests that the sciences and social sciences, including feminist studies, follow prevailing hegemonic positions' dichotomous representations and embodied objectivities. She challenges such fixed ways of visualization, which come from patterns of objectification, such as those seen in museums, where objects are often decontextualized and placed under the glass in a rough facsimile of the scientific method, removing variables in constructing hypotheses. Situated knowledge for Haraway is a form of “partial, locatable, critical knowledge sustaining the possibility of a web of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (p. 191). Situated knowledges challenge Western science and related approaches to feminist studies because social positioning limits what counts as rational knowledge. Haraway’s situated knowledges model suggests limitations to seeing and who may be able to see differently or from more than one set of lenses. This model implicitly supports de Santos notions of an ecology of knowledges working in non-coercive collaborations to learn about how to achieve decolonization.

Decolonization as a Process of Unlearning and Learning Anew

I have used the concept of decolonization in my research and in my life as a continuous practice of life-long learning. Studies from North American Indigenous scholars Marie Battiste (2013, 2017) and Eve Tuck (2013) suggest that decolonization is grounded in unlearning dominating approaches and relearning reciprocal processes. Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that the concept of decolonialization means “the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor” (p. 2). Decolonizing means moving away from the patriarchal ideals that frame settler colonialisms in order to reimagine today’s nation-states through reclamation and recognition of Indigenous identities. As Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest, “Decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity” (p. 35). Therefore, transnational literacies require decentralizing dominant perspectives and questioning normative discourses in the Canadian context and beyond.

Indigenous scholars Tuck (2013) and Ross (2009) argue that Indigenous feminists need to distance themselves from western feminisms for these reasons. They suggest that the

meaningful engagement of Indigenous feminisms will decolonize western feminisms. Because Indigenous feminisms honour peoples' relationships with the Land, water, and nature, while offering a broader understanding of human and interspecies kinship relationships, Indigenous peoples are concerned with issues of sovereignty that exceed human claims. Solidarities must be founded on an affirmation that Indigenous women have always had inherent sovereignty over their bodies and spirits, even though colonial violence has operated to traumatize whole peoples and places by devaluing Indigenous women's bodies and lives.

Decentering settler colonialism within Women's and Gender Studies could have powerful effects, making visible what decolonization might look like for all peoples. Decentering dominating practices helps develop new forms of feminist activism and critically articulated alliances. Tuck, Arvin, and Morrill (2013) have outlined the connections between settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy because "settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (p. 9). Luana Ross (2009) has described her own experience of "feminist" identity as the unspeakable "f word," due to the persistent stigma that feminism carries within Indigenous communities and the academic world because of its assumed associations with whiteness (p. 45). Of course, feminisms far exceed any such racialized attribution.

Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures* (1997) argues persuasively against culturalist explanations of gender oppression. Narayan argues that cultural resolutions usually fail to elucidate the culture in question or the phenomenon to be explained. Thus, dowry murders in India have been routinely read as a cultural phenomenon in the West and conflated with the ancient and outlawed practice of *sati*, thereby mystifying and exoticizing Indian culture. According to Narayan, dowry violence is directly connected with domestic violence and greed. Still, the meaning has been lost in cultural translation that fails to take national context into account and ties the killings to religious practice. Narayan brilliantly juxtaposes dowry murders by fire with the fact that domestic violence against women resulting in murders in the United States is committed with guns. It would be odd to present this as a *cultural* phenomenon rather than having to do with gun laws, she says. In step with Narayan's demands for deeper critical engagements, Marie Battiste (2017) suggests that decolonization has two pillars:

First, we need to understand that 'our system of education is deeply colonial,' [in order] to 'help people to understand where colonialism came from and ... colonial histories, and unpack these histories from our own [Indigenous] perspectives' (p. 12).

Battiste then says:

Decolonisation education needs not just to be a colonial experience. . . but it has to be a way to help people understand their situation and how they are in an inequitable situation. Secondly, decolonization is recovery from colonial impact, restoration of Indigenous people's identities, Indigenous people's languages, Indigenous people's experiences, and all things that we [Indigenous people] need for restoring us in this country [Canada] which builds in treaties that have been signed, ignored, marginalized for many, many years in Canada (p. 12).

Battiste also explains (2017) how decolonization can empower researchers, educators, activists, and others. It can inspire people to ask questions: "How are we related to the colonial oppressions? Who are the people who belong to colonial cultures? Who are the people benefiting from the oppressive systems? Who is privileged by oppressing others?" (p. 13). In other words, by understanding the processes of colonization and researchers' relationships with them, researchers can learn how to proceed as situated researchers and educators. According to Battiste, decolonization is "beginning to understand that 'I got it.'" However, reaching this point is a long-term and challenging process. Once it is understood that colonialism harms everyone, it should not be so easy to go back to colonial processes in research (p. 13).

Therefore, Battiste invites scholars to examine our cultural histories, contexts, positionalities, and complicities, unlearn our privileges, relearn transnational identity construction processes, establish ethical relationships in so many socially constructed differences, and learn more about where we came from. Her work points toward the relevance of critical transnational literacies in education, especially education concerned with global and social justice issues. The concept of decolonization helps illuminate how Indigenous knowledges have been suppressed, oppressed, and dismissed by white, European, and other non-Indigenous settlers. Decolonization helps to reclaim and re-establish Indigenous and subaltern non-Indigenous voices, particularly those of women (Battiste: 2000, 2017, Tuck: 2012, 2013), whose subordination undergirds the formation of all modern nation-states. Thus, feminist researchers, educators, and activists need to develop decolonial ways of learning. We are drawing not only from our thoughts, experiences, work, localities, and positioning, but respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and understanding how the processes of subordination work in the lives of the most disadvantaged, who often live on the verge of danger and death.

Decolonization is Necessary to Reconciliation

My list of critical concepts would not be complete without including the concept of reconciliation. I draw my use of the concept of reconciliation from scholars Battiste, Walia, Tuck, and Thobani. Battiste advocates the development of a "learning spirit." According to Battiste (2013), reconciliation is a lifelong un-learning and re-learning process. It means un-learning any fixed understanding of empowerment and re-learning about shared empowerment as a process, which in my case, engages women's identities and their decision-making choices in their everyday lives. Reconciliation demands an interrogation of border imperialisms (Walia 2013), settler-colonial moves to innocence (Maile, Tuck & Morrill, 2013; Fellows and Razack, 1998), an investment in cultural diversity (Degagné et al., 2011), and resistance to state-orchestrated reconciliation processes.

By focusing on decolonization, relationality, reconciliation, necropolitics, biopower, subalternity, situated knowledges, hybridity, Otherness, strangeness, intersectionality, cognitive justice, and abyssal thinking, I hope to challenge my colonial learnings and structural injustices. Through my decolonial autoethnographic mobilization of this intersectional integrated critical feminist theoretical framework, I am proposing that empowerment is not a fixed achievement, but rather that it is fluid, relational, and the result of a continual process of becoming.

Relationality as a More Life-Affirming Way to Approach Social Differences

The critical concept of "relationality" I draw from Indigenous scholars Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2010). I have used the concept of relationality because it is essential to understanding the meanings of hybridity, intersectionality, and othering. If community members cannot build trustful relationships, it is not possible to work together to actualize our own and each other's capabilities. Therefore, the concept of relationality is central to my theoretical framework and my approaches to decolonial feminist autoethnography. Once people are able to recognize themselves in a mutually beneficial relational frame, we can become more responsible with and for each other. Relationality means taking on that responsibility, together. Substantive relationality is vital to learning the meaning of reconciliation, the histories of Indigenous people and racialized settlers, and exploring the potential for decolonial empowerment practices that sustain more generous and creative forms of power. Mutual responsibility contributes to individual and collective journeys toward solidarities through inclusive community-building, including with the Land which sustains us all.

Gentle Power

I heard the term gentle power for the first time at the University of Saskatchewan student family residence community event, where I resided for ten years as a spouse and then as a graduate student. In 2017, I took the initiative with a few student residents and staff to celebrate international women's day with our University of Saskatchewan community gardeners at Souris Hall's family student residence. We watched a feminist movie together, *Queen of Katwe*. The event's goal was to inspire and motivate each other, be bold in pursuing our dreams, and share our hidden inner lights. Through that volunteer community event, we wanted to share our positive energy, love, and warmth and help each other be strong, resilient, and face our challenges in the Canadian academe's capitalist, hetero-patriarchal, and imperialist context. Two feminist faculty members were invited to discuss the movie learnings at the end of that event. My doctoral research supervisor, Dr. Marie Lovrod, was there at that event as a guest. I learned this concept from her for the first time on that feminist movie night. Later, in our ongoing discussions, she referred me to feminist scholar Merri Lisa Johnson (2021), a disability scholar who looks at tenderness, as one source for her appreciation of the concept. On that night, I perceived "gentle power" from Dr. Lovrod as an integral part of women's and allied collaborative and connective empowerment, but I was unsure what it meant and what it looked like in real life.

Therefore, I started to develop my understanding of the meaning of gentle power in 2017. I can resonate today with Jean Baker Miller's (1987) claim that "women's examination of power...can bring new understanding to the whole concept of power" (p. 241). I echo her rejection of the definition of power as domination. I wholeheartedly perceive and support how she defines power as "the capacity to produce a change – to move anything from point A or state A to point B or state B" (p. 241). Miller argues that power is often understood as a form of domination from a masculine perspective. She (1992) also affirms that "there is enormous validity in women not wanting to use power as it is presently conceived and used. Rather, women may want to be powerful in ways that simultaneously enhance, rather than diminish, the power of others" (p. 247–248). This idea resonates with me.

Similarly, Lesbian-feminist Sarah Lucia Hoagland is critical of masculine ways of perceiving power. She argues that "state authority, police and armed forces, control of economic resources, control of technology, and hierarchy and chain of command" (Hoagland, 1988, p. 114)

frame prevailing models of power. I agree with Hoagland (1988), who, in step with Kabeer, defines power as “power-from-within.” She explains “the power of ability, choice, and engagement. It is creative, and hence it is an affecting and transforming power but not a controlling power” (p. 118). However, I learned and understood power in more gentle terms from a transformative women's perspective, especially when I became a mother and started raising my children and taking care of the community's children by teaching the performing arts and hosting musical activities. That is how I began to transform into a butterfly, invested in exploring the meaning of gentle power, year after year, in Saskatoon transnational communities.

Internal transformation towards racial and gender justice does not occur through traditional methods of domination. The central point of this study is engaged with how to contest and transform dominating power into mutual empowerment through collaborative community efforts and to challenge unequal structures via the accumulated gentle power of the community. Over the years, through mingling and community-building activities organized collaboratively with Indigenous and cross-cultural non-Indigenous communities, I have learned that this concept emerges from various spaces and practices for sharing stories and resources. For example, Indigenous Elder's stories, cross-cultural senior citizens' stories, and ancestral cultural teachings help people protect their local knowledge systems, medicines, food sources, eco-systems, languages, music and spiritualities, including through connective community activities in newcomer settler communities.

For example, women's under-valued reproductive labour in raising children for the community, taking care of older adults, passing on cultural knowledges to subsequent generations through transnational literacies, engaging with eco-feminisms, climate change or environmental justice activities, building relationships, and caring for each other are all connective relationships that involve story and other sharing work that helps to grow gentle power. I have learned from my lived experiences and community activities that gentle power or power from within can transform fears of strangeness, hesitation, and rage about being racialized/minoritized, and the grief for those we bring close to us into compassion, love, and hope.

Through my long community engagements and socially stigmatized identities, I have learned that gentle power is an unacknowledged therapeutic tool, hidden everywhere around us in community activities and women's and others' caring lives. It offers an opportunity for

accessing and balancing love, care, empathy, grief, motivation, affection, and tender or soft emotions to build relationships, communities, and bridges. As a racialized newcomer woman, I discovered gentle power when Indigenous people welcomed me and trusted my presence and community actions in their stolen Lands. Sometimes they considered me their relative, a sister, despite colonizers having broken so many promises and perpetrated so many harms in Indigenous communities.

My diasporic lived experiences taught me that gentle power means blending intelligence and sharp critical skills with empathy and care while navigating complex, even violent, mistrustful situations. Often invisible, gentle power empowers disadvantaged, marginalized populations in sustaining ways. For example, I became a stigma fighter, drawing upon gentle power from the community by practicing patience and creative skills, year after year. Because coercive stigma operates as a central mechanism of discrimination, injustices, and social inequalities, holding space for gentleness and connection creates change. As a decolonial, anti-racist feminist and activist, I have been driven by gentle power for almost two decades. My commitments to community development, feminism, anti-racism, and tireless change-making work have been helping me resist structural inequities. This concept has become central in my dissertation because it came out through my lived experiences, occupying shared social spaces with gentle, calm, and strategic actions for change. My ways of unlearning and re-learning through Land-based education from Indigenous leaders helped me be humbly thankful for the Land, water, rocks, fire, air, food sources, and the non-living relations on this planet that are all interconnected and support human cultures daily in ways that we often only understand when they are deeply threatened.

As an overwhelmed, stigmatized, racialized newcomer and “bad Muslim” woman, my strength was embedded in rest, not restlessness, finding the capacity to be angry at injustice, yet gentle and not hasty to leap to conclusions, myself. I felt power when I started paying attention to my community and people, creating and living with hope, and giving back to the community and all my relations by knowing each other’s histories and life stories. Today, I realize that I have cultivated gentle power in order to be a lifelong decolonial learner. Gentle power needs lifelong practice in our everyday lives to locate our relationships on the Land in connection with Indigenous sovereignties. It is not an enigma to me; instead, I realize the nurturing methods needed to untangle the challenging puzzles facing BIPOC communities under colonialism. We

all need to be freed from the systematic harshness, the politics of exclusion, and the violent structural forms of persuasion typical of colonialist ideologies. I have learned to practice gentle fierce, inclusive knowledge building through native Hawaiian epistemologies that emphasize the sites of empowerment and resistance (Meyer, 1998). Indigenous worldviews have helped me grow my capacities for honour and respect.

By paying the high prices of diasporic lived experiences, I have learned that the power of gentleness illuminates when to speak, talk back, stand against injustices and when to stay silent, and navigate that silence in fierce and timely ways. Because I believe that one can learn from many sources, I believe that changes can happen through different ways of knowing about transformative justice, reconciliation, and love. Because women are often cast as the protectors of gentle power, we have much to offer in creating new and renewed relational practices of connection. I strongly support Hawaiian Indigenous scholar Manu Aluli Meyer, who says, "What we know matters, who we are matters, how we know makes a difference in the who we become" (1998, p 27). Gentle power appreciates the capacities of different ways of knowing and, in accepting its own limitations, welcomes change both within and with others.

Chapter Four: Autoethnographic Research Methodology and Method—What, Why, and How

Like many researchers, I struggled to articulate how to do this research and decide on an appropriate methodology. At the Qualitative Inquiry Conference, Chicago, in 2018, I attended a two-day workshop with Drs. Ellis and Bochner to study the autoethnographic research methodology firsthand. Gradually, I realized that this qualitative methodology had gained a positive reputation in the social sciences, particularly in women and gender, race and ethnicity, and social justice studies. Autoethnography engages the ethical issue of representing and speaking from the researcher's voice. Using this methodology, the researcher recounts selected personal experiences germane to their research questions and an ethnographic analysis of their cultural contexts and implications. Often, the autoethnographic approach privileges the voices of women and other minorities who use their own life stories as data sources (Bénard, 2018; Ettore, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Creese & Frisby, 2011; Hole, 2007, Butz & Bessio, 2004). Viewing lived experience as a valid source of knowledge is a common thread among feminists and other critical standpoint approaches. Autoethnography, as described by Ellis and Bochner (2000), is a genre of writing that “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739) in ways that foreground often marginalized experiences.

Research methodology reflects who we are as researchers, shaping our research methods, influencing data analysis and approaches to interpreting research outcomes (Ellis, 2004; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Research methodology helps the researcher transform, becoming a more critical thinker through their learnings. This chapter discusses why I chose autoethnography as my research methodology, engaging how I became a researcher through my everyday experiences and experiential learnings. I have organized this chapter into six sections, including 1) definitions of autoethnographic research; 2) the development of autoethnography as a research methodology; 3) why I chose autoethnography as my methodology; 4) challenges in autoethnography; 5) procedures in autoethnographic research and 6) my concluding remarks on using the autoethnographic methodology.

The Meanings of Autoethnography

Autoethnography has become a popular methodology in social science research, particularly in interdisciplinary fields. Although many scholars have identified autoethnography as a vital research methodology, a few prominent scholars have promoted its adoption, including

Norman Denzin (2003, 2018), Carolyn Ellis (1997, 2004, 2017) and Arthur P. Bochner (2011, 2020). Due to space limitations, I am focusing this discussion on the insights offered by these three leading autoethnographic researchers.

Norman Denzin, a qualitative inquiry scholar, describes autoethnography as a methodology with three parts (2018, p. 36): 1) “auto,” referring to *self-reflection*; 2) “ethno,” referring to *exploring people’s experiences*; and 3) “graph/graphy,” referring to *writing, making an image, or performing* a script that the researcher creates. He expressed the whole meaning of *autoethnography* as “bending the past to the present; I write my way through my experiences: I treat myself as a universal singular: I devise a script and play myself” (p. 36). Denzin shows how a scholar can be both researcher and participant simultaneously and how their lived experience is shaped by critical past and present events.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) extended Denzin’s definition of autoethnography, suggesting that autoethnographic researchers need to incorporate culture, language, history, and the situation in their analyses. Ellis and Bochner define *autoethnography* as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). However, in another study Ellis (2004) noted that autoethnographic researchers should “look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” and, simultaneously, focus “outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience” (p. 37). Here, Ellis suggests that researchers implementing autoethnography should recognize and respect their relationships with others. Ellis (1997, 2011) also encourages autoethnographers to treat research as a socially conscious act that helps to humanize emotionally sterile research processes. Ellis describes herself as an autoethnographic researcher as follows:

I am both the author and the focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed, the creator and the created. I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller. (2009, p. 13)

Here, Ellis focuses on the researcher’s actions in different cultural settings and explains how an autoethnographic researcher needs to act critically, see, observe, reflect, and relearn from their everyday actions. Thus, Ellis challenges boundaries between researchers and participants. She suggests ways of doing research and representing others that position research as a political,

socially just, and socially conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of both autobiography and ethnography to undertake and write autoethnography. Thus, Ellis has suggested that autoethnography is both process and product.

Bochner (2020), in his recent study, notes that “Autoethnography is not only a research methodology but also a way of life” (p. 84). The autoethnographic way of life originates in doubt and uncertainty. To be alive is to be uncertain. Bochner suggests that autoethnography allows people to lean into uncertainty rather than struggle against it. Ashe explains:

We autoethnographers acknowledge our contingency and finitude; we open ourselves to otherness, dedicate ourselves to social justice and narrative ethics, and seek to apply our moral imagination and desire for edification to keep the conversation going. As long as we can keep the conversation alive, we believe we can sustain our hope of building a better life and a more just and loving world. (2020, pp. 84-85)

Bochner suggests that living an “autoethnographic life is not a panacea; it cannot cure physical illnesses or conquer mortality. It is simply the best way” (2020 p. 86) to support social justice, critically mitigating our social and cultural realities.

Denzin, Ellis, and Bochner invite autoethnographic researchers to use critical reflexivity that illustrates intersections between self and society, linking the general with the personal and the political. Researchers using autoethnography methodology systematically analyze their personal experiences to understand more comprehensive cultural experiences.

Challenges in Autoethnographic Research

It is essential to know the methodological challenges of conducting autoethnography research in order to do it well. Explicit knowledge about these challenges can improve the researcher’s positionality in the study (Ellis, 2007) by helping them to be careful in their research (Ellis, 1997, 2006, 2017). Studies have suggested many challenges in undertaking autoethnography research methodology (Ellis, 2004, 2017). However, in the following, I focus my discussion on four challenges: taking risks, unclear researcher’s positionality, egotism, and confusion. I also discuss ways to overcome these challenges.

Taking Risks. In autoethnographic research, the researcher needs to take many risks in their study (Ellis, 1997, 2004, 2017). Ellis (2017) describes the researcher’s risky positionality as a vulnerability. Autoethnographer Anjali Forber-Pratt’s (2015) study explains how a researcher using autoethnography is vulnerable because of their risk-taking, by opening up about their

strengths, weaknesses, and innermost thoughts for others to criticize. Forber-Pratt suggests these risks can make a researcher vulnerable “in front of your peers, colleagues, family, and the academy, which is a bold decision!” (2015, p. 821). Therefore, to minimize this risk, Ellis (1997, 2004, 2017) and Forber-Pratt (2015) suggest that autoethnographic researchers need to use writing to know and let others know that they have a solid commitment to telling verifiable truths to themselves and their readers.

Unclear Researcher’s Positionality. Autoethnographic researcher Moors (2017) explains that the researcher’s unclear positionality in the study could create confusion. He argues that researchers engage in participant observation to learn about the lives of others/participants. Researchers listen to the participants deeply, engage themselves with the participants’ activities, and reflect on participants’ experiences. Therefore, an autoethnographic researcher needs to be careful about their positionality on using other participants’ reflections in their research, as those reflections can be misused or misunderstood if the researcher’s positionality is not clear.

Egotism. Autoethnography can be misunderstood as egotism. Egotism refers to talking about oneself too much, which autoethnographer Silvia Bénard calls “navel gazing” (2018, p. 166). According to Bénard, navel-gazing is a common misinterpretation of autoethnographic research. Bénard suggests ethnographers are bold for sharing a personal story publicly. She says, “if the audience finds it relevant, the seed for social change will flourish” (Bénard, 2018, p. 166). It takes a while to overcome this challenge, as a lot of courage is needed to write one’s own lived experiences and stories and resist the charge of navel-gazing, especially from a marked, minoritized position.

Confusions between Autoethnography and Autobiography. Many misunderstand autoethnography as an autobiographic research methodology (Ellis, 2017). Ettorre (2017) suggested that an autoethnography is not an autobiography; there is a clear difference between these forms even though they both attempt to provide key insights into a private event or series of events. According to Ellis:

When we do autobiography—or write about the self—we often call on memory and hindsight to reflect on past experiences; talk with others about the past; examine texts such as photographs, personal journals, and recordings; and may even consult with relevant news stories, blogs, and other archives related to life events. Then we write these experiences to assemble a text that uses tenets of storytelling devices, such as narrative voice, character development, and dramatic tension, to create evocative and specific representations of the culture/cultural

experience and give audiences a sense of how being there in the experience feels. (2017. p. 3)

Autobiographical research mainly focuses on placing the “I” within a personal context and developing insights from that perspective. Researchers may or may not take a political stand in their research. Therefore, an autoethnographic researcher must be careful while taking risks associated with engaging in personal experiences. An autoethnographic researcher requires clear positionality in their research, explicit knowledge of their stories and contexts, and a strong understanding of their methodology.

Why I Chose Autoethnography as My Research Methodology

Although there are many benefits discussed in autoethnography literature, I focus on five main strengths related to my doctoral research, which motivated me to choose this method over ethnography, participatory action research, community-based research, and case studies. Reviewing the literature about autoethnography helped me recognize myself as the subject and object of my study and the fluidity of these interwoven positions. Simultaneously, I can be both an insider and an outsider within the community cultures I have collaboratively learned with, and investigated. I became aware that I am not a “participant-observer” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002) in autoethnography. Reed-Danahay (1997) suggests that voice and authenticity are open to question in some forms of qualitative research. Her claim, which I agree with, is that “an auto ethnography is more authentic than straight ethnography and that the insider's voice can be assumed to be more true than that of the outsider” (p. 3). Ethnographic writers can document and only relate the story as outsiders, while the researcher reveals their in-depth voice upfront within autoethnographic research. As explained by Ellis and Bochner (2000), “The goal is to enter and document the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life. That’s an important way of knowing as well” (p. 761). Further, they suggest that “Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for yourself and the world” (p. 761).

By examining my research journey (what I went through, experiential learnings) using autoethnography, I can relate to my personal experiences and the experiences of others. I can also engage the ways that other artists and activists have used their creative talents and struggles to process their experiences through art (Finley, 2005). Benefits of the autoethnography research methodology include empowering researchers, building a bridge between theory and practice,

offering a political position for the researcher, providing feminist perspectives, and creating a reflexive decolonizing opportunity.

Empowering the Researcher. Autoethnography as a research methodology empowers the researcher (Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellis, 1997, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Since, in autoethnographic research, the researcher is both process and product, the researcher gets the full opportunity to explain their learning from their lived experience and positionality (Ellis et al., 2011). For this reason, the researcher can take a political and critical position in their research. Thus, Ellis et al. (2011) explain how autoethnographic stories may be therapeutic, can encourage personal responsibility and agency, raise consciousness, give people a voice and promote cultural change. Autoethnography, then, is a process that works toward self-empowerment.

Building Bridges between Theory and Practice. Bridging between theory and practice is a significant challenge in academia. Many studies (Denzin, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellis, 2004; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007) have shown that an autoethnographic research methodology helps overcome this challenge. Because autoethnography breaks the boundaries between researcher and participant, the researcher can critically and analytically relate their theoretical learning through their lived experience. Therefore, the autoethnographic researcher owns this inscription of their story, the perspective, and the voice, rather than having them filtered through another's perspectives, agendas, interactions, and interpretations.

Political Positioning. An autoethnographic research methodology takes a political position for researcher positionality, including identity, culture, and social position (Ellis, 2017). Autoethnography challenges the dominant theoretical stances and hegemonic paradigms, thereby furthering social justice aims (Denzin, 2003). According to Indigenous scholars Shawn Wilson (2008) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), political positions are significant for developing the researcher's capabilities in their research. Making a similar point, authors of recent studies (Cooper et al., 2017; Grenier, 2015) discuss how an autoethnographic research methodology seeks to connect everyday experiences to broader cultural, political, and social implications. Autoethnography also makes explicit knowledge and memories that are not easily accessed through other, more conventional methodologies. Therefore, researchers using autoethnography help situate themselves in the study by revealing their background and personal perspectives,

theoretical stance, style of interaction, political aims, and understandings acquired through the research via ongoing journaling, with participants in the dialogue, and in the research write-up.

Feminist Lenses. The autoethnographic research methodology benefits feminist research (Bénard, 2018; Ettore, 2017; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Stern, 2015). For instance, feminist autoethnographic researchers Richardson (2007), Visse and Niemeijer (2016), and Holman Jones (2016) have suggested that an autoethnographic research methodology has been applied in areas as diverse as death and dying research, feminist theory, sexuality studies, feminist identity development, and queer theory, to good effect. Similarly, Stanley (1994), explain that autoethnographic research has significant implications for women’s justice. They suggest that feminist autoethnography focuses on women’s lives, activities, and experiences in highly gendered settings. Feminist lens which attends to the interplays between gender and other forms of power and difference. Denzin (2013, 2003) suggests that autoethnography is the descendant of ethnography and its future—a political performance of resistance by one person and another person—where, by telling their individual stories and theorizing them, researchers democratize research, critique racist and hetero-gender-normative dominant discourses, and disrupt the power politics of controlling corporate and military interests. Similarly, Cannella and Lincoln (2011) call for a critical social science focused on intersections of power “whose purposes are to ‘join with,’ rather than to ‘know and save” (p. 82). Studies by Ettore (2017), Hesse-Biber (2014), and Stern (2015) have suggested that women’s experiences are helpful and even necessary to understand important truths about their lives as gender and racial minorities because prevailing discourses gloss over those truths.

Decolonizing Lenses. Autoethnographic research offers decolonizing opportunities (Chawla & Atay, 2018; Dutta, 2018). Mohan Dutta (2018) shows how decolonial autoethnography represents that epistemic and methodological space where the personal intersects with the political, historical, and cultural to critique everyday power structures. Both Dutta (2018) and Chawla and Atay (2018) discuss autoethnography as a productive methodology to convey resistance and decolonial dreams. The decolonial tools in autoethnography allow researchers to take political positions supporting vulnerable women who have been underrepresented, misrepresented, and presented through the lenses of outsiders. Previous representations of minoritized women have contributed to limited ways of knowing and understanding the social constructs (such as power, race, and gender) and related oppressions

(classism, racism, and sexism) impacting their experiences. The decolonial lens in autoethnography offers ways to clarify and center racialized women's experiences by highlighting our interpretations of the world.

Therefore, autoethnography as a research methodology "recognizes and tries to accommodate procedural, situational, and relational ethics" (Adams et al., 2013, p. 673). It addresses several ethical dilemmas inherent in more traditional ethnographic approaches to studying cultures and intersectional social groups. As the researcher and participant in autoethnography are the same people, collecting and interpreting personal data allows the participant to speak in their voice. According to Denzin (2013), the researcher is not appropriating the participant's voice or misinterpreting the participant's experience because they are the data source. Denzin (2013) and Ellis (2017) refer to autoethnography as a significant qualitative research methodology that systematically analyzes a researcher's lived experience in a variety of ways (i.e., from positioning oneself in the text as the researcher to being a participant who is the focus of the research).

Procedures in Autoethnographic Research

Methodology dramatically influences both the process and outcomes of research. This section discusses how I use autoethnography as a methodology by explaining my positionality as a researcher, research methods, and data analysis procedures.

My Positionality as Decolonial Feminist Autoethnographer. In autoethnography, I must acknowledge how my socialization, identity, education, and professional experiences influence my understanding of autoethnography research procedures. Nonetheless, scholars such as Ferreira and Gendron (2011), Meyer (2001), McCarthy and Moje (2002), and Smith (1999) have argued that a researcher's responsibilities are to conduct significant research rather than simply to acknowledge their identity. I agree that researchers should perform meaningful work; however, they should also recognize that who they are will affect the processes and outcomes. As Torre and Ayala (2009) argue, it is the researcher's responsibility to make space to rethink their identity and challenge their ways of being. Asking "who am I as a researcher?" is essential for conducting autoethnographic research (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). I agree with Wilson (2008), who suggests that research knowledge cannot be separated from who we are and what we do as researchers. Therefore, a researcher's identity is vital for accountability in their research, including autoethnography.

As a decolonial feminist autoethnographic researcher, I have an intersectional identity. I am a racialized newcomer settler, mother, sister, friend, and community volunteer. I am also an activist, anti-racist practitioner, cultural performer, community radio host, community gardener, a doctoral student in women's and gender studies and a university instructor who teaches sociology, social problems, community, and society. My identities as a transnational feminist community activist and ethnic, cultural performer are always in the process of becoming. In doing my doctoral research using autoethnography, I want to create something candid about my way of being that remains integral to my practice as a feminist community activist and transnational cultural performer. My community activities and learnings have shaped my thoughts and understandings, informing my decolonial autoethnographic writing. My ways of doing and knowing have helped me understand my transformation as a decolonial researcher. Finally, I have realized that I am becoming a transnational person not only through migration but by building bridges with this Land's transnational and Indigenous peoples.

Research Methods. Research methods derive from the research methodology in order to explore the research questions and achieve the research objectives (Ellis, 2004). Drawing from autoethnographic practice, I will use two research methods: individual storytelling and commonplace books.

Individual Storytelling. Individual storytelling plays a significant role in autoethnographic research because it explores an individual's relational and spiritual stories, memories, personal experiences, and expectations (Kovach, 2010). I will use the radio program I have been leading for the last ten years as a context for engaging individual storytelling. I chose stories from my radio programs that focus on empowerment in immigrant women's communities and on building bridges among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. I have chosen ten stories to reflect my learning about Indigenous Lands and immigrant women's empowerment. These include two Indigenous Elders' stories, one on Indigenous Land-based learnings and the other on Indigenous meanings of music. After transcribing the stories, I carried out a thematic analysis to identify my understandings and learnings about Indigenous meanings of Land-based learnings and music. I have used two Indigenous educators' stories on decolonization and anti-racism approaches. Lastly, I have used six immigrant women's stories about their ways of knowing and the meanings of music, dance, employment, leadership, and their challenging experiences in continuing their cultural activities in Saskatoon. These Indigenous Elders, educators, and

immigrant women have known me through community activities for the last ten years. Therefore, they were comfortable sharing their educational stories publicly on community radio and around the community garden premises. Although these radio programs are available to the public, I have used them in my doctoral research with approval from participants and the university's research ethics board.

Commonplace Books (for Reflective Learning). A commonplace book is a journal used to collect personal experiences, feelings, ongoing interactions, and other cultural materials (e.g., poems, photographs, drawings, etc.) (Sumara, 1996). Stake (1995) explains that “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins. Analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations” (p. 71). My analysis started with my desire to understand what was happening in Canada and my new community immediately after I immigrated to Canada in 2010, well before I started my doctoral studies.

I learned how to maintain a commonplace book during my coursework in ANTH 802.3: *Ethnographic Theory and Method* at the University of Saskatchewan. Unlike a typical journal, a commonplace book is meant to engage individuals in everyday activities in specific places. These places can be Land, houses, community gardens, forests, playgrounds, waterfalls, local schools, etc. A commonplace book is a space where one can represent a variety of experiences in various forms. For data collection purposes, I have used the last three years of two of my commonplace books: the first is focused on my community garden activities, and the second is on my cross-cultural activities. Both books span from 2017 through 2019.

Commonplace Book on Community Garden Activities. I have maintained a series of commonplace books on community garden activities for three years. They focus on two main areas: first, my Indigenous Land-based learning and Indigenous and colonialist histories in Canada with Indigenous Elders and, second, cross-cultural activities (networking, children's art workshops, food sharing, women's leadership).

Commonplace Book on Cross-cultural Activities. For the last three years, I have taken the initiative to build cultural bridges among Indigenous and non-Indigenous racialized settler women's communities (particularly from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, South Sudan, Oromo, Germany, and Russia). During these activities, I performed personally and with my two oldest daughters, whom I raised as performers (dancers, singers, painters, playing several musical instruments). I mentored many Bangladeshi-Canadian and cross-cultural

community children, dancers, singers, and artists and have coordinated their participation in various cross-cultural festivals over the years. While I have been taking journal notes about these activities for many years, I have restricted my current thematic and narrative analyses to my cultural activities between 2017 and 2019. During these three years, I was involved in cultural bridge-building and activities with international immigrant women's organizations and transnational artists' communities, including the Ness Creek music festival, the International Mother language day event, and Bangladeshi-Indian-Canadian ethnocultural organizations. Keeping a commonplace book as a research method significantly impacts autoethnographic research because it offers learning stories that can be analyzed critically as part of answering research questions.

Collaborative Learning Stories

Collaborative learning stories for this study incorporates the reflexive autoethnographic narratives that I have written (Ellis, 1999) while doing community garden, radio, and cross-cultural activities that emerge from my commonplace books (2017-2019), as outlined above. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe autoethnography as a genre of writing that “displays multiple layers of consciousness connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739). My personal and cultural background and political stands against different forms and intersections of racism and social injustices frame my multiple layers of consciousness.

A recurring theme in my writings that I must address up front is that it is hard to address religious racism because imperialist religions assert aggressive power to silence resistance with severe backlashes. As an insider of the Muslim community, my lived experiences speak against Islamicist's dogmatic practices, which have affected my life and anti-racist solidarity work among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Due to my cross-cultural, inter-religious, and non-religious identity, I have been ostracized and neglected by my Muslim family/relatives back home, the Bangladeshi-Canadian and diasporic Muslim (South Asian Muslims, Middle Eastern, and African Muslims, etc.) communities in my previous sojourns in Norway, the United States, Toronto, Saskatoon, and Calgary.

My everyday experiences demonstrate that fundamentalist Islamic societies/people do not readily accept and tolerate my social life, existence, or presence around the community events, nor my critical anti-racist social positions. I have often felt like many Muslims give me a look as if I were a ghost, an untouchable “badass woman,” a term that is not complementary in my

communities. Most Bangladeshi-Canadian Muslim families are not comfortable mingling with me and inviting me to their family, home, mosque, funerals, and other religious ritual events in practice, because my husband is a non-Muslim, and non-Muslims are not welcome in many mosque activities, for example, the five daily prayers, Ramadan, Eid celebrations, etc. My siblings, relatives, family members, and many senior community members require my husband and children to convert his religion to be accepted into Muslim society. We have refused as we felt it was a forceful assimilation policy to establish the aggressive and patriarchal religious power over us. I have always supported my husband and would not allow him to break down because of social pressure. I told him not to convert his religious identity and erase his culture, his ancestor's precious and Land-based practices from Hinduism, which is closely connected with Indigenous spirituality and worldviews.

On the other hand, I faced challenges in mingling with Hindu community events at the temple, but they eventually accepted me without conversion. We failed, however, to make our family members and community people understand that there are different ways of knowing. Therefore, which community I live in, how I live, who I live with, and the living/sharing mechanisms within communities and social systems and structures surrounding my family and me are deeply embedded in everything I/we do or write.

These conditions are an integral part of our (mine, my husband's, and children's) identity constructions, social positions, and status within our communities. All these experiences emerge through my writing often as I have taken a political position to address the issue of religious racism, which is a risky zone to talk about, and defensive denials are always there.

I raise this story upfront because I can see the denials of religious racism to protect the interests of religion, not humanity. I have faced tremendous challenges in advancing my cross-cultural community-building work and taking responsibility for reconciliation. There is a profound theological conflict between radical Islamists, moderate Islamists, and those with secular views. Extreme Islamists foster anti-western, anti-secular, anti-feminist, and anti-Indigenous sentiments. Their fundamentalist views harm society and create obstacles to building relationships with the Land, Indigenous people, honouring women's rights, and the modern world. Lifelong decolonial, anti-racist education is required to understand religious and racist perspectives and foster the deep and open community conversations needed to deradicalize people's minds. Safe and fearless community spaces are required to have an open discussion and

establish inclusive practices; it takes courage to speak up, unlearn, and break such politicized religious barriers. These narratives came through my writing repeatedly. My life has been shaped by everyday religious and other forms of racism. It has become almost impossible to find a supportive network to work against this issue, even here in Canada, because the radicals are homegrown and include my Muslim family members and many community members and friends. I have found autoethnography to be an important way to unpack these painful experiences, because I learned from Ellis and Bochner (2000) that “Autoethnography has become the term of choice in describing studies and procedures that connect the personal to the cultural” (p.740). I bring the person to the politics in my study by taking the risk to share my efforts to challenge religious disharmony and violence.

As a child and adult sexual abuse survivor, I live with lifelong traumas. And as a professional radio and TV performer in my past life in Bangladesh, I could not accept mentally that I could not perform professionally anymore in mainstream media in my diasporic life or that I needed to let my language die. As a trained social worker from Sweden, I could not pursue my profession due to the devaluing of credential transfer here in Canada. As a community builder, my volunteer efforts were not valued by my community people and not even by my husband initially because I did not visibly contribute to my family financially, although my reproductive labour has undoubtedly eased our way. Therefore, these family and social challenges left me depressed, isolated, and feeling out of place; it profoundly affected my mental health and intellectual growth, and I felt rejected in this newly forming oppressive system. I could not accept the systematically prescribed death of my cultural identity, language, creative artistic activities, and intellectual preparation. Therefore, building cross-cultural communities through everyday life actions and making connections and transnational impact through the representation of ethnic minorities’ cultural aspirations (preserving the language, arts, history, values, ancestors’ stories/ teachings), writing an academic dissertation, articles, and book chapters were always a necessary breathing and therapeutic space for my survival and empowerment.

Over the years, I realized that autoethnographic self-expression, writing, analysis, and thinking entail shifting one's consciousness into transformative modes to create respectful spaces for collaborative, experiential learning. Therefore, I deliberately articulated a political stand in my writing to address the issue of the devaluation of women’s reproductive labor, which

needs to be recognized as foundational to fiscal economies in all communities. Simultaneously, I dreamt of a world where cross-cultural community members could actively work in anti-racism, decolonial feminism, and critical transformative social/racial/environmental justice practices that keep questioning inequitable systems and the cruel disparities they produce. These conditions form a primary data source; at the core of my autoethnographic study resides my self-awareness, empowerment, transformative learnings, and reporting of my lived experiences, challenges, resistance, resilience, and introspections. As the subject of my research, it is legitimate for me to clarify the conditions shaping my stories and collaborative learning experiences to explain my data and make it more precise.

However, I understand that people's historical, social, political, educational, and economic realities create varying forms of social justice consciousness within a community. I happily embraced available collaborative educational activities and shared my learnings with community people. I accepted the continuous struggle because there is always a ray of hope for social change. I used to write small poems, processing my immediate thoughts about my mind and life. I have saved all those writings as a treasure that I have used during my dissertation writing. I am fortunate that I got the opportunity to learn about cross-cultural community building and inclusive Indigenous worldviews. Connecting with Land-based training gave me a different level of hope, strength, confidence, and more healing spaces to grow and move on, even though the destination was unknown, like an ocean. I kept writing about how Land-based learning gave me the power to understand that Indigenous Bangla culture also has a connection with the Land. Still, much of it is lost today, due to many years of colonial practices and imperialist Islamization. I invested in developing decolonial lenses to look at religion and culture as sites of dynamic social struggle and, at the same time, as a possible arena for change. I became curious to re-examine how social meaning is generated, constructed, and mediated through various cultural narratives, practices, and situated knowledges. This reflexive praxis constantly encouraged me to reclaim my identity and take responsibility for making changes and moving forward by maintaining my journal notes.

Consequently, I used to take quick random notes initially from my daily community learnings and personal harassment stories. Through Women's and Gender Studies methodologies courses and Anthropological ethnography classes at the university, I learned to take ethnographic notes systematically using anti-racist, decolonial feminist, and social justice lenses and to

develop my critical questions and understanding. In my ethnographic notes, I reflected on the conversations, and discussions I had with the guest educators/speakers talks, community gardeners, radio listeners, radio conversations, performance participants, community members at the studio, and about cultural event preparation meetings, rehearsals, and performances together with my family (children, husband, and community senior citizens) and community friends.

My commonplace books reflected conversations with many university faculty and staff members, social justice activists, knowledgeable community members, and various community activity participants directly involved with my community events. My findings also come from my reflective journal and the publicly available recorded archive of my community radio conversations, including my poems and short articles published in newspapers and magazines. I was interviewed in many campus newsletters, the undergraduate paper *The Sheaf, On Campus News*, and local mainstream media, including the CBC, CTV, Shaw TV, Global TV, *The StarPhoenix*, and many other local newspapers, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, *Prince Albert Herald*, Ness Creek in Big River, as well as settlement organizations' newsletters etc. I used to write randomly, tirelessly, on social media, via e-mails, and in local newspapers to share the social justice messages I wanted to convey to the community. I document those social media narratives, expressions/frustrations, or actions from time to time. At the same time, I was unstoppable in engaging my children and myself directly through community activities (cultural performances, workshops, writing in various venues, community gardening, etc.), undertaking various initiatives as time and opportunity would permit.

I am necessarily selective about the people I connect with most of the time through community events. My expectations would probably be higher for a person with similar feminist training, someone who is social justice-minded, well-educated, and able to understand me, my struggles to make a change, and my volunteer efforts. Also, I used to look for healing alliance constantly.

One of the many purposes of this study is to explore and make visible the unpaid, unrecognized volunteer efforts of a racialized woman. I contextualize that learning within the frame of Indigenous teachings in order to demonstrate how my empowerment journey is grounded in Land-based education and exposure to inclusive Indigenous worldviews. Another purpose was to reclaim my cultural identity through ethnic, cultural performances, educational, meaningful social-justice-oriented workshops around the community garden, and critically

informative radio shows through the process of seeking individual learning and growth through these platforms. While confronting cultural biases in the Bangladeshi-Indian-Canadian community and also around the complex international student community at the university, I was afraid of what people would say about me when I would organize many community events voluntarily without any funding, wearing traditional costumes and singing with my traditional harmonium around the garden, all alone or with my children, or sometimes with the community performers assembled around my preparation of some ethnic foods to share.

It was new for me to wrap sarees for unknown cross-cultural community people, sing or dance together under the open sky, around the community garden, at the fringe festival on the street with my two little daughters and other community gardener children, or with my Bangladeshi-Canadian friends' children. But I was resilient in my efforts to make myself and my culture visible around multiple public community spaces. I also collected garbage from the community garden, radio premises, parks, and riversides to encourage more people to join in. I have used relational autoethnography and collaborative co-learning analyses as a foundational process of data gathering. The gentle power of these relational community activities remains invisible, neglected, and discounted by the capitalistic system and the colonialist nation-state. In the process, I have learned collaboratively with many other community members that caring stories can become reconciliation stories. Listening to and taking care of each other's stories, and respecting each and every community relationship can help create mutual decolonizing empowerment. Of course, because neoliberal colonialisms persist, in affirming relational work that challenges those frames, it is important to recognize that choosing vulnerability and resilience as sites of resistance includes social risks that can only be navigated well when diversely positioned people have each other's backs.

Findings Analysis

My research findings are an essential part of my autoethnographic research. Ellis (2004, 2017) has suggested two approaches to data analysis within autoethnographic research: narrative and thematic analysis. The narrative and the thematic findings analysis approaches offer opportunities to center the researcher's critical perspectives on their stories (Ellis, 2017).

Narrative Analysis. There is academic attention and interest across disciplines in the narrative, knowing how to understand storylines profoundly and meaningfully. These narratives are presented as a framework for understanding the subject matter and related community

engagements, including the collaborative learning stories examined in this qualitative research project. A narrative analysis "assumes that a good story itself is theoretical" (Ellis, 2004, p. 195) and that "stories themselves are analytic" (p. 196). To present my own learning story as data for my doctoral study, I will employ a combination of narrative and thematic analyses. Ellis (2004) describes mixing various types of analyses as a "sandwich—a story with academic literature and theory on both sides" (p. 198). According to Jackson, Drummond, and Camara (2007), narrative analysis is a broad term used to describe various procedures for interpreting the stories generated in research. I have read my commonplace book notes, the transcripts of my radio shows, and coded themes that I have created throughout my reflections on the recorded narratives. I have written about my conversations with my family and the community activities of others. Like Wall (2008), I have tried to "converse with the literature rather than just interject my perspectives into identified gaps in the works of literature" (p. 40). I aim to interpret the construction of my sense of self through my commonplace book narratives and radio conversations.

The rationale for using narrative analysis in my autoethnographic inquiry is to demonstrate that, although my story is unique, I am deeply interconnected with others (Gergen, 1991), to present what is thematic about my narrative story, and to produce novel ideas and questions (Ellis, 2004). This autoethnographic inquiry aims not to make any claims through interpretations and analyses but to invite readers to share their lived experiences and learnings from community activities (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I also hope that my autoethnography will help enhance participants' well-being (Ellis, 1997) and provide insight into the multiple layers of consciousness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) that emerge in diasporic experiences in a colonialist state like Canada. I hope the readers will understand that there are many strategic and logical reasons for telling a woman's personal life stories. My stories are emotional, gutsy, gritty, soft, and strong because these are the qualities and feelings that provide common ground with other women who sometimes are unsure what will make us resilient and where our resistance is embedded or how to explore our agencies.

Thematic Analysis. I have also employed thematic analysis to derive themes as they arise in my commonplace books. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the thematic analysis identifies, analyzes, and reports patterns (themes) within data. Further, thematic analysis helps categorize and define data sets in (rich) detail. A theme synthesizes something important about

the data relative to the research question and represents a patterned response or emergent meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the researcher's judgment is necessary to determine what a theme is. It is crucial to be flexible because applying unyielding rules to identify themes does not work (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis seeks to find the most common and salient themes within the data, representing the whole dataset in a thematic map of some phenomenon or process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By using thematic analysis for my doctoral research, I have had the opportunity to generate themes by using my own perceptions. Ellis (2004) suggests that researchers using this approach “work inductively and present their findings in the form of traditional categories and theory” (p. 196). I have used thematic analysis to identify the most exciting and representative patterns to develop and compare emergent themes. Here, I provide some preliminary themes to show how parallel issues are emerging in each of my data sources.

- Starting literally from the ground up, discussions of environmental justice grow from practices of food sovereignty based on spiritual connections with the Land, which reveal the politics of representation around food, gendered labor, and the environment.
- Women’s investments in collaborative intergenerational learning support relational accountabilities through networking and mutual empowerment.
- Learning how colonialist histories mobilize stereotypes through Indigenous-centered activities shows the impacts of lack of cross-cultural education and the need for critical unlearning, learning, and relearning through anti-racist and decolonial critiques of multiculturalism.
- Loss of language and culture threatens both Indigenous and immigrant communities who are fighting to preserve their heritage in the midst of colonialist patriarchy, religious racism, wide-ranging discrimination processes, and spiritual abuses. Building cross-cultural solidarities to fight back against neoliberal imperialism creates contexts for connective mutual empowerment.

Thematic and narrative analyses are interconnected, inseparable, and interdependent. Once my themes and subthemes have been thoroughly developed and reviewed, I proceed to chronological or holistic narrative plotting (to clarify how the elements of the stories I have found to tell have fit together. In this way, I draw upon on concepts from my theoretical framework and use fluid data analysis that engages my shifting social positions, verifying my

findings with my community participants. Below, I have summarized my data analysis process in brief:

Collaborative Community Learning Processes: Because learning relational accountability for the knowledge we co-create and co-learn together requires collaboration,

- I have selected 12 community radio conversations (as outlined above) for transcription and analysis, with follow-up conversations where clarification is needed.
- I have drawn on two commonplace books, the first on my community gardening activities, which acknowledges my new relational networks, starting from the ground up, with sustainable food sharing, learning from Elders, and related intergenerational cultural activities.
- My second commonplace book engages my intercultural/transnational cultural activities with Indigenous and immigrant women artists and performers.
- I have used thematic and narrative analyses for this dissertation, familiarizing myself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for, reviewing, and defining themes.
- I have engaged myself from the beginning in using detailed fluid data analysis of both community radio conversations and discussions.
- I have used my personal, collaborative community learner stories to show how we have learned together through long-standing relationships and networks developed in my 10-year radio program, cultural activities, and community gardening.
- I consider my collaborative community learners to be knowledge providers whose perspectives have advanced my decolonial process (i.e., learning, unlearning, and relearning). In my research, collaborative community learners are my mentors and knowledge providers. As a researcher, I consider myself a learner living in a community of learners and co-learners (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Decolonial Relational Auto -ethnography and Collaborative Co-Learning

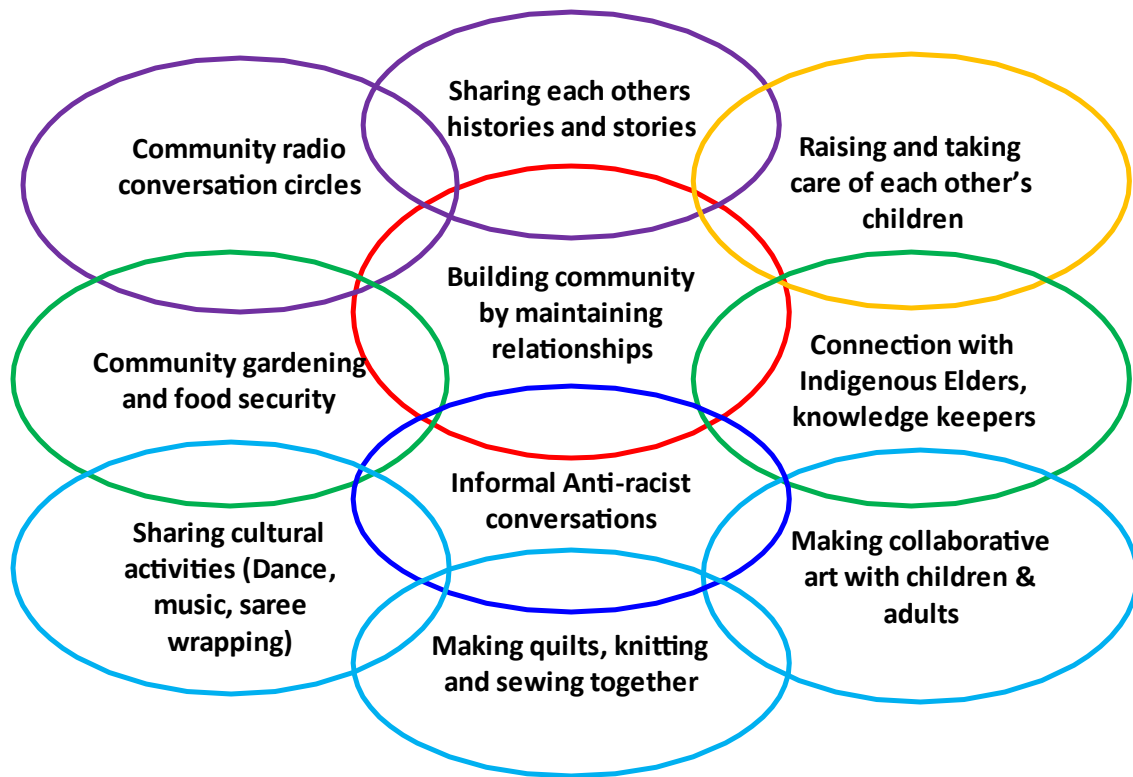


Figure 4.1: Decolonial Relational Auto-ethnography and Collaborative Co-Learning

The image above represents the interwoven circles of community co-learning that inform my dissertation.

Research Analysis Process Step by Step

Step -1 (Ethics Approval) Community Radio conversations

Step-2: Finding Appropriate Radio recordings from the 300 publicly available radio conversations.

Step-3: Listening to audio and transcribing radio conversations and reading commonplace book notes continuously to explore documentation of the importance of inclusion in my research and capturing how things are said using significant critical terms.

- When I was listening, I kept in mind constantly my ways of listening and their purposes. I wanted to be mindful of how I was listening, what I was listening for, and how my listening practice might be expanded within a framework of relational accountability.

- When I was listening to another person or the radio guest speakers, I didn't just listen with my mind; I listened with my whole body. I gave the speaker enough space to share their knowledge and lived experiences without fear of harm. That was the most precious gift I could give, and I gave it to the selected radio speakers.
- Listening generously, attentively, and paying deep attention to different knowledge is nuanced and complex. It takes time to learn how to listen carefully and embody that listening. I practiced my listening skills on the community radio for a decade and repeatedly listened to selected radio conversations for hours and hours, day after day, to accomplish my analysis.
- I believe we can build meaningful relationships when we take the time to honor shared stories or experiences and pay attention to listening to each other. Why do I think generous listening is so difficult for newcomers? We are working to survive in our new Land, and we need to pay attention to it with all of our senses.

Step-4: Getting written and oral consent from the radio guest speakers

Step-5: Transcribing a total of 12 selected radio conversation recordings

Step 6: Reviewing transcripts by the radio guest speakers to represent their voices accurately

Step 7: Exploring follow-up conversations (through e-mail, phone calls, and social media on a regular basis at a mutually convenient time if I need clarification).

Step 8: Highlighting quotes, coding, and finding themes and subthemes

Step 9: Reviewing themes and subthemes (Saldana, 2015)

Commonplace Books Notes Analysis from Community Garden and Transnational Cultural Activities (2017-2020)

Step-1: Finding/Pulling together the last 3 years of commonplace book notes.

Step-2: Reading and selecting relevant elements from them

Step-3: Highlighting the critical quotes and findings in the subthemes table (Saldana, 2015)

Step-4: Creating a Theme Table from commonplace book sub-themes

Step-5: Reviewing themes and subthemes

Step-6: Juxtaposing themes and subthemes arising in both commonplace books and radio conversations

Step-7 Juxtaposing lessons learned collaboratively in community radio conversations and commonplace books

Step-8 Emergent Themes for the Dissertation Chapters

Outlining Key Stories through Narrative analysis (Step by step)

Thematic and narrative analyses are interconnected, inseparable, and interdependent.

Nasheeda et al. (2019) provided important guidelines:

Having chosen participants representing Indigenous and newcomer perspectives, transcribed radio conversations, and examined commonplace books through holistic content review and thematic analysis, I followed several steps.

- I began chronological or holistic narrative plotting (to clarify how the elements of the story I am telling fit together)
- I develop the stories revealed using narrative analysis, drawing upon concepts from my theoretical framework, and explored through fluid data analysis
- However, in autoethnographic research, while thematic analysis provides support for narrative analysis, research analysis starts and ends with narrative analysis.

Procedures of Narrative Analysis

Step-by-step narrative analyses are outlined by Nasheeda et al. (2019) and are rendered specific to my project below:

- 1) Choosing representative conversations or storytellers from the community radio programs from both Indigenous and newcomer communities
- 2) Transcribing recorded radio conversations,
- 3) Familiarizing myself with the transcripts by reading them many times,
- 4) Plotting elements of the emerging stories, social messages, and
- 5) Developing the story through thematic analysis, drawing on concepts from my theoretical framework.

Using collaborative, relational, decolonial autoethnography as my research methodology allows me to become a researcher, empowers me, and centers opportunities for my stories in the research. As Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) suggest, researchers in autoethnography can “treat research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (p. 1). Through my autoethnography, I have written not only about personal stories but have also had the opportunity to connect my cross-cultural activities with prevailing social and political realities in Canada and

Bangladesh. My learning and appreciation for Indigenous Land-based knowledge, community building, and autoethnography are grounded in community activities. In Patton's words (2002), I have used my lived experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture I am a part of. If I look back, I realize that I had been changing internally as an individual and as a researcher all along, because I have changed the ways I approach the issues, constantly reflecting on my life journey through decolonial lenses, deconstructing my socialization processes and 'self.' This work has helped me recognize the broader implications of my research journey, by witnessing both my reactive and resilient situated choices.

I think that autoethnographic researchers need to respond to the Dutta's (2018) and Chawla and Atay's (2018) invitations to achieve decolonial processes, to come together in critical solidarity with compassion, care, love, and the desire to heal from the wounds of prevailing institutions, including the academy. Through my community-building activities, I learned that my stories make me responsible for my everyday actions. Autoethnography creates epistemic and methodological space that allows my personal stories to intersect with political, historical, and cultural contexts to critique everyday power structures, injustices, and inequalities. Following a decolonial perspective, I aim to focus on my accountability, responsibility, empowerment stories, lived experiences, agency, and voice. Throughout the process of doing my doctoral research, I am asking what Patton (2002) calls the "foundational question" (p. 84) that autoethnography poses: How does my own experience [as a racialized minority settler woman of color] "connect with and offer insights about this culture, situation, event, or way of life?" Thus, an autoethnographic research methodology allows me to analyze my formal and informal learning journeys, responsibilities, empowerment, and transformations through my community activities recorded in my commonplace books and community radio programs.

In preparing this dissertation, I have learned that collaborative, relational, feminist decolonial autoethnographic research is an appropriate methodology for my doctoral study and the only way to present my lifelong learning, re-learning, un-learning, and co-learning reflections in a more meaningful and mindful way. The cultural phenomenon, the relationship-building work that I was doing for a long time through various community activities in-depth, closely living, and researching, became possible because of autoethnography methodology.

Because I am breaking my research analysis into three chapters dedicated to community gardening, cultural performance, and radio show participation, respectively, here, I provide a summary in the follow table outlining some of the overarching themes I have found in radio conversation transcripts and from my common-place books, which will be applied across all three chapters:

Table 4.1: Outlining Overarching Themes

● Social Disparities
● Social justice, environmental justice, intersectional gender justice
● Knowing about Canadian colonial histories
● Indigenous worldviews
● Relational Accountability
● The right to Self-determination of Indigenous peoples (and the right for all peoples to determine their own economic, social, and cultural development)
● Meanings of Land acknowledgments, treaties, decolonization, and reconciliation
● Spiritual and relational connections to the Land and music
● The importance of teaching ancestral and traditional stories
● Food sovereignty and politics around food, immigration, labor, and environment
● Impacts of neo-liberalism, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchal social systems, and globalization
● Violence, false promises, corruption in the colonial system
● Struggles in fighting back for justice
● Social activism, resilience, uniting communities people to raise awareness against social injustices
● Idle No More
● Loss of language and culture (Both for Indigenous and racialized people)
● Intergenerational learning
● Intercultural communication: barriers and bridges
● Anti-racist education and practices in daily life
● Gendered and collaborative labor
● Decolonial practices in everyday life
● Critiques of multiculturalism
● Taking responsibility for building reconciliation in everyday life
● Collaborative learning and relational empowerment
● Learning about relational accountability for the knowledge we co-create and co-learn together.

Each of these themes has been explored and unpacked in each of the subsequent findings analysis chapters.

Chapter Five: Community Gardening: A Learning Space for Building Bridges

During the early years of my life in Canada, I engaged in community events voluntarily passionately, emotionally without thinking deeply about any specific benefit. I aimed to keep my leadership skills alive and get to know people around my community for better integration and belongingness. Year after year, I gravitated to the community garden, for my family's and my survival, to feel better, to learn from each other and because I observed that people appreciated the harvest, mostly, but also one another's community relationships. Still, very few people seemed aware of other less obvious benefits I found in the community garden. I learned by doing and discovered an opportunity to learn something collaboratively with community members who were invested in making social changes. Therefore, I began to take various initiatives, such as including art activities for the children, hosting anti-racist workshops, Indigenous Elders' talks, environmental and feminist talks, educational movie nights, and presentations on the benefits of gardeners. It was a great experience, learning and practicing local leadership through awareness-raising events for newcomer and international student gardeners. In bringing gardeners and community guests together at workshops, while cooking our harvest meal, by providing rides to people, supporting the management of childcare, mentoring newcomer women's various needs, and helping them to connect with the community garden information, collecting seeds and saplings for the gardeners and arranging distribution, I began to develop my place in the cross-cultural community gardener's community.

However, the pandemic and a family move to Calgary precipitated an indirect break. The pandemic compelled me to pause my community garden and other volunteer activities. I realized that I needed a peaceful time to reflect on my previous community learnings, and like many others, that I needed self-care, badly. Sometimes, we have to sacrifice to recognize our accomplishments and their impacts on the community and our own lives. So, during the pandemic, I stayed involved with community gardeners through social media and online communities, at a time when there were many in-person community restrictions, including in the community garden. This fallow period helped me to see my gardening activities in a new light.

It was challenging as a settler woman of colour to lead community activities with an unknown shared piece of Land and an unknown community of people with various mindsets. While it took courage to take a leading role with this community garden for a full decade, in this

chapter, I have focused on the years of 2017-2019. Through the community garden, though, throughout my ten-year involvement, I have learned how to survive, speak up for social justice, empower myself, develop my leadership skills, and build bridges among Indigenous and racialized settler communities in Treaty 6 Territory, Canada.

Our Cross-Cultural Community Garden

Our cross-cultural community garden is a shared piece of Land, gardened collectively by a committed cross-cultural group of people. Community gardens use either individual, family, or shared plots on private or public Land to produce a few local fruits, flowers, and vegetables. My first opportunity to engage with a community garden arose in 2010, right after coming to Saskatoon. Part of the University of Saskatchewan's campus, this shared piece of Land comes with community-shared funding and garden equipment, such as watering hoses, jars, and shovels, the gardeners share some seeds, plants, and some of the harvests.

Sharing harvests with a broader community is celebrated by all participating gardeners as the best part of community gardening. A community garden is a place where community gardeners get together to produce healthy organic food and create a community by reducing their dependency on the capital market. Our McEown Park garden is designated for mostly university resident students, most of whom are racialized immigrant and international students similar to my family members and me. The University's Office of Sustainability facilitates and supports the community garden collectively to run throughout the year. A few students take the lead in creating changes and making a better community. My partner and I were among them. Throughout our participation in the community garden, I connected with other community gardens around Saskatoon that are similar to ours.

I was unfamiliar with the community garden concept before coming to Saskatoon, Canada. I grew up with an individual backyard garden where our siblings and parents used to work occasionally together, just for refreshment and to enjoy the connection with Land and nature. In Bangladesh, Land-based gardening work is usually done by hired cheap labour, not the gardener or landowner. The major work would have been carried out by a poor male labourer, and garden owners would do minimal work. However, I saw how my parents were involved by loving the Land which contributed to them being healthy, happy, and content. I have had a passion for gardening since my childhood, and as a result, I have been carrying it for a long time in my mind.

Our community garden stimulated me to become a community builder, find new cross-cultural friends, and embrace my new Canadian identity. It became a unique community to me, where I could rely upon others, mingle without fear, and make many cross-cultural relationships. I had been isolated as a settler woman of colour, a graduate student, a mother, and a community activist who dreams of a just world. I found that as a graduate student, the community garden was a place to develop my leadership skills, get to know people around my community, as well as provide opportunities to get involved with the Land, plants, grass, bees, birds and to explore with the guidance of Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers the meanings of Land in this new country.

I realized our community garden is really an informal learning space, a sort of casual, invisible, unrecognized classroom. In short, I discovered that it is a hybrid space, which means there are several roles that a community garden can play. This quiet garden space has many storied meanings that are both interconnected and often untold. For me, it became a place for relational networking, connecting with community information, creating a sense of belongingness with this new Indigenous Land and its peoples. It became for me a space to learn about interculturalism, by sharing cross-cultural stories, learning about science, about Indigenous worldviews, a place to share and gather interdisciplinary knowledge, to enjoy natural beauty and spirituality, and where children could play with ladybugs, bees, plants, and flowers instead of market-made toys and hypnotizing electronic screens. Our community garden became a source of gentle power and happiness, and for creating new cultural friends through our healthy life and community. My primary motivation was to engage with the community garden in building relationships, having fun, supporting one another, and including making relationships with senior citizens who came to visit their graduate student children and grandchildren. We were trying to improve each other's lives, all centering around a small piece of Land and our shared community activities. As a racialized newcomer woman, our community garden allowed me to place my first footsteps toward an unknown community where I was a stranger but, eventually, I managed to co-create a sense of belongingness. The community garden's participants became part and parcel of my life during my stay in the student residence.

Our cross-cultural community garden activities helped me overcome my life challenges as a newcomer. We started in 2010 with 10 garden plots for 10 different families from three different countries in 2011. In 2018 and 2019, that had increased to 120 plots with families from

28 different countries, 80 children and 400 adults, representing Indigenous, immigrant, refugee, and settler communities. Our cross-cultural community garden activities created many opportunities for us, including spaces for learning about Indigenous Land-based knowledges, healing from the intensities of our very busy lives, cross-cultural mingling and learning spaces, and sites of empowerment, along with many registers, from the personal to the political. Indeed, our community garden activities gave me a new lens through which to look at my life and intellectual growth, challenged my colonialist mindset, and helped me to know who I am today on this stolen Indigenous Land. I would not be who I am today if I had not had the opportunity to be connected with our cross-cultural community garden Land, people, educational activities, and experiential learnings.

Data Used

Drawing upon my auto-ethnographic, transformative learning reflections, as gathered in my common-place books, I have explained my learning experiences with, community educators, scholars, leaders, activists, artists, environmentalists, feminists, children, and youth (ages 2-30), Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and cross-cultural gardeners primarily from University of Saskatchewan campus family residences. In addition to reviewing my commonplace book, I have used my learning reflections, my more recent memories, a student newspaper article from *The Sheaf* on our community garden, and interviews with *The Sheaf* and the CBC. I have also used the funders' yearly reports to compile my learnings. My goal in analyzing these learning reflections is to frame racialized women's empowerment as relevant to future research in support of more equitable gender and racial policies in Canada.

Community Garden as Healing Place

I first experienced our community garden as a healing place, though there are multiple reasons to get involved with a community garden. I benefited from the community garden and its imperatives to get involved with the Land. When I was overwhelmed at the beginning of settlement with two little children, I was looking for an opportunity to alleviate my agonies and frustrations. Thus, the garden became an escape for me. As I struggled to come out from the social alienation and stigma projected onto my cross-religious marriage within the Bangladeshi Canadian Muslim community, the community garden helped me build a new community, where people were not concerned about our religious identities and "stigmatized" marriage. The community garden became a healing place for my family because these new cross-cultural

community members didn't ask questions about our personal choices, religious beliefs, or financial status. It was fun to build relationships with cross-cultural friends and work as a community builder. The community garden helped to reduce my acculturative stress, albeit slowly. It was fun to share my own and our family's multi-dimensional, meaningful stories with newcomer gardeners. Also, I derived great spiritual pleasure as the saplings I planted flourished in the garden. Whenever I might feel exhausted, I could go to the community garden area to listen to nature, the water, birds, bees, and Land, while reading from my ancestors' profound, meaningful teachings, and philosophies. When my father passed away back home and I could not be beside him, I spent my time around the community garden, in order to feel better, because I could feel my father's voice and connection there, through the Land. This Land and nature helped me to remain spiritually connected with my father, even though we were miles apart. These experiences all became a part of my healing journey.

It is this healing that provoked me to commit so much energy to the garden, and to the relationships I formed there.

Community Garden as Opportunity to Learn

When I started to reflect on my learning through our shared community garden, I found five big themes: the community garden as a space for learning about Indigenous peoples and knowledges; community garden as classroom and curriculum, community garden as food security; community garden as a site for building solidarity; community garden as Land for decolonization and reconciliation. These five themes are outlined and discussed below.

Community Garden for Learning about Indigenous Peoples and Knowledge

After arriving in Saskatoon, ten years ago, I did not know much about Indigenous people, their histories, and ways of knowing here, in Canada. I gradually learned about Indigenous worldviews, decolonization, and reconciliation, initially through the Building Bridges program, in our community garden, and then, expanded my learning beyond the garden space. In this section, I comment on what I learned, specifically, in the garden. Indigenous world views and Land-based education, concepts initiated for me in the community garden, have helped me understand my positionality, newly constructed hyphenated identity (Bangladeshi-Canadian), my everyday life challenges, and the importance of learning the meaning of reconciliation from an Indigenous perspective. Over time, the community garden and my gardening activities allowed me to engage with local Indigenous people and their worldviews about environmental

interconnectedness, with anti-racist scholars, and with other social justice activists. In our community garden events and activities, Indigenous Elders' traditional storytelling, prayers, songs, ceremonies, and cultural teachings helped many fellow gardeners build relationships with the Land. We all became better-connected friends and neighbours together.

Indigenous Land-based Education. I have learned from Indigenous scholars that Land-based education offers an environmental approach to understanding Indigenous people's deep connections and relationships with the Land. The community garden events and activities helped gardeners learn how Land recreates our identity – who we are and where we belong. The events and activities created many opportunities to learn about our relationships with the Land and get to know ourselves. Many newcomers and international students were not aware of Canadian colonialist histories and the struggles of the Indigenous peoples of Canada before. Therefore, the events and activities were helpful for learning more. Land-based education offers a welcoming way to understand Canadian history and build bridges among people of diverse cultures. After my immigration, I suffered from an inner disconnect with fellow humans, for many reasons. Land-based education gave me a new path to find my way. Connection with Land helped me focus more deeply on my life and my work of building intercultural bridges. I became keenly interested in Land-based learning and Indigenous ways of knowing, including about the meaning of reconciliation. Learning Indigenous ways of knowing helped me (and other members of the community garden) learn about environmental interdependence, which is integral to Indigenous ways of being in Treaty 6 Territory.

Indigenous Environmental Interdependence. I learned about environmental interdependence knowledge on July 20th, 2017, from an Aboriginal knowledge holder, Dion Tootoosis. Dion's workshop aimed to provide gardeners with an educational and interactive learning experience designed to introduce and enhance their capacity in the areas of Indigenous Land-based knowledge and contemporary transnational issues. For many Indigenous people, all aspects of the environment are interconnected. Understanding ecological inter-connectedness is essential to saving the earth and its creatures from the ravages of neoliberal capitalism. Dion Tootoosis explained to the gardeners how thankfulness is a concept that allows for and demands mutual respect between the loving earth and all of us who inhabit it. Demonstrating thankfulness for the Land and for that which we consume is a necessary step towards having and maintaining a sustainable and respectful relationship with our planet. He shared with us why Indigenous

people show their respect for the Land. We learned together how stories help us understand cultural perspectives, whether through Indigenous stories or those from our own diverse cultural heritages. We all need to observe, illustrate, and analyze living organisms within local ecosystems as part of interconnected food webs, populations, and communities, and as inextricably tied to ourselves.

Story Telling. The workshop facilitated by Indigenous knowledge holder, Dion Tootoosis, highlighted key aspects of Indigenous knowledges in understanding ecosystems. Dion Tootoosis educated attendees on Indigenous ways of learning through stories and how the worldview captured in those stories affects the ways they perceive the natural world and ecological connections. He also described how humans and animals adapt to their environments (biomes) using Indigenous lenses. But the most salient feature of the workshop was involved in teaching about the natural world within a natural context through oral traditions -- also known as "Yarning." In Indigenous pedagogy, "yarning" is an informal way of learning from each other through stories, experiences, and thinking that builds on oral traditions. "I believe 'learning through yarning' helps us learn through sacred stories, builds relationships, and creates a 'safe place' to exchange and engage in conversation" (Farzana Ali, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Community Health and Epidemiology).

Everyone Belongs Equally. Zahra Ghoreishi, a graduate student from Women's, Gender and Sexualities Studies shared her learning reflection from Dion Tootoosis's workshop. She wrote: "It was amazing to learn that in traditional cultures such as those of Indigenous peoples in Canada, women, Elders, and children have been placed centrally and in complementary honour with men in social and familial hierarchies. This is a long-forgotten concept in our deeply patriarchal societies today. Another forgotten idea that Tootoosis reminded us of was that "we don't own the land, the land owns us." As in many other cultures, "we are buried after our death in my culture. In a way, we return to where we originally came from, as it is the land that owns us and embraces us once our time is up"

Community Garden as Classroom and Curriculum

Cultural Space and Learning. Our community garden created a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary learning space through our broader social interactions. In this cross-cultural learning space, I got the opportunity to mingle with Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, Middle Eastern, and other women-of-colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members, white settlers, a

person with special needs, people who are first-generation immigrants in Canada, second-generation diasporic children, historically underrepresented groups, and people on limited incomes. This informal classroom space helped me relate to and learn with cross-cultural families from many different parts of the world involved in our gardening community. They faced settlement challenges like those my family met when coming to Saskatchewan as newcomers. We got the chance to share each other's stressful, challenging life stories and face the same types of racial discrimination and could mitigate them with happy moments. I got the opportunity to engage with many immigrant women and children and made friends with people from many cultural groups. This engaging opportunity helped build a strong sense of community, and I gradually started to come out of my social isolation. However, initially, I did not know the potential learning benefits of the cross-cultural community garden. I now see the garden as a relational space for me to learn, grow together with others, and support cross-cultural networking. It is a way to emphasize working together side by side. I learned about diversity, equity, justice, and inclusivity rights and challenges from this cross-cultural community.

Community garden activities helped me understand what cultural activities mean to me, why they are essential in my life, and who I am as an artistic performer in this Land. Community garden activities also encouraged us to reconnect with our own cultures and creative talents. For me, the garden mainly supports reconnection with my cultural activities (dance, story, poems, literature, film, play, history readings) and my singing life. I learned from the garden workshops with Indigenous and university scholars that multiculturalism had opened some spaces for artists of colour, but at the same time, those spaces remain marginalized.

During a series of Blanket Exercises, which use Indigenous methodologies to demonstrate the shared histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, on the Land as represented by a blanket or blankets, many Indigenous educators taught us that “women are the carriers of culture.” Therefore, women and children were particularly targeted by colonizers for abuse. By targeting women, they targeted the nation's heart and attempted a “cultural genocide.” These teachings helped me want to protect my own ethnic culture and language, as a resource in our co-learning, and because this teaching coincided with the history of the 1971 Bangladeshi liberation war when many Bengali women were systematically raped. I could see that by sharing these stories across our respective histories, we could build solidarities.

Our community garden created hope for new possibilities for advancing the aspirations racialized newcomer artists. It certainly gave me the resiliency to continue my artistic activities. Our community garden played a significant role in reconnecting me with my identity (as a singer). I started to sing around the community garden for many of our shared events and activities; singing helped me re-learn how to build cultural bridges through creative activities and energize my artistic soul and mind. In the community garden, I learned from Indigenous Elders' stories that Indigenous ways of explaining their music, culture, dance, spiritual practices, connections with Land, nature, and cultural ceremonies helped me reconnect with my own cultural identities. In the community garden, gradually, I got involved with Elders' conversations. Listening to Indigenous knowledge holders provided me with guidance and a new perspective on life in this Indigenous Land, which had been missing for me for a long time. This opportunity helped me explore the in-depth meanings of my own cultural activities as an ethnic-cultural performer and activist, as a resource in reconciliation.

Making friendships with Indigenous people and artists in our community renewed my spirit. It offered a new way of thinking and of becoming an artist, every day. I have, therefore, been learning how to decolonize myself through my ways of seeing, knowing, and explaining my cultural activities. I began to understand the purpose and meaning of doing cultural activities in the community garden, as I worked with various groups of fellow gardeners who also brought a positive spirit for challenging colonization, popular culture distortions, and hegemonic western cultural norms. Many Indigenous scholars, Elders, neighbors, and friends in our community garden helped me realize, once again, that my cultural activities are helpful for reclaiming my ethnic identity and keeping my mother tongue, ancestral teachings, and philosophies alive. I have learned from my Indigenous sisters and brothers to take a stand against the invisible mechanisms which sought to prevent me from singing and passing my language and culture forward to the next generation.

Art-Based Space and Learning. McEown Park community adult and children gardeners participated in a workshop called "Coming to know growth and possibility" in June, 2017. Indigenous artist Monique Blom and Professor Dianne Miller explored growth and possibility in the community garden with seventeen school-aged children, using arts-based activities. The main point was to help the children consider multiple ways that growth takes place both in their surroundings and in themselves. Children were encouraged to push against the standard practices

they knew, by drawing objects hidden in a paper bag that they could only sense by touch. They used their non-dominant hand to draw. Workshop instructors then escorted them around the field surrounding the garden with their eyes closed, stopping to explore objects with the gentle power of growth. They then had to map their trip on paper with their eyes closed. The entire activity began with readings of poems about gardening and ended with sharing their pictures and creating a collective poem composed of words that they used as captions for their pictures.

I observed that the children were engaged, relaxed, laughing and chattering with one another, and that the word "hard" was often used. The challenge of reordering the use of their senses was something the children responded to well. I noticed that most were following directions and wanted to do well in the activity. In conversation, they said that markers and pastels are only used in art class, and some judged their work negatively. However, they responded well to Monique's reframing of their judgements when she pointed out the artful qualities of their work. The children asked if the instructors would come back next year. Monique and Dianne asked them to "save the seed" of what they had learned so that they could grow together again. Some asked to have their work put on 'google' and to do an exhibition the following year though I could not make it happen due to a lack of volunteer time and funding support.

Spiritual Space and Learning. I learned from an Indian Canadian environmental and spiritual leader, Anand Chandrakant Thakkar, in August 2018, along with many gardeners, that our community garden is a place for ecological and spiritual education. He addressed issues about gardening as a path to spiritual awakening and connection. I learned from this garden workshop that there are many invisible, unrecognized connections between gardening and spiritual life and that spiritual values are mirrored in gardening activities. Many engaged gardeners have expressed that community and individual gardening experiences foster personal growth and spiritual awareness. For example, the community garden, Land, sprouts, plants, weeds, bees, insects, and harvests help to make relationships with all more-than-human things.

Ecological Space and Learning. Our community garden space helps us to understand that ecological symbiotic relationships are essential to organisms and ecosystems. These relationships within the garden can only be achieved by working with diverse species and they are also enriched when working with a cross-cultural group of people. Gardening is a vehicle for ecological relationships, for instance with birds, worms, insects, bees, soil, water, rain, air, and

even us, as human beings. I learned collaboratively about gardening and its potential for our internal growth, with other gardeners.

The greater the biodiversity in the garden, the greater the cultural diversity of the people, the healthier the ecosystem will be. If a person ensures there are plants that produce pollen throughout spring/summer/fall, and if those pollen-producing plants are distinct types - colours, shapes, then different species of pollinators are attracted, and they will fertilize the fruits and veggies we have planted. Also, there are the predators and the prey - some insects enjoy our crops, and others enjoy dining on the insects that eat our crops. Again - variety keeps the ecosystem healthy, and we are more likely to get our food needs met without using poisons.

Mental Health Space and Learning. Community gardening helps to de-stress our daily lives as we relax into a wider web of relational networks. Like many gardeners, I also believe that the connection with the Land and nature is nurtured through gardening, which stimulates people's minds, souls, and mental health. The community garden Land can become a profoundly sacred space that can foster growth for our inner selves, an interior space just as vital to our growth as the external world. I learnt that a garden is not only a space for plants; it can be a place of dedication and spiritual connection with all natural creatures. Community garden activities helped me to understand environmental and spiritual education, which supported my mental health. The garden encouraged me to find the spiritual meaning of caring for the environment, which was needs-based; therefore, I initiated the creation of spaces dedicated to symbiotic and spiritual connections. Learning about the relationship between gardening and spiritual life was extremely helpful for the growth of my physical, mental, social, and spiritual health. Here I have shared my related feelings about the environmental and spiritual education workshops I attended with our community garden group. Later, I wrote a short piece for the environmental sustainability slam competition which was organized by Graduate Students' Association (GSA) on March 29th, 2017. My performance got the first prize at that competition. I have shared a piece from my performance below:

I became involved with the McEown Park community garden in 2015. This Land helps me to understand the meaning of spirituality and environmental sustainability. Sustainability means regaining my skills, continuing my intellectual development, and taking care of the environment. I derived great spiritual pleasure as the little saplings grew big in the garden planted by me. I enjoyed watching them grow during my leisure time and on my way to school. I also started to derive pleasure from my survival passion, as the garden space became my friend and also where I met my best

friends, i.e., plants. I hardly got a chance to connect with the Land during my life in Sweden, Norway, and the USA as a struggling international student from Bangladesh. I knew that my relationship with this new Indigenous Land and nature would be healing for me. I engaged myself with this university campus Land and started to learn that Land is a space for continuous learning, healing, and a spiritual connection feeling. I began to create a learning culture within myself, as it gave me transformative, sustainable knowledge. I found this space extremely helpful for my everyday mind meditation and keeping my mental health healthy.

During COVID lockdown when I could not connect with that Land anymore, because I had to leave the Saskatoon community garden, I became isolated in a new city, in an apartment which is quite disconnected from the Land. As a result, I became severely mentally ill. I realized again that the Land is therapeutic for my mental health and good for my entire family's well-being. I had grown used to loving the even Land as it became my best friend, and I cannot pass a few days without having a Land walk, and without having my life connected with some kind of garden or gardening experience.

Plants and Music Create Space and Learning. I learned more from Tanjalee Kuhl, an immigration specialist invited to do a workshop on Aug 14, 2018. We got the opportunity as a community to discuss the connections between plants and music from diverse cultural perspectives. We, gardeners, focused on the significance of plants to music and cultural traditions and the significance of music and sound to plants. There was an opportunity to listen to and share music in the garden. Gardeners were encouraged to bring their instruments to play music for one another. It was an informal discussion, a musical time, and fun discussion for everyone who participated. During this event, Chinese, Indian, Bangla, Columbian, Canadian, Jamaican, Jordanian, and Vietnamese cultural performers got together to share each other's musical understandings of the Land, including plants, rocks, animals, weather, and the community gardeners. Here I am sharing an artist and gardener's reflection, whose name is Pallavi Majumder; she is a Bengali singer, songwriter, and composer:

This garden workshop helped me connect with artists of color and musicians as a newcomer. It is a place for networking with community artists and activists. I learned from this workshop that music exists everywhere on our planet, which I knew before, but I got a clearer understanding from this workshop, for example, the wind, leaves, raindrops, waterfalls, chirping of birds, and so on.

We had found a collaborative way to link our beloved music with the Land in our community garden. We got that opportunity many times and, still, we cherish each other whenever we get a chance to get together.

Community Garden as Food Security

A community garden creates food security. It is a source of fresh, organic, and healthy foods. I heard many gardeners say that they spent only ten dollars, just like me, to buy a few packets of seeds. They got hundreds of dollars' worth of vegetables that they could preserve by canning or by storing in the refrigerator, for winter use. I have learned from gardeners and in my personal life that gardening helps save money and gives some level of food security to low-income people. My family could not afford to buy organic or fresh vegetables for a long time, as we were living in poverty, due to our student status. This community garden helped us eat healthy foods and raise three healthy children for more than a decade. This community garden enhanced our food security and family livelihoods, while teaching us to avoid market dependence.

Community Garden as Community Solidarity

A Community Building Space. In the community garden, I got the opportunity to play a role as a community builder and an informal community educator, in order to teach the gardeners who we are here in this stolen Indigenous Land to learn the social benefits of gardening. This community garden inspired me to work as a changemaker, working towards a healthier planet for all. I had the opportunity to share my knowledge on how to make relationships with Indigenous people by initiating many cross-cultural community events and activities. The goal was to work toward greater social justice for all. For instance, events and activities included workshops about anti-racism, Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers invited as guest speakers, and working through various versions of an Indigenous-led Blanket Exercise. As well, to promote greater social justice, I hosted or participated in women's conversation circles, cultural activities, cross-cultural harvest potlucks, children's art activities, saree wrapping, community radio shows, and ethnic and cultural performances through music, dance, and stories. Many informal social activities positively impacted the community and helped us integrate and adapt faster to our new community.

An Empowering Space. The community garden activities were empowering for me as an immigrant woman. Kearney (2009) argues that it is empowering for all committed participants. Various community garden activities helped me engage with community members regularly. I worked there voluntarily, initially, but later I got hired as a garden coordinator. This role was valued positively by the gardeners and the university community. It helped me earn

social dignity and belonging, empowered me to face the daily biases that targeted my inter-religious marriage, and supported me through settlement challenges. Community garden members encouraged me to move forward with courage and confidence and to stand up to destigmatize my independent marriage decision and secular-religious identity. Therefore, I started to take a stand to talk about intercultural and cross-cultural education, publicly. Our community garden events and activities gave us a platform to create a new and meaningful pathway of life and to fight back against all sorts of challenges that we faced at the beginning of our settlement. Through this community garden, I connected with many volunteer workers around the community. Those experiences helped me envision and dream of embarking on my current doctoral research.

A Bridge-Building Space. Our cross-cultural community garden created new possibilities and feelings of hope every day that we could build bridges through cross-cultural activities. My experience with the community garden gave me immense pleasure, belongingness, connectedness, and purpose, because I was engaged with its activities. Finally, I got the chance to be reconnected with the Land when I needed it most. Through our community garden and its teachings, I built an invisible, spiritual bridge between my Bangladeshi Land and this stolen Canadian Indigenous Land.

A community garden is a hybrid place, which means it has played many roles in my life. It played the role of a healer, mentor, and connector, and it became a babysitter in our lives, especially during the summer, when the girls could play nearby while I planted, pruned, weeded, harvested, and got some free time to pay attention to the gardeners' informal everyday discussions.

Our cross-cultural community garden inspired me to engage with other kinds of community activities. Garden activities allowed me to network with community leaders, activists, scholars, artists, event organizers, filmmakers, and community volunteers. For example, a filmmaker came to our garden to make a short documentary about our community garden which was shared with the wider community at a public event on culture day. Many members of the local media – CBC, *The Sheaf*, CTV, Global TV, *The StarPhoenix* – came to know about the benefits of community gardens. Through those exposures and media connections, I was inspired to build multiple networked engagements within the broader community. For instance: joining our local settlement organization's board, hosting a community

radio show, teaching Bangla music and cultural performances to Bangladeshi Canadian and cross-cultural garden community children, organizing potluck social events to bring people together, and volunteering at my daughter's school and for my partner's university classes and with many diverse ethnocultural social groups. I found that the community garden's informal activities offered valuable, constructive, and life-saving exposures to understanding my place as a guest in this Indigenous Land. Our community garden created many paths as a vehicle to build transnational bridges across cultures and as a tool to learn about the reconciliation process with Indigenous communities.

Community Garden as Land for Decolonization and Reconciliation

Decolonizing Myself. Indigenous worldviews and teachings in our community garden helped me learn about the meaning of decolonization and reconciliation. For example, Indigenous Elders' teachings about the Land, water, rocks, fire, animals, and nature have influenced my thoughts on learning about decolonization and reconciliation processes. Reconciliation means taking responsibility for learning about Indigenous people in Canada, their histories, and their stories, respecting and honouring Indigenous knowledge and building a relationship with Indigenous and Non-Indigenous peoples. Our community garden helped me to take these responsibilities into my everyday practices. For example, I now understand more about the meanings of relationships with the Land, after spending ten years in the same community garden, building continuity with the other gardeners. I know that I am as connected to the Land as I was to my mother through the umbilical cord, providing me with fresh oxygen, local species of chirping birds, bees, worms, weeds, and flowers. The day I received the small plot in our community garden, I started to smell the soil and felt almost like I was touching my mother, whom I had not seen for a long time, and then who passed away while I was on my settlement journey in a new Land. My other fellow gardeners found similar connections.

Our cross-cultural community garden activities encouraged me to overcome my deskilling, which means, in part, that I had forgotten to sing and smile. I have started to come back again because I got the opportunity to sing around the garden, without any fear. Many community children and ethnic and Indigenous artists encouraged me to be confident and sing again, to help keep my heart happy. Through our cross-cultural activities, I have learned how to create intercultural understandings and how we can be a part of the learning processes of decolonization and reconciliation in new and creative ways. Today, I can still sing Bangla songs around any

community garden premises. I love singing “We shall overcome one day” in English and “*Amra Korbo Joy*” in Bangla, to remind me and my audiences of the perseverance of minoritized peoples and places. The meaning of this song helps to reconcile me with new peoples and their unique histories in order to create solidarities. My partner and I have recently started learning the Cree language and songs, since we realized that learning an Indigenous language would be an act of reconciliation and goodwill, and my daughters have been learning about pow wow dances, as well.

The Land Teaches Human Responsibilities. I know I have many responsibilities toward this Land, Indigenous peoples, and their struggles. As an ally, I also understand that the Indigenous battle is essential for all racialized settlers, as we are all responsible for what is happening to this Land. I grew up in a colonized culture in a capitalistic, colonial educational system. When I became a rootless, Landless, diasporic person, facing tremendous religious discrimination, I started to wonder who I was becoming. I began to wonder why I thought I could escape some of the patriarchal and religious violence I grew up with by coming to this new Land. At first, I knew no one in the community, had no Indigenous friends in the city, did not dare to study at the university, and believed that pursuing my professional career was hopeless. I became connected with volunteers and activists through the community garden, from whom I learned about decolonization, social justice issues, and anti-racist education. From those community garden activities, I learned to thank Indigenous peoples for offering their friendship, sharing their Lands, healing, gentle knowledges, and for accepting one another’s cultures, languages, and faiths. Indigenous activists and scholars provided a space to help me deconstruct the neoliberal, hyper-individuated, profit-motive ways of seeing the world. I remember a saying by an Indigenous Elder in our community garden, “Land is for sharing, not for owning,” a concept that Indigenous Bangladeshi people also follow. However, I did not learn about decolonization in my previous educational life or growing up in Bangladesh. It took many years for me to learn these new ways of knowing about the Land and about Bangladesh’s colonial history. It is helpful to understand my decolonization process as part of who I am becoming as a researcher. I have also learned how sharing a piece of Land can build gentle processes of caring for the entire community.

In building bridges, I have observed from my community garden activities that most immigrant people do not have an interest in learning about decolonization and reconciliation.

Many people in my student residence building are international students and recent newcomer immigrants, highly educated from their countries of origin, with many pursuing a second master's or Ph.D. degree from a different discipline. Most are not interested in Land-based education because they have no background knowledge about it from their home countries or from their prior or current education. Before they came to Canada, they had many misconceptions about Indigenous communities and were not particularly invested in learning about Indigenous world views. Many wanted to produce organic harvests to save on grocery bills, but also to enjoy working with plants, and to have an experience of ownership. As the garden's cultural coordinator, I faced many challenges organizing garden workshops on environment and sustainability, food sovereignty, and Land-centered spirituality. For instance, a computer science Ph.D. student gardener challenged me when I told him about Indigenous Elders' teachings about sharing the land:

Individuals own the land, corporations own the land, and the university owns the land, towns, or the Crown. Who cares about sharing land? I came here to get my Ph.D., not to learn about an inferior, vanishing, primitive, underdeveloped race. They get a lot of money from the government. They do not pay taxes; they use drugs and alcohol because they love fun and have plenty of cash in their pockets.

This person is not the only one who believes in such stereotypes and who is not interested to learn about Land based knowledge, Indigenous communities, and their philosophies. In time, I hope that my life experiences, engagements with the Land, and knowledge might inspire others to learn about Indigenous world views, cultures, and approaches to substantive reconciliation.

Building bridges among Indigenous and immigrant communities in a community garden can help more people know about Canada's colonialist history. For instance, most international student gardeners (from my ten years of experience) do not know that Indigenous peoples in Canada have undergone five hundred years of colonization. Many recent migrants have little knowledge about residential school histories and their consequences, and many of them are not aware of the 2008 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They know little about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 2015 Calls to Action. Non-Indigenous Canadians' and newcomers' needs to appreciate that reconciliation represents only the minimum standard for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Working with garden community members, I have learned how to motivate international students, newcomer immigrants, and refugees to engage them with Indigenous histories learning

spaces and how to start baseline solidarity work for reconciliation (Chung, 2016; Nagy, 2017; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Younging, 2018). I thought deeply about how a reconciliation framework must be incorporated into our community garden activities. We need to create a platform to share this knowledge with newcomer community members who do not have access to Indigenous world views. From my ten years of community garden activities, I have also learned that reconciliation means connecting with my own country of origin and Canadian colonized histories, creatively.

Through community garden activities over the past ten years, I have come to understand that building bridges means that non-Indigenous people are responsible for learning about, honouring, and acknowledging treaties. When I first arrived in Canada, I did not know the meaning of Land, reconciliation, and treaties. I started to understand the importance of reconciliation from Indigenous Elders, visiting scholars in our community garden, and my connections the university, and I am still learning. It might take my whole life to know enough to align my path as fully as possible with the new futures that reconciliation offers. What I have learned from my life experience is that reconciliation means to live together with multiple faiths (in my case in Bangladesh, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist) with love and respect, without social exclusion and without practicing religious dogmatism. My ongoing learning helps me illuminate and eliminate complicit othering and accept different religions, cultures, races, classes, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations. Reconciliation is, for me, a lifelong unlearning and re-learning process. Through my activities in a community garden, I became an advocate of inter-cultural relationships and knowledge sharing, in order to create positive changes around the community and to build harmony across multiple ways of knowing.

In return, I am constantly working to define, redefine, and un-learn my colonized upbringing, thoughts, and identities as a process of personal decolonization. While learning about the decolonization process, I learned to relate to the Land and nature. This learning helps align my resilience with these life-sustaining forces, reinforcing my responsibility to serve the Land and take up my treaty role as an ally with Indigenous peoples, who are its most informed protectors. We all need to work together with empathy and responsibility to learn more about reconciliation.

Building bridges among Indigenous and immigrant communities is an ongoing process. It is about meaningful engagements with the Land, understanding colonial legacies of oppression,

and practicing anti-racism in everyday activities. Newcomers need to learn about the struggles of Indigenous peoples and respect them, because we all live in Indigenous Lands. Newcomers need to become allies and take a firm stand against all sorts of systemic oppressions against Indigenous peoples. This will not only help to create belongingness with the Indigenous people and their Lands; it will also empower immigrants and their future generations. Newcomers will find new ways to understand oppression and injustices that affect their lives. I have learned that newcomers could benefit from listening to Indigenous voices and experiences and respecting the wisdom of Survivors, Elders, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers. It is a collective responsibility to learn about Land, decolonization, and reconciliation, which I have gathered as a harvest from my own life experiences through the community garden's educational activities.

Discussion

This chapter has explored the role of community gardening in shaping *who I am* in this stolen Indigenous Land. As a racialized settler woman, I have found that community gardening has helped me realize my need to learn about Indigenous peoples, their histories, and cultures as a process of developing meaningful cultural bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Having learned that, I initiated educational events to model and teach about culture, gender inclusivity, and towards enhancing the lives of BIPOC communities, refugee women and their families, through events that included Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers to share about Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs about the Land. As a result, I co-learned over ten years that the community garden's educational initiatives and gender-inclusive approaches can enhance the livelihoods of BIPOC settlers, refugee women, and their families and can lead to improvements in decolonizing Canada and reconciling with Indigenous peoples. In my life experience, the University of Saskatchewan campus community garden has been a place to empower communities, build bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, strengthen community capacities, and improve self-determination among Indigenous and cross-cultural newcomer communities.

The community garden project has provided a powerful way of building bridges among Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. It connects with neighbourhoods, enriches experiences, and inspires us to learn about new ways of knowing, through co-learning, and re-learning, together. In the last ten years, I have experienced how people are changing their communities through the power of community gardening. Our community garden is a place for

relational networking, connecting with community needs, and creating belongingness within this new Indigenous Land. It is a beautiful place to share cross-cultural stories, learn about Indigenous science and worldviews about the Land, exchange interdisciplinary knowledge, and enjoy natural beauty and spirituality. This garden fosters a positive environment in which to watch children play as they grow up peacefully with nature. This garden has created allyships and a welcoming space for 2SLGBTQ2IA+ people through its anti-racist and decolonizing educational activities. I have seen through my gardening activities that youth are beginning to learn about Canadian history and understand the deeper meanings of Land, decolonization, and reconciliation.

Community gardening activities have taught me about rebuilding relationships with various communities and Indigenous peoples, personally, in terms of my intellectual and social development, and supporting peoples and our beloved places by supporting the environment. Therefore, I have learned that building bridges is my own, and also a shared responsibility, to learn about the meaning of Land, decolonization, reconciliation, honouring, and acknowledging Indigenous treaties. As an immigrant, it is my responsibility to learn and talk about reconciliation and to learn about treaties or unceded Lands, depending on what territory we are living in. Through my various community engagements and community gardening work for the past ten years, I have discovered the ways I am responsible for educating myself, sharing this knowledge with my children, friends, and community members. I am also committed to doing the work of standing in solidarity with Indigenous peoples to make sure that reconciliation happens according to their needs.

Chapter Six:
Challenges for Racialized Artists of Colour in Canada:
Learnings from the Community Radio

Racialized and newcomer artists in Canada have many unheard stories and challenges, and my life is no exception. Therefore, I organized a total of six community discussions with racialized artists from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Russia, Chile, and Africa, along with Ness Creek music festival staff members and Indigenous community cultural performers, throughout 2018 and 2019 at the CFCR community radio studio, Saskatoon, where I volunteered as a host. Through connections developed via CFCR community radio, I also volunteered with the Ness Creek music festival as a Cultural Connections Co-Ordinator for nine years. It took many years for participating artists to get to know each other through various multicultural community events around Saskatoon, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Lloydminster, and Prince Albert, including Folkfest, Prairie Prism, The Fringe Festival, various cultural events, hosted by Nutrien the Western Development Museum, Motif, Tapestrama, Lloydfest and many more. Because of people's different work schedules, life challenges, and cultural differences, it took me many years to develop awareness-raising, solidarity-creating community discussions with other minoritized and artists of colour. In this chapter, I have used the names of the racialized artists, feminists and anti-racist community activists who gave me consent to do so and pseudonyms for those who wish to remain anonymous. Our discussions centred on how racialized and minoritized artists struggle to maintain cultural continuity, mother languages and classical art forms, and to sustain their artistic growth, personally and professionally.

My Story as a Racialized Woman Artist in Saskatoon

I was born into a liberal Muslim family and grew up in big cities, including the capital of Bangladesh. My mother, however, was born into a conservative Muslim family and grew up in a small district in Bangladesh with many religious and social restrictions as a Muslim woman. Therefore, my mother faced tremendous challenges pursuing any cultural or sports activities outside her family environment, as my grandparents did not allow her to do so. My grandparents maintained strict Muslim cultural practices during the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. Therefore, my mother struggled to break the patriarchal Islamic and social barriers she had grown up with during her married life in the 1970s. She gave up wearing *Burkha*, *veil* or *hijab*, bought an Indian harmonium, and dreamt of teaching music to me and my siblings, as she started to learn music

with her children. My father returned that Indian harmonium and argued with my mother, "Muslim girls should not sing and dance publicly. The Muslim community does not appreciate and accept female performers." My mother fought for her three girl children to be educated in the arts, culture, and physical activities (biking, swimming, driving, badminton, tennis, handball, volleyball, soccer etc.) beside our mainstream education. She continuously challenged my father for broader futures for my other siblings and me, attempting to break the social and religious barriers that constrained us. Because of my mother's resilience to fight against Islamic dogma, I grew up as a child artist in a Muslim family in Bangladesh.

My parents were not culturally educated, which means they did not have any training in music, dance or acting from any formal institution, even though they had university degrees. Therefore, I was in a constant battle to continue my cultural and sports activities as a Muslim girl child. Later in life, during the 1990's, I qualified to join the prestigious Bangladeshi National Television and Radio corporation (in Bangla, it is called *Betar*) as a ranked youth artist, with regular performances on both Bangladesh Television (BTV) and radio (*Betar*, the first private radio station, Radio Metro Wave). I left my home country for higher studies in 2003. My performances centred around singing 'Poncho Kobi' songs, Indian Classical Music, theatre acting, and anchoring as a news broadcaster and presenter until I left for Sweden as an international student when I was 23 years old. As a performer, I had more than fifteen years of training in Indian Classical music and Bangla devotional, folk, and patriotic songs. Since childhood, I received many national prizes as a child artist in diverse categories such as singing, acting, dancing, recitation, debate, and motivational speaking.

When I left my home country almost twenty years ago, carrying my heavy Indian harmonium, *Tanpura*, would have been impossible. It was once an integral part of my daily singing life. I had been familiar with this specific instrument and started to practice for vocal performances when I was three and a half years old. It was almost impossible for me to practice singing without traditional musical instruments. Indian classical music and devotional Bangla songs were my performative focus in Bangladesh. My parents provided opportunities to work with professional *Gurus* who emphasized classical musical training as preparation to be a better human being, rather than a professional or commercial singer. Once I started to do well in the performance world in Bangladesh, my parents allowed me to perform publicly. Because the audience, and many music teachers and cultural administrators admired my singing talent, they

encouraged my parents to help me develop my artistic gifts. I used to perform confidently on stage, TV, and Radio from the ages of 5 to 6 years old.

My decolonial feminist, anti-racist, Land-based and social justice lessons started through these childhood cultural activities. I used to sing ‘*Poncho Kobi*’ and Fakir Lalon’s songs. Those songs are enriched with an enchanting melody, melancholic composition, a simple philosophy of life and commitments to social justice. Those Bangla songs and related cultural activities were Land-based, taking a stand for underprivileged people, and challenging the biases of colonizers. Those poetic works were directly connected to the monsoons, our loving earth, rivers, mountains, clouds, Indigenous peoples, farmers, rural life, and nature. They carry deep spiritual and philosophical meanings, histories of the Land and peoples, cultural stories, and teachings. My Bangla songs and dances are mostly connected to the partition of India and Pakistan (1947), the language movement of Bangladesh (1952), and Bangladesh’s liberation war (1971). I specialized in songs written by the five most significant poets of Bengal, i.e., Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Dwijendralal Roy (1863-1913), Rajanikanta Sen (1865-1910), Atul Prasad Sen (1871-1934) and Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). My thoughts were shaped by their cultural teachings, since childhood, because my father introduced me to their literary and musical works. These poets spread the message of social equality and love through their poems and songs. I am also deeply passionate about Fakir Lalon Shah’s (1772-1890) songs and anti-racist philosophies. My parents used to love ‘*Poncho Kobi’s and Fakir Lalon’s* songs, specifically *Lalon Geeti*, *Tagore song*, *Nazrul geeti*, and *Dijendro geeti*, and my father would teach their philosophies at informal family get-togethers.

Fakir Lalon and Kazi Nazrul Islam were against religious conflicts; they produced many songs and poems about Hindu-Muslim relations and multi-faith solidarity. They critically questioned socially constructed religious identities. Many of their songs and poems mock identity politics, religious divisions, and violence against women. Through his writing and songs, Fakir Lalon rejected nationalisms at the height of the anti-colonial nationalist movements on the Indian subcontinent. His songs go beyond class or caste divides and stood against religious racism at that critical time. He supported pre-marital sexual relationships over waiting for traditional marriage. As a poor Bengali peasant class writer, he never disclosed his religious identity or his caste in order to challenge the role of divisive identity politics. The Baul philosophies not only reject external rituals but also strongly condemn caste and gender binaries.

Learning about 'Poncho Kobi's' and Fakir Lalon's literary and musical works and their philosophies of intellectual and social freedom through accessible songs, made me who I am today as an artist and human being. They helped me think critically and break free from the shackles of my traditional society, planting planted the seeds of non-binary, decolonial feminist and social justice thinking at an early stage of life. I considered the practice of singing these songs as an integral part of my path towards self-realization. However, I did not have the opportunity to look back and nurture that knowledge while I was struggling for survival as a rootless racialized immigrant woman.

I cannot separate my 'self' and my rich legacy of philosophical songs, history, and culture. I grew up with a Sanskrit song: *Gururbrahmaa gururvishnuh gururdevo maheshvarah gurureva para brahma Tasmai Shriigurave namah*. This Sanskrit prayer means: The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, and *Guru Deva* is *Maheswara (Shiva)*. The *Guru* is the *Para-Brahman* (Supreme Brahman), Salutations to that Guru. *Guru* or teacher was compared to a God and treated as a combination of the *Trimurty (Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheswar)*, as well as the supreme one. I have translated and taught this song to our community and my children at home. I always explain the context of each performance piece, not only as light entertainment but as part of a deep philosophical tradition based on disciplined commitments to humanity. According to Indian culture, I have learned to believe that a child receives their first physical birth from their parents. But the second birth happens at the hands of their teacher, because a teacher shows the student the art of living, providing new perspectives through new knowledge. Teachers shape the morals of learners. In Indian culture, the *Guru* or teacher is given a high position right after the mother and father. A *Guru* is a learned person who can remove the darkness of ignorance ('*Gu*' means darkness and '*ru*' means to remove). These teachings came from the *Srimad Bhagavat Gita*, but as a Muslim descendant, my exposure to them was rare, because this worldview originates from the sacred scriptures from ancient India and the Hindu religion. My *Guru* offered a secular view, that never divided Hindu and Muslim learners or practitioners.

The word *Guru* also has many connotations; a spiritual guide, teacher of fine arts or knowledge giver, formal and informal institutional teacher, a person elevated in spirit and strength, or one with a calm mind and clear thoughts/ wisdom. Therefore, due respect must be offered to such a teacher, who acts as an usher. *Guru Vandana* is a prayer from a student to her *Guru* or teacher, which I learned on the first day of my cultural journey. The students say, you

are my *Guru*, who taught me how to create things, preserve things, beautify my arts, and shape my thoughts. A *Guru* also teaches how to eliminate concepts and practices that are not good, negative, or bad for humanity and our loving earth. I offer my devoted humble thanks to my *Guru* through my singing and performing arts regularly. I still believe a *Guru* can transform disciples through their presence, sharing spiritual knowledge about the arts (dance, music, acting, and others).

My *Gurus* taught me to be devoted to my music, and not to abuse the pure form of Indian classical music and devotional songs. This training prevented me from straying away from the pure traditional form of music, toward capitalist approaches. My music and cultural activities are my worship which requires a special platform to perform and practice. This kind of music aims to achieve spiritual pleasure in the soul and purify or cleanse our minds and uplift our spirits, with the ability to heal because it is connected to Land, a meditational mood and reverent environment. When I started to perform professionally, my parents and family accepted my performances as part of my academic and learnings life because they saw my passion and dedication to this knowledge. My community also supported me as my performances helped people to connect with our Land, ancestors, culture, and history. I devoted my “self” to music and my *Gurus* for more than 15 years because of my great love and respect for them and their lifetime of commitment to music, the Land and my ancestors from India and Bengal, including my parents. Without an informed audience in the western world, I have still carried this treasure within me, as part of my heritage and sense of myself and my mission as an activist and academic.

My Artist’s Life in Bangladesh and Canada

In the following table, I provide a simplified exploration of my lived experiences as an Artist of color in Canada and as a mainstream Muslim female artist in Bangladesh.

Table 6.1: Situating Myself as an Artist of Colour in Canada and as a Mainstream Muslim Woman Artist in Bangladesh

Muslim Female Artist’s Life in Bangladesh	Artist of Colour Life in Canada
As a Muslim Woman, it is challenging to be a public figure without any stigma	Less challenges from my religious identity to pursuing an artistic life without stigma
Many social and patriarchal challenges for middle-class women (For any religion)	Class issues are not as acute here in Canada for BIPOC artists
Earning living through artistic life or profession is possible but hard	Earning living through artistic life is not possible at all for BIPOC

Obtaining a Bangladeshi performing arts degree or certificate courses and qualification is accessible	Obtaining a Canadian performing arts degree or certificate courses and qualifications is not accessible
Language advantages (Bangla speaker), and no accent issues	Language and accent issues are severe to working in Canadian media
Foreign credential recognition is quick	Non-recognition of foreign credentials is extremely complicated
Easy to know deeply about the culture, history, poets, writers, political context, social context, class issues, gender issues and performance context	Almost zero knowledge about the culture, history, poets, writers, political context and performance context, class and gender issues, whiteness, and Indigenous people in Canada
Cultural familiarity and knowledge about print media, and electronic media were easy	Cultural shock requires many years to overcome, learning how to get connect print and electronic media
Many Bangla and English newspapers, TV (around 60 TV channels) and radio (around 6 channels), and more opportunities to work with media	Few daily newspapers, TV (around 3 to 4) and radio channels, and almost no opportunities to work with print or electronic media
Had parents, siblings, and extended family nearby to provide rides at night, or early morning like at 6.00 am after shooting and helped to organize or collect performance props	No extended family support for childcare rides during hard winter and preparing ethnic performance props in Canada
Available transportation is not safe (even in daytime because of random sexual assaults) for women who work in public media. Taxi is affordable for middle-class people	No driving license: reliance on public transportation accessibility and during winter hard to use public transportation and a taxi is expensive
Had a decent income from performance life	No income/ low income/ occasional honoraria and scholarships, bursaries
It was possible to perform almost every day or regularly	Performance opportunities only in community events yearly twice or three times maybe, almost no opportunity
Risky to female artists due to sexual abuse and a chance of involvement with media mafias, with and many more abusive and criminal activities	Lack of familiarity with the Canadian media's work environment
Make-up artists were affordable and available	Make-up artists are not affordable and readily available for artists of colour here in Saskatoon
Indian instruments and percussionists at recording studios, and production houses are available and affordable	Indian instruments, percussionists and recording studios are not available
Many opportunities to take lessons on Indian cultural performances and to grow as a performer	Almost zero opportunity for taking voice or dance, musical instrument lessons focused on Indian cultural activities

A huge Bangladeshi audience/viewers appreciated my performance with respect and honour; everyone knows the national media artists	Small Bangladeshi population and media support, no respect and honour; very few know the local ethnic artists
It was easy to pass on the language and culture to the next generation.	It is extremely hard here to pass on the culture and language
Surrounded by the artist community and audiences	Isolated from artist communities and audiences
Easy to work as a freelancer and independently as a producer	Not possible to think about freelancers or to be a paid producer

Table 6.1 makes visible an outline of some of the advantages or opportunities I experienced in Bangladesh as a Muslim woman artist and the situation I here in Canada as an artist of colour. This picture is necessarily incomplete but introduces how my shifting social positions and systemic barriers reveal the likelihood of death of an ethnic artist more clearly. I earned dignity as an artist in Bangladesh. After immigrating to Canada, I got a new identity as a minority, BIPOC, female artist of colour, who is therefore constructed as “inferior,” even while faced with many structural barriers to my survival as a newcomer with aspirations for justice. This experience made me realize yet again that my “majority” and my “minority within a minority” identities are socially created. My life’s artistic progress and interruptions trace the effects of unequal colonial power structures, gender bias, and racism in both my country of origin and my new home country. This comparative table tells me not to idealize my home country or Canada. Things are not perfect anywhere because of the role of nation states, neoliberalism, capitalism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.

Challenges to Continuing My Cultural Activities Abroad

When I left Bangladesh and was transitioning into my life abroad, it was hard for me to live without my cultural activities, media platforms and artists’ communities. As a first-time traveller in Europe, I left Bangladesh with only my necessary belongings, due to luggage weight limits. I had to live without my Indian harmonium for more than ten years because Indian instruments were unavailable in the new cities where I lived. I could seldom speak my mother tongue, because I did not have any Bengali speaking community, there, without time to build my cultural community as an international student. On top of that, I struggled to survive in academia with a small amount of scholarship money and with the demands of academic studies in the English language. That meant I could not sing or practice for many years in my diasporic life.

Due to a lack of performance opportunities in Sweden, Norway, and the USA, as well as lack of childcare and extended family supports while also living in poverty, I could not join the Bangladeshi diasporic community in order to help keep my language, culture, and artistic growth alive. Due to my stigmatized social identity, I willingly isolated myself from other Bangladeshis for safety and to protect my mental health from toxicity. As a trained, professional TV and radio performer and broadcaster in Bangladesh, I was not comfortable performing in an unprofessional musical setup without proper percussion, technical, and stage support. Bengali community organizers also expected me to perform free of cost without any honorarium or token of appreciation because of the lack of funding support for their community events.

Diasporic artists face a considerable lack of logistics support from amateur events organizers. Because they are not educated in cultural activities, they would devalue my training, which was hard for me to bear. Local Bangla community stages are often occupied mostly by family and friends those who can sing or dance and like to have fun together. Amateur artists do not expect to be paid. Meanwhile local community politics may not always provide a healthy site of practice for the arts and trained diasporic artists. When diasporic community organizers and audiences disrespect a formally trained artist's identity, they may prevent newly arrived trained artists from growing and contributing to the community artistically, which is not conducive to cultural growth or empowerment for the subsequent generations. Therefore, I started volunteering my time and cultural education backstage and began to train local community children.

I was deeply demoralized not to find community-sponsored performance spaces in diasporic Bangladeshi communities in Canada. I also could not interest the mainstream media in my work, due to differences in language, musical skills, and ethnicity. I grew up as a solo performer, but for singing, I needed group support (various percussion support, mostly *Tabla* drums). Although I could not pursue my singing activities in the West, I was able to sing at home when my partner brought a harmonium from Bangladesh during the trip to his mother's funeral in 2011.

After my children were born, I was faced with a lack of childcare. I was also unsure how to pass my artistic qualities and teachings to my own and community children. Without community support, how would I teach Bangla music or culture to my children? I was not in a position to travel back home often for financial reasons, and it was not safe to go back to

Bangladesh anymore, due to my interfaith marriage. Without a Bengali-speaking community, it was almost impossible to give the children exposure to my ethnic-cultural teachings and heritage. YouTube videos were the only means to show them Bengali culture and people. It made me constantly worried, sad, and depressed, as I floundered without South Asian or Western artists' community in Saskatoon during the first five years after our arrival in Saskatoon.

Since I did not have a driver's license, did not know the community and the artists relevant to my interests, and had two small children on my lap when I came to Saskatoon, I was not in a position to build a comprehensive network with other community artists. Twelve years ago, social media was not as popular as today, and I did not have a cell phone for more than ten years, or adequate computer access outside of public libraries and university libraries, once I became a student. It took all my energy to receive national-level competitive awards during high school, college and university and make myself a national-level performer in Bangladesh. It took my entire lifetime of training and preparation to produce resonant performance pieces. Similarly, this doctoral research has taken my life energy for the last eight years. Now, if I moved to other parts of the world and those countries de-valued my Canadian doctoral degree, how would I survive?

My musical and cultural activities live in my impulses, which are connected to my spiritual, emotional, and intellectual well-being; musical and artistic practices are therapeutic for me. My cultural activities are like oxygen. I face breathing problems when I do not have the proper flow of singing opportunities and the hope to grow as a performing artist. Lack of performance opportunities and hopelessness about cultural continuity have affected me and my daily life, including through physical and mental health issues over the years. Because the arts taught me universalism, humanism, anti-racism, feminism, social justice and how to cultivate love for community and people, my brain and body grow numb, my body starts to shiver, my eyes get blurry, and my chest becomes heavy, on a regular basis. Systemic barriers are mountain high, and my life is like a fish without a river, trapped in an iron cage or aquarium. I still try to live as an artist because I have not died, and my cultural activities and musical knowledge still provide me with the strength to move forward.

Besides mood transformation and healing powers (such as alleviating depression and anxiety), Indian classical music and devotional Bangla songs promote mindful, emotional awareness. Therefore, when I engage with Indian classical music and Bangla devotional songs, I

usually undertake a journey deep into my inner self, back to the building blocks of creation where all the answers to our problems lie hidden, waiting to be discovered or answered. It gives constructive food for and opportunities to see the world differently. Today, I feel that my sadness is my strength, and that my sadness and joyfulness together help me to re-learn and un-learn. My sadness has become a part of my decolonial re-learning process, and it is re-connecting me with the Land and Indigenous informal teachings, yet again.

My rollercoaster life journey has taught me resilience and to know who I am, who my ancestors are and what my responsibility is in today's chaotic neo-liberal, colonial, and capitalistic world. Today, I realize that all peoples once had connections to their homelands, but due to colonialism, a global neo-liberal economic system and emphasis on profit-making, and consumer culture, we all have been chasing after technologies and luxuries, while mindfulness went missing, disconnecting us from the Land, communities, spirituality, accountabilities, relationalities, people, love, and responsibilities. After exploring my lived experiences as a racialized settler woman, I have learned that connection with the Land can help us to reclaim our cultural identities, histories, cultural teachings, languages, and artistic expressions. And respect for one another's rooted knowledges only can help us to know who we are and what are our responsibilities are in this new Indigenous Land. These rooted knowledges can help us to decolonize our minds, religions, languages, cultures, identities, and rootless upbringings.

A Hope Sparked Through Saskatoon's Sargam Vocal Performance Group

Until 2011, I used to feel like someone had grabbed my pen and told me not to write, think, or produce any creative pieces. I observed and shared my feelings with many artists around the community, and they shared similar experiences with me. I realized I need to protect my artistic 'self' 'and other artists' lives, but I did not know how. I was unsure how to accentuate the importance of cultural preservation and continuity around the community. I was absorbed in the assimilation process, so most of the time, I did not have the opportunity to think that time was passing, and I was losing my artistic practices, getting older and losing touch with many important cultural values. After one year living in an isolated apartment in Saskatoon downtown, we moved to a campus student residence which helped to improve my life, as I slowly emerged from isolation. In 2011, I connected with several graduate-student Bangladeshi families at the same student residence, Souris Hall, who had children the same age as mine. I was also connected with other graduate students' isolated spouses and children at the student residence,

from many cultures. Those few Bangladeshi diasporic community children inspired me to start a cultural activity group for teaching the Bangla language, songs, dancing, recitation, and so on. I received a positive response from the children's mothers, because they faced the same challenges as me. Like me, they lacked driver's licenses, their children were small, and they were exhausted from raising children and supporting their graduate student husbands. They, too, had language barriers in their efforts to integrate with the mainstream Canadian communities.

There is a community room for student residents where we used to take turns booking the space so we could sit together, particularly during weekends. The name of our informal community ensemble was the *Sargam Vocal Performance Group*. I started a new life with my two little daughters and five other children in that student residence room. The community children were 3 to 7 years old when we began, and they became friends with my children. Friendships were enhanced by attending the same events, singing the same song, and dancing together.

Sargam Vocal Performance Group as a First Stepping Stone in Saskatoon

Establishing the *Sargam Vocal Performance Group* became my first steppingstone for resuming my cultural activities in Saskatoon. The name "Sargam" refers to musical notes in Bangla. Taking care of my artistic soul was my first aim, and I decided to let off a little steam and focus on supporting my own children, as my parents had supported me. Many newcomer parents have different levels of cultural education and degrees of life challenges in teaching Bangla culture to their children. I continued my efforts with this informal cultural practice group because my second aim was to raise my own children in a community with other Bangla-speaking families and give them a climate in which to practice cross-cultural arts, music, and all sorts of artistic activities. Mine and other *Sargam* families began taking time for *Sargam* community friends and community children to enjoy a cup of juice or tea and have homemade snacks, while sharing the warmth of our relationships. It was not only a tea break; ultimately, it was also a mother's break time and the children's happy playtime. An essential part of Bangla culture is getting to know each other, offering friendship, and helping each other in raising children, by cooking and sharing food and support, laughing, and crying for each other, offering connective familial feelings, which I had learned from my parents and community back home. Over the years, the *Sargam vocal performance group* has dedicated itself to nurturing and uplifting our language and cultural activities among newcomer families in Souris Hall and

Saskatoon's Bangla-speaking families, more gradually extending connections also among other ethnic and cross-cultural communities.

Eventually, I learned to rely on this small, informal cultural practices group as a resource that could also contribute to achieving equity, social and gender justice, and respect for the Land and the environment. This small initiative offered ways to improve newcomer people's lives through women's and girls' social engagements and fostering leadership through cultural activities, by hosting various potluck events for community members (celebrating baby showers, birthdays, marriage anniversaries, watching educational movies together etc.), often drawing upon Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed in group programming.

The *Sargam vocal performance group* began sharing their challenging immigrant life stories through dance, singing, recitation and musical drama performances at several multicultural festivals and Bangladeshi-Canadian community events in Saskatoon and Saskatchewan. I became vocal and passionate about this group, because I felt it gave me a platform to recover my artistic voice and find the strength to move forward again with a more joyful mind. I also found the hope to work for cultural preservation. A few more families joined our small community group from beyond the student residence, owing to word of mouth and the need for mutual support among newcomer Bangla-speaking community children and families. This kind of initiative had been missing in the city of Saskatoon, prior to 2011. Families appreciated the opportunity to cherish their cultural heritage through singing, reciting poems, learning about Bangla elocution, storytelling, dancing, acting, saree wrapping, and cross-cultural food preparation. The group also enjoyed participating in various informal educational workshops and community gardening activities, and our community radio show. Such informal and cultural knowledge sharing helped newcomers navigate our daily life challenges, share and construct knowledge about our heritages, and engage in transformative action for social change, including learning about decolonization and reconciliation. My children and I got attached to these families so much that we all started to feel like extended family in supporting each other's well-being through our relational support network. We stood by each other and developed sisterly familial relationships. We could discuss social issues with each other and organize educational and social justice activities and workshops around the Saskatoon communities.

As a critical organizer of *Sargam* cultural activities and workshops (with topics such as women's empowerment, body positivity, pregnancy, maternal health, Yoga, community

gardening, summer art workshops for community kids, anti-racism and even opportunities for meeting Canadian political leaders through university events with Building Bridges and Wanuskewin Heritage Park), I gained community-building experiences. Similarly, our cultural performances drew upon community members' emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual capacities, ancestral histories, and aspirations. We learned from each other's challenging stories, helped raise our children together and built a collaborative community invested cultural reclamation and as a practice of using art to create a better future through social change. Our mission was to celebrate and promote innovative informal learning, by fostering community development that advances and improves newcomer women's family lives. I continued this small initiative for more than nine years.

In 2012, when I started the community radio show, I used to invite the *Sargam* family group's children to perform as well as to showcase their talents and cultural heritage around Saskatoon city, Big River (Ness Creek), Swift Current, Prince Albert, Moose Jaw and many more places at various multicultural events. I invested this unpaid, unrecognized, quiet, and patient effort to create more young artists around the community because I knew the value of intergenerational transmission of cultural inheritance. My pleasure was to see children bloom as flowers in the context of their cultural continuity, identity, and teachings, learning to know who they are, where they have come from and who their ancestors were, as a resource for understanding their responsibilities as diasporic settlers in this stolen Land.

Out of this small cultural community-building initiative, my two daughters became trained Indian classical dancers and singers; they have been involved with many other multicultural performers and learned the Bangla language. I carry my pride in their achievements, gently, and see firsthand how racialized settler women can become resilient, as we pass the language and culture to the next generations. Informal community building efforts can help newcomer families establish cultural empowerment. I invited many newcomer community performers to our *Sargam* group to help train participating children in that small community room. I felt immense happiness and satisfaction in this work because *Sargam* became the first steppingstone for many newcomer artists of colour. It turned into a space to share each other's skills, make relationships, talk about community activities, and find new students for cultural teachings. Everyone loved that collaborative *Sargam* learning space, but some were unsure about my positionality. A few people raised questions, like, "Why does she do what she does around the

community? How does she benefit from all this tireless volunteer work?” Nevertheless, they supported my initiative without knowing the answer. They saw me as a relationship builder, not involved with community or mainstream politics, and not greedy for monetary benefit. They accepted and showed up right beside me. Some said that “she wants to be famous and wants more community awards or recognitions and she will be benefited by earning her doctoral degree, etc.” I always assured them that this informal community collaboration might turn into a powerful advocacy group which, over the years, might influence the City of Saskatoon’s planning agenda, and we all could benefit together. I also told them that an individual doesn’t change society or build a community. For change to be effective, people need a collaborative platform, so our *Sargam* group could only be a start, like the community radio and community garden networking spaces. I invited them to work with me for at least five years and assess for themselves the changes and growth of the community children and artists of colour in Saskatoon. Social changes are always the result of many peoples’ growing consciousness and both public and silent actions. I shared how living abroad for almost twenty years without practicing my language and culture at home, left me feeling like a dead artist. I told them about the politics around artists of colour and the brutal battles for survival that reveal how racist Canadian policies are.

A few culturally educated and knowledgeable community members resonated with my pain and efforts to protect heritages in danger. Elderly, knowledgeable people trusted me with love and care and supported my small but continuous actions and strategies for resilience. My own cry for creative space turned into a community cry over the years. They appreciated the way I used to mentor newcomer artists of colour, their families, and children to find better ways to grow as an artist, by making more social spaces for artist of colour performances, challenging government policies, that demand performing whiteness, rather than protect endangered languages and cultures. I could see curious questions in their eyes when I talked about collaborative artistic work with Indigenous and other artists of colour. Many were inspired to continue. Though they were open to collaborative artistic work with cross-cultural groups and Indigenous artists, they needed networking support.

My community network expanded and became inspired to engage my doctoral research in order to refine my efforts to make this social problem visible on an academic platform that could help to prevent the cultural death of diasporic artists of colour. It took many years to

connect with multicultural community performers and to create spaces for showcasing my culture and the power of Bengali literature and language. Bengali culture possesses rich universal literary perspectives and Bengali music is an aesthetically rich resource for supporting relationships with other cultures. My anti-racist, decolonial lenses and doctoral studies helped me develop a deeper understanding of today's cultural and language losses. I was sad and angry about the vulnerability of the world's endangered languages, arts, and cultures, and wanted to establish a community healing space to unite Saskatoon artists of colour as a community, able to respond to their challenges. Therefore, I wrote an invitation to a group of radio guest speakers for Nov 22, 2019, most of them were artists of colour and community activists, as outlined below:

Artists of colour are losing interest in cultivating new artistic practices and raising their children as ethnic artists—which is threatening the transmission of the ancient art forms. Ethnic artists face tremendous daily challenges to continue their artistic growth in their lovely city, Saskatoon. We all know that historic and systemic barriers have affected access to artistic opportunities and resources for many artists of colour. These artists do not have a positive climate in which to cultivate more artists in their families and community, for many other complex reasons. Artists are seldom encouraged to be an artist anymore; it is challenging to pursue an interest to be an artist in a small city like Saskatoon due to many social and structural challenges facing each small ethnic population. Ethnic artistic production or performances have not been given the spotlight they deserve for many years, and when they do, these events are consumed as spectacles and entertainment; the multicultural spaces are not a common entertaining space for the ethnic artists; for them, it is an opportunity to let the wider community know who they are and where they are coming from. Multicultural spaces can become problematic and need to be discussed together with community members to make room for improvement, new hope, and possibilities.

After reading my above email invitation and listening to this invitation over the community radio broadcast, community activists and artists of colour became excited and supported starting this community conversation, immediately, because they had wanted to have these kinds of discussions for a long time. However, they did not find any platform, and no one took the initiative on their behalf to talk about these challenges. In November, 2019, more than twenty artists and community activists appeared in our small CFCR community radio studio. I invited mainstream media like CBC, Global TV, and *The Sheaf* to amplify our community voices. Few showed up to listen to us, unfortunately. Below I explore the challenges faced by artists of colour as outlined in the community radio discussions.

Marginalizing Artists of Colour Through Multicultural Policy

Multicultural policy is a tool to marginalize the artists of colour. Cultural activities are vital instruments to keep a community's language, culture, and identity alive. A senior and well-regarded Pakistani-Canadian community activist, Nayyar Javed, with whom I worked in various community activities for the past ten years in Saskatoon, came to contribute to the radio discussion. She understood the importance of this community conversation and raised a vital challenge through her knowledge and criticism, empowering newcomer artists of colour. She said:

It is the State that is the culprit, in my opinion. It's the policies of multiculturalism. So, you develop the guidelines but do not have the resources, and you do not acknowledge multicultural people, othering them. State policies are othering us, differentiating between people and how they see us.

While multiculturalism has opened some spaces for racialized newcomer artists of colour, they remain caught in processes of marginalization. The complicated multicultural policy hides the fundamental problems facing Indigenous and racialized newcomer community groups. In the multicultural performance spaces in Saskatoon city, there is not much space to talk about artists of colour, their ongoing challenges, histories, cultures, who are they as artists and what skills they have brought into Canada. I did not come to this country simply to entertain white folks. I have a rich culture, heritage and knowledge that needs to be respected, valued, and represented as an art, not diverting entertainment for a poorly educated audience.

A community poet from India named Arati Chattapadhyay expressed similar sentiments:

Canada seems a beautiful "multicultural" country, and it is a lovely painting where we can go to the Folk Fest or other "multicultural" events, but that's not what we're talking about. These festivals happen once a year, and it does not create solutions, because Folk Fest or multicultural festivals create some entertaining spaces; it is not giving support to nurturing ethnic communities' language, culture, heritage and cultural identities on a daily basis. Often multicultural language schools get closed, due to a lack of funding.

As an insider of the artist of colour community, I agree with Arati that we are not talking beyond our performances about reclaiming our cultural identities. I did not have much critical knowledge about multiculturalism and its impact on racialized artist communities before. We awakened collaborative knowledge together during that radio conversation.

These critical comments about multiculturalism coincide with my lived experiences. It makes me sad that artists of colour do not find welcoming space within their diasporic

ethnocultural organizations or so-called multicultural spaces. Both spaces are just window-dressing, temporary cultural events for eating, selling, drinking, and networking, but not for genuine, rooted cultural activities. If one raises these concerns, both ethnic and multicultural organizers may get offended and may not even invite trained and knowledgeable artists, anymore, preferring more docile amateurs, who will not demand better.

Lack of Funding for Artists of Colour

Ethnic art forms are not considered mainstream art and, therefore, artist of colour face lack of funding support. As a newcomer artist of colour, I was unaware of the funding opportunities for artists, after coming to Saskatoon. It took me many years to understand who I am here in Canada as an artist. Why are artists of colour treated differently than the white settler artists? Since Canada claims to respect all races, languages, and peoples, why are there no arts or language schools for people of all colours to preserve their languages and culture? As an independent, solo artist who did not intend to set up a music school or found any arts organization, I did not know how to reach out to the Saskatoon arts board and apply for funding. As a freelance performer on Bangladesh TV and Radio, I used to perform with social dignity and honour, so I was looking for a regular opportunity to perform and nurture my artistic talent. Passing my language and culture to the next generations, should be a collective effort, not individual work. When I took the initiative to establish *Sargam* and my community radio shows, I needed funding support, but I could not reach out to community cultural funders. Forty years ago, very few dancers and singers came to Saskatoon; they expressed frustrations and shared stories about how their dance or music schools got closed almost every year due to a lack of entrepreneurship and stable funding opportunities or other government supports. Saskatoon is a small city; most Bengali and Indian artists know each other. I have yet to see any community artist of colour who received funding from the Saskatoon Arts board or government for their individual development or community arts building efforts.

On the top, parents always juggle balancing eastern and western arts, and they can not decide what to choose for their children. I have seen many diasporic parents juggle their many responsibilities in efforts to transfer the culture and teach an art form to second and third diasporic generations. They want to try because they believe it would make their children better developed, more whole persons. I have seen parents get tired and give up their children's art activities, which is frustrating for the diasporic trainers. Finally, they have settled for western

music or dance schools because they are stable enterprises with many teachers and available audiences.

When I was mentoring community children and busy preparing artistic productions, I was too busy to seek funding opportunities. It was hectic to plan, write the scripts, pull people together, train fresh new community recruits, and support their families with childcare, rides, food etc., then take the stage, providing performances free of cost. The work was overwhelming. I did not have any community mentor or information support to work for funding so that I could get paid as an artist. I tried to find funding information, but it wasn't straightforward or accessible, and English-language websites were a barrier for newcomers. That unpaid emotional labour and facilitative work for the arts and artist's community was exhausting. Because I was passing my culture to the children, in order to keep myself alive, I got frustrated, but never gave up my effort to create artistic productions for the community by engaging *Sargam* members in raising funds from the community people. That was my only handy instrument to move forward and to continue my artistic activities.

Classical Dancer Sneha Mukherjee closed her dance school in Saskatoon for many reasons. One reason is that diasporic parents want to teach the traditional arts like Indian classical music, Bharat Nattyam or Kathak dance, but the reality is that many children miss Bangla or Indian culture at home because parents are caught up in survival jobs. Therefore, the entire family struggles to juggle between eastern and western culture, teaching children at least one form of ethnic arts. After spending five or six years, students often drop out of ethnic dance or music schools. These are hidden challenges because founders of the dance schools face lack of funding, and students can not afford to pay high tuitions. The trainer also needs to get busy with other survival jobs.

Although she has an engineering degree and formal classical dance education from renowned gurus from India, Sneha started a clothing and jewelry business called 'Colours of India,' because she could not pursue her engineering or dance career in Canada. I know many artists who want to run a dance or music school, professionally, but in a small city like Saskatoon with small ethnic populations and lack of enthusiasm from the white settler communities, barriers are considerable. As an Indian classical dance school founder, Sneha notes that while provincial and federal governments provide arts funding to dance companies and individuals engaged in artistic practice, when artists of colour approach the dance divisions of various arts

councils, they are seldom funded. Arts councils refer them to the department of multiculturalism. Ballet and modern western dance are supported by arts funding, but not other forms of dance. Diverse cultural arts forms are not given status as real forms of dance. This kind of colonialist logic divides the realm of arts from culture.

Permanent Death of Cultures

Newcomer artists of colour face tremendous challenges to maintain their cultural activities and to preserve their languages. The systemic process of assimilation slowly kills the languages and practices of newcomer artists of colour. Arati Chattapadhyay, a senior citizen, has lived in Saskatoon for over 40 years, and has been an active community member with several performing arts groups. She notes that “We are talking about a very intense problem, the death of a culture. This death is dangerous for all of us,” She shared a brief story to explain what “cultural death” means to her.

I am a grandmother of three diasporic children. Our children born here will probably partake in a little bit of our heritage, language, dance, music, history, language, and all that. But it eventually dies down. It doesn't get carried away. And I think, sadly, that's the permanent death of cultures. So, I think we have sacrificed a lot by giving up our culture, wisdom or knowledge, and cultural values, but it is sad to be a part of this death of culture and its ongoing brutal invisible history. We see that the cultural death has been slowly happening every day, though I have tried hard at home to keep my culture alive. I published my first Bengali book of poetry in 2017. To do that, I went to Calcutta. After writing the Bengali poetry book and publishing it, I realized that I don't have that atmosphere, that impetus here, I don't get the feedback from my readers, and it is hard to reach out to the Bengali readers due to the small population size; I got frustrated when I realized I don't have a place to share my poems and my book. Even with my husband, I would say I'm writing poetry; would you like to hear it? He listens to me, only.

Arati expressed, with tears, that:

I don't get the other people in the same boat as me and sharing my pain, expressions, and intellectual death, with what I'm writing or nurturing just on my own with my minimal ethnic Bangla speaking, Bangladeshi or Indian communities. The Canadian Government does not fund or create any exchange, cultural bridging initiatives, or translation funds. There are ethnic poets like me and other ethnic artists, writers, or community performers who eventually die out due to a lack of funding and community support. Mainstream Canadian media do not highlight our work for us. Then I changed my mind, and this year (2019), I'm writing English poetry, and things have changed a little bit because now I am assimilating into the mainstream. Once you get into the mainstream English culture, it's a different story, and I can see things differently. I'm happy because I

can share things with more people than before. But, at the same time, I'm despondent because of my mother language, Bangla, which I can express much better. I have stopped writing in Bangla because I can not reach out to the Bangla speaking community here, and also English is not my language (I am not comfortable writing in English). I don't get motivated to write like before, because I need to juggle a lot around languages and funding support, because I do not find that much feedback from Bangla or English communities.

As a community activist, I have observed that Arati's voice represents the concerns of many other diasporic writers. Most Bangladeshi families do not have much energy left after coming back home from the hard work of immigrant life. Therefore, parents do not spend enough time teaching cultural knowledge to their children, because they are too busy trying to survive here in Canada, and the second generation does not get the opportunity to learn their mother tongues at home from extended families or from neighbors. Parents do not have enough time to nurture their children to grow their artistic creativity or cultural identities. There are very few ethnic-cultural schools in Canada, creating a big challenge for minoritized parents to continue their culture. On the top, parents face assimilation pressure to teach white culture to their children, without exposure to local Land-based knowledge and Indigenous world views. Therefore, most of them are in a climate to become whiter and to sing, dance and recite only American or Canadian culture and literatures. North American Anglocultural imperialism was a significant challenge, even when I was in Bangladesh. As a result, many Indigenous languages and local dialects and cultures are not well known and are in danger.

Local volunteer multilingual language schools face a lack of funding and volunteers. Bangladeshi people cannot access Indigenous Knowledges and community people, either. However, the second generation quickly picks up white English culture by forgetting their roots and not knowing even their own cultural worldviews. They are seldom taught about colonization in their home countries either. I have observed that as a result, people choose to pick up on religions, because it is much easier to practice at home rather than to read literature, practice singing, dance, and share cultural knowledge, which requires lifelong effort. As a result, many ethnic Bangladeshi people become deeply religious, after a certain period. Due to the onslaught of pressures from the host culture, they may grow more fundamentalist in their daily life practices, because they feel otherwise disconnected from their own culture, and knowledge systems. This reifies ethnic

enclaves or ghettos. Of course, there are some exceptions. In my opinion, BIPOC children need to learn about one another's cultures and come to value one another, through environments like the community garden or Land-based learning. I have learned from the community garden that the Land is a non-discriminatory teacher, classroom, and curriculum.

Canada's Immigration Policies Are Assimilationist

Canada's immigration policies are assimilationist. A social justice community activist and anti-racist practitioner, Dr. Manuela Valle-Castro, immigrated to Canada from Chile, and is furious about how multiculturalism is a façade for assimilationism:

I think there's a misconception about Canada's multiculturalism. The state hides and people do not understand that Canada's immigration policies are very assimilationist and economically motivated. So, it is interesting that the policies for people to immigrate here are very selective regarding who gets to come here. Suppose you are not a refugee or a newcomer here. In that case, you have to have a lot of money, a lot of education, and many professional experiences, so what I'm pointing at is immigrants, for a considerable part, almost subsidize the economy of Canada. It's an economically motivated policy, and it's a policy in which we are expected to assimilate as nice, conformist, grateful immigrants. We are supposed to leave everything that made us who we are and become good workers; most importantly, we become good compliant workers.

After reflecting on my experiences in Sweden, Norway, USA, and Canada, I realised that I faced the same assimilative pressure that Dr. Valle-Castro talks about, through acculturative stress. Forced to take up survival jobs to feed the family, immigrants become like machines with many part-time jobs, and no time to spend time engaging their children with cultural activities, Land-based learning or to teach their language or cultural histories. Dr. Valle-Castro explains:

The state has designed policies to over-conform the norms here and not necessarily express who we are as immigrants, our roots in culture, political ideas, philosophical ideas, and our wants and needs for the future.

I, personally, have always felt this invisible pressure to conform and assimilate, and the fear to be critical about the state-designed policies. We artists need to create art that engages critical thoughts about our needs for future. Critical arts can express where we live now, and our vital resistances to the processes of assimilation. Canada needs to hear our voices, appreciating that we can't leave who we were if we were warriors and social

fighters for change in our countries. Canada would benefit from our perspectives. Artists need to be critical and we need to use arts for social change.

Lack of Opportunity to Practice, Perform and Continue Artistic Activities

Assimilationist policies force people of colour to work as a cheap labour in various industries. Therefore, people have very few opportunities to work for their language and cultural activities. For example, I spent more than 12-15 years learning Indian classical music and Bangla devotional songs and qualified for the Bangladeshi national television audition. It took my entire life's energy to reach that level of performance and I am still learning many new techniques and songs, whenever I get a little chance. Becoming accomplished in Indian classical dance or singing takes hours and years of practice, core life energy and deep passion. It's a challenging and serious educational form of art. Many of the Saskatoon artists I talked to are busy with their survival jobs. They have irregular work schedules, working night shifts and on weekends, when mainstream artists have more time to see each other. So, at the end of the day, they do not have the motivation to return to their musical or dance life due to a lack of energy and togetherness. Artists need to be together to make creative pieces. Individual solo artists also need an artist's community, but I have learned from these discussions that the problem is systemic because the state has designed its policies in ways that are harmful for the artists and communities of colour. The rules and regulations make people into 'labour machines,' contributing to capitalism and making more profits, without the space to grow other talents.

Dr. Monsur Alam is a Bangladeshi *Tabla* (Indian drums) player who studied at a reputed musical university in India to earn the degree in *Tabla* playing. He expresses his deep frustration:

I have a Ph.D. in playing *Tabla* from a renowned institution in India. But I need to do 3 to 4 jobs for survival, only to pay my bills and to feed the family. I do not have time to improve my performance skills, which are going down daily, whatever I brought with me here in Canada only five years ago. I am frustrated as a *Tabla* musician. I do not have the opportunity to perform regularly on Canadian TV or radio, and earn money by playing my Indian *Tabla* (little drums), something which was possible in Bangladesh.

Shelly Nasrin, a sitar player from a reputed artist family in Bangladesh, has a similar story to Dr. Alam.

I need to work at the Superstore and do not have time to practice the Sitar, which needs long practice hours and devotion. I am frustrated as I feel I am going to die as a musician and now I got busy with gardening to keep myself alive. Because my inner artist's mind is dying and drying day by day. I replaced my musical pain

in gardening. I love planting because I love to see the plant growing, and blooming flowers. I feel happy because I can see the plant's growth; we need to water the plant and give soil to that plant. We artists of colour need a positive climate to grow, like plants and trees in this new weather and Land.

A Pakistani-Canadian *Tabla* artist expressed sadness for Dr. Monsur Alam

One and only Ph.D. in *Tabla* we have here in our South-Asian community; when Dr. Monsur came to our Saskatoon community, I became so happy that such a level of highly regarded *Tabla* artist is here with us. It is very sad that we Saskatoon community members are not getting any benefits from his high level of performance skills. He does not have the support to open a *Tabla* lesson school even. That is a big loss for the Saskatoon South-Asian community and Canada. It is sad that the artist of colour community cannot respect this level of artistic quality, as well.

Miki Mappin summarized the entire discussion topic, precisely

I think the problem all the artists have been sharing, for example, about culture and race, is another layer on top of a fundamental structural problem in our society in North America. For example, the fact that our society is now structured in such a way that everybody has to work two or three jobs for their survival (to pay for accommodation, transportation, food, clothes, internet, phone bills, tuition), and we don't have time for arts, culture and, you know, all of our excess wealth from all the work we are doing is going to world elites in other places.

The above conversations made me realize how ongoing neo-colonialism and neoliberalism are interwoven, invisibly impoverishing not only workers but our cultural lives. The diversity of fine arts practices and artists of colour are being killed systematically by government policies that claim to be celebrating diversity and multiculturalism. The separation of art from everyday life as a by-product of the capitalist division of labour along lines of race, class, gender, age, ability, and sexual orientation within the corporate world, while linking the arts to neoliberal capitalism and the tastes of the wealthy few.

The neoliberalization of the arts seeks to frame art, creativity, and our cultures in strictly economic terms. Local funding cuts are common in practice, while the government is encouraging corporate investments in arts and culture through sponsorship, award-giving, loans, public-private partnerships, or privatization. Ultimately, this creates a big gap between business elites (who are seldom well educated in the arts, let alone cultural diversities), local community artists and the people, constructing culture as mere window-dressing, yet again.

Racialized Artists “Perform as an Entertainer”

Most artists of colour find their roles as entertainers here in Canada. Over the last ten years in Saskatoon and my previous eight years in Sweden, Norway, New York, New Jersey, and Toronto, I have learned that there has been a big gap between white settler community artists and organizers, artists of colour communities, and state policies for the local community artists. Since the white western population is seldom literate about racialized artists' histories, they contribute to undermining racialized artists' artwork and community performances. Multicultural events make it possible for white audiences to ignore their own racisms, because those events are more accessible as vehicles to consume amusing entertainment without engaging the deeper meanings presented by the artists. Bharat Nattyam, an Indian classical dancer and instructor, born and raised in Bahrain, who moved from the UK to Saskatoon a couple of years ago, notes that

They're more interested in taking pictures with our different, attractive dance costumes, rather than going to look forward on the stage and trying to understand our dance forms. I think the Canadian prairies are still learning and getting exposure to other cultures only. They're in a process of learning about the Indian culture and heritage.

Another community-engaged newcomer, Sneha Mukherjee, an Indian Classical Dance instructor from the Mudra Dance School, shared her view:

Many people do not understand classical dance or do not have education about it; they search for light, entertaining shows where people want to get entertained, relax, have fun by meeting and talking with friends, have “multicultural” experiences, making “ethnic cultural” friends, and have liquor, which is disrespectful in my Indian classical dance culture. In Indian classical dance, dancers show deep spiritual or religious respect through their dance. This is not where we classical dancers get that proper environment to showcase these serious forms of dance and the inner meaning of this dance. We classical dancers worship our dance and music. We are not here to entertain people. We are here to bring out our roots and heritage and showcase this. But they don't understand that — that's the challenge we have to face in all events.

An international undergraduate student from Bangladesh, Paromita Sengupta, a Classic Indian Odissi dancer, agrees with Sneha and Sumeetha:

The University of Saskatchewan values good students, but why doesn't the university respect artists of colour or international student performers? We should be given a chance to practice our cultural art forms in an organized way, to enrich the university's artist community. Finding a place or studio for dancing is always a struggle at the university although Canada is considered a multicultural country.

Indian classical dancer, Sumeetha Gee Abraham outlines her frustrations:

The challenge is, it is very hard to get the proper platform or the proper audience where I can showcase my hard-earned (I spent 18 years learning) Indian classical dance, talent, and skills. The Indian dance form is too deep, and it needs long-term formal education to learn and to make the postures perfect. It's just not about the leg, hands, and eye movements. This dance can tell a deep meaning or stories often filled with a lot of artistic expressions. When I feel the audience lacks the understanding and gets bored over here, it demotivates me to perform further, and I feel uncomfortable being on stage.

As a graduate student and a community cultural activist, I agree with Paromita, Sumeetha and Sneha. But we do not know to whom we should talk about these issues, in efforts to improve the working environment for the artists of colour. Paromita Sengupta asks for meaningful opportunities and accommodations with a space to rehearse in an extensive collaborative artist community and with opportunities to perform at the university social and mainstream community events. I believe the performing arts should be accessible to all irrespective of race, class, and gender. Another singer and music composer from Bangladesh, Pallavi Mazumder, agrees, “We artists of colour need motivation, and authentic platforms to grow and contribute through the years.” Pallavi, Sneha, Paromita, and Sumeetha’s standpoint coincides with my own. I spent more than 20 years learning, performing, and practicing singing, but I got tired and the situation hasn’t changed much for the artists of colour. My children face similar challenges.

It takes an artist’s entire life to produce a small 5-minute performance piece but that reproductive labour has been devalued structurally, at the state, provincial and community levels, and sometimes by the family. It is very similar to the way women’s community building, family raising efforts and reproductive labour have been devalued by patriarchal family and community members. Malnourished artistic growth cannot be resolved by an individual. It is important to create an inclusive community for passionate artists of colour and art lovers, of every culture, socio-economic class, and ability. Neoliberalism supports high tuition fees and exclusive, elite decision making, factors which prevent our children, youth, and adults from accessing opportunities to flourish with and through the performing arts, which provide skills in critical, reflexive practice.

Indian Classical dancer Sumeetha Gee Abraham would like audiences to appreciate the creative effort required to sustain traditional and critical artistic practices:

Promoting different cultural arts education is important, just trying to educate everyone about the beautiful and rich culture, the heritage, and how hard work, hard love that the dancers are putting into performing each piece, even if it's just a five to eight minutes piece. Also, it takes a lot of effort and hard work to do it. So, people

just need to understand that. Arts organizations and governments need to make arts accessible to all, to make a better community.

Government and community organizations need to work together to listen to community artist's voices and advance arts education because in the age of missing and misinformation, reflexive skills are vital. A lack of art knowledge rendering the arts as only an entertaining phenomenon, undermines capacity for collaborative meaning-making and sharing. Artistic survival is not only about the survival specific artists and practices. It is also about cultivating deeper compassion and critical thought. Government and cultural organizations need to work to develop public capacity for appreciation of the arts, especially Indigenous arts. These artistic practices illuminate the more generous aspirations of culturally situated craft and are an antidote to the polarizing superficialities of the present moment. The government needs to provide more logistical support for community performance facilities, help more local artists to sell their artworks, and fund more theatre and performing arts show tickets for members of all audiences, not only for the survival of the artists and thousand-year-old ancient arts, but for building capacity to want to understand one another's histories and dreams. We all need to care about this issue. If artists die, then the arts will die, and we will all suffer the loss of our ability to connect deeply across our socially constructed differences and locations.

Racialized Newcomer Artists are Tokenized

During the community radio discussions, some artists of colour were unsure of how tokenization works and what it looks or feels like. Dr. Valle Castro explains:

The way I understand tokenization is like representation without powers, like a form, a particular form in which the Canadian state constructs the narrative of multiculturalism by presenting a spectacle of inclusivity in which different groups have less power in society. Minority groups are present without enough power or representation at all levels.

To support Dr. Valle Castro, a white transgender community activist, who immigrated from South Africa, Miki Mappin, gave an example from their working life:

It reflects my experience on the board of a cultural organization, a board that the funding agency praised for being a leader in introducing diversity into the organization. Still, my observation as part of that was that the context is that of an organization formed by people of the dominant culture's elite, who are then "giving" diversity to other people, reflecting what you are saying.

My working experiences with several cultural organization's are similar to what Dr. Valle Castro and Miki Mappin suggest. I have worked on boards of directors in many

organizations in Saskatoon. where I have felt like a minority because of my different race, culture, and language. Most of the time I have found the board is fully white and I am the only person of colour. In that case, I always felt difficulty expressing and sharing my challenges as an artist of colour and racialized settler woman. I could not amplify my voice and needs for the racialized artist community. Tokenization is a very common practice here in Canada; it is systemic and has also been practiced in an inter-personal level, where mainstream people cultivate “exotic” friends. Canada needs to tackle the systemic discrimination and racism which is still a lived reality for too many racialized Canadians. We all need to understand and continue taking steps to make our artist of colour communities safer and inclusive for everyone.

Dominant Culture Versus Racialized Artists’ Community

I am becoming increasingly concerned about the infiltration of arts and culture by neoliberal capitalism and the dominant white culture. Big budget commercials and money-making media productions motivate community audiences not to engage with the local community and Land-based artistic activities. Slowly, local artists’ activities are becoming marginalized. Commercial productions and the dominant culture jeopardize the efforts of racialized community artists to grow and survive. There is also a gap between profit-making productions, dominant and traditional cultures. Indian Classical Dancer Sneha Mukherjee relates her experiences:

In my community, people sometimes get confused between dominant popular culture, for example, Bollywood, western media productions, and the classical art forms like: Indian classical music or dance. So, there’s always been a fight between commercial arts and traditional or classical art forms. There is a problem back in India too. Invariably, dancers who practice classical dance forms fight with the dominant popular culture, which I faced in India and even worse here in Canada.

Miki Mappin supports Sneha Mukherjee, by emphasizing that:

Of course, we are all overwhelmed with a dominant culture which is the culture of the United States, basically, and of mainstream media, so people do get out, they do get in their cars and go out, down to TCU place, to see an American touring musical, something they advertised on TV.

Narrowing the artistic palate narrows the public capacity to appreciate nuance.

As an insider of the Bangladeshi community and as an organizer of the cultural events, I have seen closely that many people do not support the local community’s cultural events.

Bangladeshi community event organizers do not have the resources to offer even a small amount of honorarium (for example, any token of appreciation, flowers, a thank you card, any sort of food or modest funds after their performances). Ethnic organizers and audiences want to enjoy the performances free of cost and do not attend the local community events if their children are not involved. If there is even any nominal 10\$ CAD door ticket or entrance fees involved, the audience does not respond with enthusiasm. These same audiences do not mind paying \$100 CAD to buy a saree at those local events or to pay \$50 - \$ 100 CAD or more, if there is any special show by star artists from Bangladesh, Bollywood performers from India, or anyone from anywhere with fame from the TV or film industries. U

Audiences feel it gives high status to share on social media or to tell their peer groups that they got the opportunity to take a photo with a big-name artist. The neoliberal system has taught audiences that Bollywood, Hollywood, and big-budget commercial music/dance video artists are more valuable. Unlike community sports, in Canada, there is very little infrastructure supporting local artists as a talent pool. Artists who are connected to the Land can bring deep reflexive and critical artistic philosophy or knowledge to their publics, instead of empty technological, glamour-based, hyper-individuated and overproduced entertainment. The capitalistic art and cultural markets are conditioning people toward limited constructed choices in terms of their engagements with the arts. Audiences are being taught to consume everything in a capitalistic way. They buy status and pleasure by paying high ticket prices, and become more disconnected from the Land and their own and other communities, because they do not find status in supporting local community artists. They may even feel that leaving their connections with the Land and local communities gives them social status. Audiences seldom understand that they are becoming assimilated to the dominant culture and that they contribute to and become invested in the capitalistic colonial climate. It is obvious that neoliberalization and corporatization of culture is really a takeover of the arts industries, transforming artists' impacts by commodifying them as an entertainment product. The community artists who contributed to our radio show discussion sought to explain how and why neoliberalism has invaded the arts and constructed methods for developing dominant elite artists.

Ness Creek music festival board member, Cathy Sproule, who was the MLA for Saskatoon Nutana, joined our community radio discussion and expressed her feelings about this challenge:

As a member of the dominant society, it is complicated for me to weigh in because I do not have that lived experience, and I know how easy it is to be the oppressor of the dominant society. I think of the work of Paulo Freire, who did some of the work on the oppressed, and it is a perpetual problem. I don't think this is new. Of course, minorities need to bring to the attention of the majority the persistence and sometimes very hidden oppression that minorities experience, and I often think of my sons growing up in Saskatoon and remind them to understand their privilege; I guess from the majority's perspective, it is understanding the privilege and feeling bad about it, you know, guilty. I mean, it doesn't help anybody just to recognize your privilege. I think that will create relationships with minority groups where I feel good about having that token person on the border or on the agenda of the event. Whatever culture talks about the painter, the musician, that is more interculturalism than multiculturalism.

If I try to analyze this situation and the experiences of participating radio guest artists, I would say that the process of colonization, neoliberalism, migration, and lack of arts education has affected mass practices of cultural consumption and taste. People are increasingly disconnected from the Land and their community people. Therefore, the capitalist economy and unequal policies acquire an advantage, creating social and cultural disparities with impunity, because minority artists' voices are buried in the domination of capitalism, neo-liberalism, and racism. Racialized artists lose their position to create more critical artistic interventions, and the art of political disguise has taken the place of artists' of colour.

Corporate-dominated, Profit-driven, Neo-liberal Artistic Representations are Harmful

The neoliberalization of the arts began many years ago, without recognition of its silent, but lethal harms to local arts and artists. The community radio discussions were extremely helpful in exploring racialized artists experiences and analyses of these root problems and challenges. The problem is systemic, with artists of colour facing the acute impacts of unequal, racist and colonialist policies and practices. On the top, neocolonialism and disparity capitalism have always worked hand in hand. The arts industry and the ruling elites have always been connected to each other, in both our countries of origin and in Canada. Dr. Valle Castro explains this serious problem from an anti-colonial and anti-racist perspective:

I think what Sneha and Miki have outlined, I would like to follow, and there are so many issues here overlaid. One of the things we talked about is how the immigration policies in Canada, for example, are structured around how newcomers are invited to come here as workers. That's the only thing they (Canada) want from us; the neoliberal state only wants cheap labour from us. We are just supposed to leave behind any cultural practices or political practices that defined us in our context before, so that's one thing when we come here; we are invited to come to

assimilate. In the same way, it is crucial to make this distinction between artists of colour. I think it is essential to distinguish between what happens to Indigenous artists with a specific history—genocide and assimilation policies. And as a newcomer - we are invited to replace Indigenous people. Indigenous people have to disappear; we are here to replace Indigenous people. We are invited to come here as a de-politicized workforce and to assimilate to the broad dominant culture, the dominant British or American culture. It is essential to notice that this happened to Eastern European artists who came here before. I think this is important to acknowledge because many East-European cultures also assimilated into the wide British-dominant English culture. So, there is a kind of layer after layer in this idea of Canada's art and culture, which is still wholly defined in British, English terms.

Olga Koughia, a Russian dancer, also talked about how Ukrainian dance, and languages are disappearing from many families and how they have been struggling to pass their languages, music, dance, and stories to their next generations.

All these erasures constitute Canada's mainstream culture and art. There are many hierarchies too, which support the dead culture, the high culture, the cheapened culture, the bad culture, which distracts rather than focuses attention on mutual flourishing. Miki Mappin's point that under the neoliberal colonialist state, even art is a corporate-dominated, profit-driven practice, driven by the logics of disparity. The invitation for the precarious labouring newcomer to compete for narrowly defined projects promotes a neoliberal logic of scarcity. Dr. Valle-Castro argues that with current funding structures, "we all have to compete for the right to perform, so, art and culture are only essential if diversity can be managed if we can be managed as depoliticized things that are kind of like ornamental. Something that decorates the idea of Canadian multiculturalism." As a hegemonic structure and mode of discourse, neoliberalism has altered how we act, think, represent ourselves, make arts or practice cultural activities, listen, or look at the life or humanity or women. It has been changing our taste in everything, in all spheres of life, everywhere turning the arts and artists into a big market, where citizens are reduced to mere consumers (Harvey, 2006, p. 145-6). Class hierarchy and power have been invading the arts world with assimilative colonialist capitalisms.

Women of Color Artists Are Considered Less Desirable

Canadian society has been trained by prevailing discourses to focus on physical traits, particularly around issues of gender, race, ability, and age. I often hear that women of colour artists are undesirable. In a coffee talk, some community performers discussed how their hooked

nose, dark skin, or solid, long legs are often interpreted as ugly in North American culture. Women who have learned cultural dancing, singing, or acting their whole life are rejected on the basis of body shaming. They have embraced their racial identities and rich artistic qualities. They thought they were beautiful women and the nurturers of their ancestors' cultures, passing it to the next generation through their communities. Appreciating their own beauty and power has allowed them to support each other as artists. My daughters have been learning ballet dance since their childhood beside Indian classical dance. They often feel uncomfortable as teenage girls today because they are a "brown" ballerina in a white ballet world. They always face integration difficulties and lack of confidence when they go to ballet competitions because of their brown skin colour. White colonialism has been engrained everywhere and it affects the dance and music industries, immensely.

Art Education Needs to be Valued from Home, Community, and State

Arts education is too often devalued by the family, community and even the nation-state, through a lack of meaningful job opportunities. As jobs have been simplified and procedurized, complex and demanding art practices are increasingly incomprehensible to broad audiences. Prokriti Datta, my eleven-year daughter, who is a ballet and Indian Classical dancer, was present at the community radio discussion and, at the end, asked a question which speaks volumes. "My dad told me to be a doctor, but I don't know which one I should choose, whether I should be a dancer or a doctor?" She added, "The government has cut funding for music and art classes at Brunskill School. Music and art teacher no longer have a job, and I am discouraged and sad about it because arts and music classes are super fun." The artists of colour who were listening all laughed and became sad together in the studio. Prokriti raised a profound and challenging question for all the adults. It is very hard to be a professional artist and to earn a daily living. Therefore, parents teach children to maintain a backup profession, while encourage talented children to keep practicing their artistic activities. Whole generations grow up with this dilemma. As a mother, I replied to my daughter on the air:

I think that's a vast topic to discuss because the dominant disciplines are not allowing artists to be an artist and they de-value arts education. The neglect of the arts, arts education and artists is deeply saddening. Worldwide, governments must invest more to understand the importance of supporting arts education and artist communities. Due to politics and lack of public knowledge about arts education, artists can not make their professions mainstream. Therefore, artists find it challenging to find jobs, and finally, they cannot feed themselves and their

families properly; that's the reality around the community and the world. This scenario is not much different, even in Canada if I compare it with Bangladesh. Moms, Dads, and community people are pressuring children directly and indirectly to be doctors, engineers, or scientists first, because these are prestigious and accessible jobs. Parents think that if they send their children to medical school, they will be a doctor, but if they send their children to art school, their children might not be able to be an artist, because it needs unique creativity and talents. Everyone cannot be a poet, novelist, music composer, musician, filmmaker, or artist; it needs an exceptional talent and a uniquely creative mind and passion. In Bangladesh, the family raised me always with a pressure to be a scientist, doctor, or engineer, not an artist or social scientist even. In my Bangladeshi community and surroundings, arts, social science, and literature are not given the same importance as teaching science or commerce. Through out my life I had to hear as a social science graduate that "I am brainless," though I was always a good student and made top ranked results in social science and artistic fields. Dominant disciplines help people to think narrowly. Without arts education, it is hard to be open-minded. Our education system does not encourage us to ask questions critically, creatively, or courageously. I consistently heard from my parents to study first because an academic education will provide me a job. After finishing my academic schoolwork, if I have any extra time left, I can go to sing or dance or do artistic activities.

There have been few attempts by government to make arts and humanities education more attractive as an essential career option for prospective learners and educators within this neoliberal economic system. Closing arts classes in Saskatoon schools proves that failure of leadership. The nation-state as apologist for market economies, has disenchanted cultural and arts education, and impoverished public capacity for the mutual respect necessary to substantively inclusive democratic processes.

Arts Programming is Necessary to Educate Audiences About Inclusion

As an insider of the artist of colour community, I have often faced ignorant questions and received discouraging body or facial expressions from audiences responding to ethnic arts. I felt a considerable need, myself, for intercultural education about diverse cultural arts practices (music, dance, drama, fine arts). However, this kind of cultural enrichment is largely absent in the colonial education system. People are seldom keen to learn the deep meanings of Indigenous or ethnic cultural activities. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, music, theatre, dance, and the fine arts are neglected subjects at the universities. Fine arts graduates and music and drama students face a tremendous challenge finding jobs and are often socially undermined. People who do not have a specific arts education may think that anyone can be an artist and perform on stage with only

limited training within that particular field. Bangladeshi singer and music composer Pallavi Mazumder notes that:

Unfortunately, 10% of people in Bangladesh are genuinely culturally literate. Furthermore, we get less than 1% of people from that 10% who come to Canada. So, if we want to shine our skills, there is no platform to grow as an artist and no community support or funding available for artists of colour. We do not have a proper sound system, studio and stage, and the right audience for which to perform with a whole heart and share my creative productions, because audiences are not culturally educated enough; on the top, they undermine the artists in various ways among Bangladeshi communities. I realized it is also the same with the Canadian audience, and I feel they are not the right audience for me. My song is not for the pub or bar; I write the song and compose my music, which connects with my homeland, mother, ancestors, and profound philosophies of my history and culture. Most organizers (Bangladeshi Canadian and white Canadians) do not know where to place my deep artistic production and how.

Pallavi's experience resonates with my own. My parents were university graduates but did not emphasize arts education much because they did not have essential arts education when they studied in their educational institutions around the 1940s or 1950s. Overall, Bangladeshi people back home also share many stereotypes about arts education and undermine these fields. For example, my cousins and friends who were in fine arts, drama, or music school, often face negative comments about their degrees, which are not valued by the community or their peer groups. The situation here in Canada is only slightly better. Artists are at least as vital to a flourishing society as technocrats.

Islamic Religious and Patriarchal Barriers Forbid Cultural Activities

As an insider of the Muslim community, I have observed a silent conflict between Islam and cultural activities, as outlined earlier. Muslims debate whether “real Islam” should or should not prohibit cultural or musical activities or making sculptures. Due to my rebellious, feminist mother and sisters, I managed to overcome some of these religious barriers. Many Muslim women artists face such obstacles.

For example, a second generation, Bangladeshi-Canadian, Indian classical dancer, named Alma Ashraf Projjol shared her challenges as a Muslim dancer. Her father did not encourage her dancing. He was a trained Indian classical singer and used to say, “Modest Muslim girls do not dance.” But after migrating to Canada, her feminist mother supported her and her father accepted her dance education because they did not have to worry as much about community criticism here. Another second- generation, Indian classical dancer, Salma Kazmi who has Pakistani-

Mexican hybrid identity, said, her father's could not accept her training but Salma always ignored Islamic extremism, because she believes that art does not have any race or religion:

I am aware of my mixed identity and it's a way I even like to connect with my history. Though it is even an Indian classical form of dance but it is related to Pakistan too. It is part of Pakistan's heredity as a South-Asian neighbouring country. I am aware of the religious extremism that has conquered today's Pakistan. Therefore, Indian classical dance is a dead form of art in Pakistan, today. It's heartbreaking; women and artists are not being able to express themselves due to Islamic fanaticism.

Alma Ashraf Projjol, Salma Kazmi and I have all fought against religious barriers, choosing the arts as empowering practices to help us break many social and patriarchal barriers. However, many diasporic women artists cannot fight back against religion and they give up their cultural activities at some point. I considered myself born into a liberal Islamic and educated family. But, after the recent rise of religious fanaticism in Bangladesh, my siblings no longer have access to arts education and cultural activities. My siblings and relatives back home no longer support my artistic and cultural activities and criticize how I have raised my children as artists, as they once were. My friends and relatives back home have transformed a lot through state-sponsored Islamification processes. They belittle us because Islam does not permit cultural activities, despite my mother's generation's efforts to try to change that extreme view. My younger brother thinks my parents guided him and me on the wrong path by giving him an arts education. Therefore, over the past ten years, he has given up all his former cultural activities (for example, playing musical instruments, theater activities, singing, painting). He was a fantastic *Tabla* player who used to accompany me when I sang on stage in Bangladesh. He used to perform on TV, radio, and community stages until the age of 22 years. In today's Bangladesh, my brother, sister, nephew, and nieces do not fight against Islamic bigotries and they do not support feminism like my mother's generation. They welcome *hijab*, and restricted lifestyles. I am deeply saddened when I see people my age and in the next generation, going backward instead of supporting the progression of the prior generation's efforts.

In 2016, Islamic extremists made one of the most sinister attacks on an arts and culture center in the Brahmanbaria, Bangladesh, a practice that is not new, but is on the rise. Islamic extremists often blast bombs during Bangla new year's celebration anywhere people sing, dance, have fun welcoming the Bangla new year, with women and men mixing together nation wide. The extremists try to stop these celebrations and any open relationship between men and women. They believe women need to live under a veil or *hijab* and listen to only men and qur'anic

commands. They also believe that music, dance, arts, paintings are *haram* or un-Islamic. Therefore, extremists burnt down the *Guru/ Ustad* Alauddin Khan music academy at Brahmanbaria.

This academy was dedicated to the memory of the greatest exponent of Maihar-famed Indian classical music and style, *Gharana*. The more than century-old ancestral home of *Ustad* Alauddin Khan had been turned into a museum cum musical center, designed as an historical treasure where dance, art, classical musical instruments, and vocal lessons were offered regularly (*The Financial Express*, 2016). The attackers destroyed many ancient Indian classical instruments and musical books, hand-written letters of the *Ustad*, musical notations, and invaluable musical archives. What was destroyed can never be recreated. The students of musical and fine arts departments are now afraid of practicing in Bangladesh because extremists threaten to cut out the tongues of singers and cut off the fingers of musicians. Even though I now live in Canada, I felt the unconscionable agony and frustrations when I learned this news. Many local youths are being contaminated by such Islamification incidents back home and they spread the same extremist messages even here in Canada in the second generation. Attacking the arts is a common denominator of imperialist agendas.

I often get confused about to whom I should pass my cultural movement baton in this intergenerational relay race. I can see how the lack of arts education, awareness, and Islamic fundamentalism have distorted how the public sees art and cultural activities. I only know that I must run well. As a runner in this race, I want to hand down the baton of artistic expression to the next generation, without stumbling or fumbling the hand-off. Artists inspire and shape how we think and answer critical questions we are always afraid to ask ourselves alone. Artists give us new perspectives to better understand how we can communicate across our differences in creative ways.

Finding Solutions as a Minoritized-Artists-of-Colour Community

When the artists of colour got together at the community radio show to find a solution, everyone appreciated initiating this conversation on a community level, as long overdue. Still, they did not find any other platform to amplify their voices. The initiative and the conversation have just begun and must be continued to protect the artists of colour from colourless mainstream discourses. This conversation needs to continue at a policy and state level to sustain

the quality of artworks and the communities that artists draw together. Participating artists brainstormed to find solutions for all these profound challenges and problems.

At the end of our discussions, we summarized some points together to sustain hope and for finding possible solutions:

- First, artists of colour need to be educated about the challenges outlined above. Awareness can reduce frustrations and help us to engage and support each other as an artists' community. Sharing each other's stories helps make artists resilient.
- Anti-racist and decolonial lenses can help empower artists. Artists need this special knowledge to stay strong and resilient. Minoritized artists need to learn how to make anti-racist, decolonial art. Artists of colour need to take a strong and united political position against targeting systemic challenges.
- Minoritized artists need to lobby politicians and the government. As Nayyar Javed emphasized, "That is the problem we face, and now we know the causes of problems, and it will not be resolved unless we have a powerful lobby." No multicultural policies should require anyone to give up who we are. "We say who we are, write an excellent letter, start with that, and then get together and talk."
- Indian poet Arati Chattapadhyay also suggested such a lobby should work to advance specific state policies. "I think it's essential to get the politicians to make a state policy. We need a lobbying group, which is probably a good starting point. Saskatoon is maybe a small city, but Saskatoon can start a lobbying group, and we need good leadership for that. We can find a leader among ourselves to start the movement."
- Dr. Valle Castro said, "I want to invite everybody to join me at the Anti-racism network. There's already a network that we can use to put pressure and do some lobbying around these issues. People of colour, Indigenous people, and refugees, we are also engaged in making art, and this art is connected to our people's struggles and histories. And that's what we want people, the rest of Canadians, to know. Those artists of colour are not just ornamental things, pretty things to consume; they contain our history, which we want people to learn about."
- Nayyar Javed also advised "institutionalizing what we have; it has to go to schools, it has to go to music departments, arts, and others. So that's it: we start with a letter to the

Prime Minister, and we push it, and we institutionalize what we have brought, rather than performing here and there.”

- Javed also emphasized intercultural educational institution-building among educators. “Instead of us passing on some intercultural understanding and enriching Canadian society and culture, we are usually treated as entertainers, which is a typical view of colonized subjects; to provide entertainment, but they do not learn anything from us.”
- As my own contribution, I created a social media page where artists of colour can get their work seen, and voices heard, with opportunities to volunteer time and resources to make events and actions happen.

I have worked with many multicultural events in the past without understanding my own social position as part of the root problems facing Canada. But this collaborative community radio discussions opened my eyes and we all learned together how these systemic problems are deteriorating the quality of newcomer artists' lives. In my ten years with the Ness Creek music festival, where I worked as a cultural-connections coordinator, I found that the festival welcomed my leadership and supported my intercultural initiatives. They permitted me to start anti-racist educational spaces to create awareness and advance critical discussions within artists' communities.

Artists' Resilience and Few Rays of Hope

We should not let our songs and singers die. We need to work as a community to allow our cultures to continue to live. A Pakistani-Canadian *Tabla* player, Azad Danish, tried to bring some hope to our discussion:

I hear lots of challenges and frustrations among us. Let's think of something positive. Let's do something together. I just started a TV program, an online TV channel. I'm offering my channel to all the artists to get introduced. I'll promote everything, all your art forms, on the radio station we can use. I also arrange shows; you're always welcome if you like to introduce yourself or your art. Just do practice whatever you know. Practice it, teach the kids, the next generation, to do something and just practice it. Give some more time. It is inside you, your soul, and yourself. Keep some time; find some time to do practice for yourself I wish we could start practicing again, and we can be teaching kids and do better in this way. My platforms are always available for everybody, for all the artists, anytime.

Azad Danishe's online TV programme made me think about my own radio show initiative. I had been thinking deeply for a long time about how to create anti-racist, intercultural spaces through

my singing and cultural activities, investing. my effort to affirm the community of marginalized artists of colour in Saskatoon. The many barriers we overcame to have that conversation, reveal the prevailing structures and the importance of changing course.

Discussion

Critical conversations among minoritized artists of colour have been long overdue and finally happened on Saskatoon Community radio. As a community, we all need to understand how gender, race, ability, and age intersect in the arts and how diversity must be encouraged, invested in, and celebrated in order to inspire respect for each other, which is foundational to meaningful democratic citizenship. By empowering artists to make excellent art and build community, the quality of our thinking about the future can begin to improve in depth and nuance.

Neo-liberal policies are harming people's relationship with the Land and the arts. This connection is not an accident. I would say that this kind of exclusion is being created and targeted. In my first chapter, I quoted Bhabha (2018; 0.44 seconds in), who critiques the discourses of denigration and dishonour that have taken hold in today's world. In the cultural performance world, monoculture artists are doing business by selling their arts to the highest bidder. Corporatized managers do not necessarily want to see an educated group of critical audiences or artists who preserve and mobilize classical art forms to resist the ways neoliberalisms are damaging Lands and cultures through the distracting overconsumption of entertainment models that are more about product than process.

Arjun Appadurai (2015) discusses the evolution of widespread global interactions and the tensions between cultural homogenization and heterogenization. He explains how the common model of understanding the global economy does not fit with the ever-expanding and changing cultural mixing in this current era. He describes "disorganized capitalism," which involves the separate, disjointed operations of the "economy, culture, and politics." (p. 295). This article helped me recognize how a misunderstanding or global miscommunication in one sphere can affect a nation or culture.

Reflecting on my efforts to decolonize myself and my community, I like how Indigenous people always say and practice that they will never fish out all the fishes, never kill all the bison; they teach us not to be greedy for more consumption. Indigenous community-based ways of knowing can help advance community dialogues that dismantle colonialist neoliberal ways of

knowing and protect our cultures, environments, heritages, and the Lands from which they have arisen.

Artists should thrive, not just survive. We can help lead through the gentle power of building community resources and creating provocations to improve our relationships with this planet. Artists need to empower and support each other, not to be de-motivated and de-moralized, losing their dreams and creative imaginings. Artists have unique ways of working against social injustices. Tanya Tagaq's political work, for example, often tackles environmentalism, feminism, human rights, and Indigenous rights themes. Artists, scholars, researchers, activists, community builders, organizers, political leaders, business elites, audiences, and artistic producers need to attend to the urgencies that artists like Tagaq embody through rooted and critical artistic practices.

I believe artists who work alone create art. Artists who work together make the change. They entertain, inspire, motivate, and move on a community and global level, to protect the gentle forces of the earth. Art and artists make people smile, laugh, cry, commit to love and affection, and jump out of our seats and act alone and together as a community. Artists can work together to save the world and the Land, which is the heart, spirit, and mother to all life forms. To make this group of artists' dreams a reality, we need to work together and bring other artists together across fields and disciplines. When artists unite, anything is possible.

I worked for eleven years in Saskatoon to create platforms for community artists because music and cultural activities are therapeutic. Eventually, I realized I could not live without singing and cultural activities to pass on my roots, culture, and knowledge to the next generation. At the same time, I am willing and open to learning about other cultural teachings and to building cultural bridges. Always, I remain thankful to Indigenous people for sharing the Land with us and offering friendships and transformative world views.

In this section, I began by discussing my own lived experiences as an artist facing systemic challenges to my artistic growth. The artists of colour who participated in the radio discussions explored how cultural death happens in all the complicated intersections of our lives. These consequences result from the othering politics perpetrated by state mechanisms, necropolitics, and biopower. Our lived experiences show how artistic works by marginalized peoples can help us to resist colonization and oppression. However, because most diasporic people cannot fight back against systemic oppression due to many factors in their lives, they may

not pass on their languages and cultures to subsequent generations. That would be a tragic loss for everyone. Ethnic artists need critical knowledge to understand and challenge the effects and processes of racialization. Newcomer settlers need to know how to connect with Indigenous Knowledges and struggles. We can fight together to reclaim our identities in a thriving movement for sustainability and self-determination.

Chapter Seven: Learnings from the Community Radio: Indigenous People, Knowledge, Land, and Decolonization

This chapter discusses what I have learned from my community radio conversations about Indigenous people, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Lands, and decolonization. The project is a self-initiated volunteer radio programme named *Banglar Gaan O Kotha* (BGOK), which means “music and stories from Bengal.” It is a CFCR community radio show that I started individually, without technical support; CFCR trains their hosts to do the technical work and to host simultaneously. Because my two children used to stay with me at the studio due to a lack of childcare, I could not do both jobs. However, I am grateful that later, my partner agreed to provide technical support, beginning in 2012. Initially, I created this radio show, primarily for Bangla-speaking people (West Bengal Indian people and Bangladeshi people in Saskatoon, as well as online Bangla speakers and listeners). After one year, however, I started to engage BIPOC community members in Saskatoon, based on the community’s needs. Through word of mouth, I learned that more than 4,500 Bangladeshi people live in Saskatoon. An informative and entertaining weekly radio program, *Banglar Gaan O Kotha* seeks to directly engage community members, artists, leaders, women, children, and youth in discussing contemporary social issues.

As I learned from the community garden experience, I also treated the radio studio as a classroom for collaborative learning. By exposing its listeners to the culture, stories and Land-based music of Bengal and other music from around the world, in the context of contemporary societal issues, the show has addressed numerous topics, including community gardening, Indigenous Land-based learning, Indigenous histories, reconciliation, decolonization, religious dogma, minoritization, anti-racism, the value of cross-cultural education, community engagements for belongingness, 2SLGBTQIA+ rights, women's empowerment, international student integration challenges, and mental health awareness, to name a few.

The show began as an effort to keep alive my artistic expression and to empower newcomer community children and families to continue to cherish their cultural heritage. The radio studio was a great collaborative learning space to pass the language, culture, and education on to the next generation through singing, reciting poems, dancing, acting, storytelling, participation in educational workshops, creative writing, and using social media to construct knowledge. The goal was to enhance cultural and social consciousness and engage participants in transformative actions for social change. For the past eight years, this radio show was dedicated

to promoting cultural activities that are uplifting, in order to create awareness about new perspectives on creative ways to achieve equity, social, and environmental justice. Learning about intercultural bridge-building through *Banglar Gaan O Kotha* has included linking newcomer families with Indigenous communities, to learn about Canadian history through anti-racist and decolonial feminist lenses.

Banglar Gaan O Kotha has impacted grassroots newcomer people's lives. The radio show advocates for anti-racist education through formal and informal channels that operate to dismantle problematic colonial ideologies, oppressive policies, and practices that maintain the unequal distribution of social power in ways that conscript newcomers to colonialist and neoliberal narratives. These activities engage five main streams of intercultural learning: Cultural Continuity, Celebration of Diversity, Anti-Racism, Intercultural Connections, and Social Integration through Reconciliation.

Banglar Gaan O Kotha held a regular slot every Sunday at the CFCR community radio station, where cross-cultural community members, post-secondary international students, university faculty members, young community leaders, and children of different ages and cultural backgrounds could tune in to learn about justice-related issues, language, history, and heritage. Radio show participants could develop their skills as leaders, public speakers, performers, and broadcasters and build relationships with others while also nurturing artistic growth and bringing social, economic, and environmental justice into their communities. Land-based, community-engaged learnings and reconciliation processes were treated, throughout, as a significant foundation for Canada's future.

This chapter draws on firsthand learning reflections provided by Indigenous Elders, university faculty members, and BIPOC women's group discussions, along with reflections by some immigrant children and youth who gathered at the CFCR Saskatoon community radio studio. The age of the children, youth and young adults involved ranged from 7 to 30 years, with everyone present being invited to ask questions or listen actively. 12 shows were selected based on the following criteria: Indigenous people, Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous meaning of Land, decolonization, and reconciliation learnings from the radio guests conversations. Each radio show was one hour long, creating 10 to 12 pages of transcripts for each of the 12 selected shows. The transcripts were read and reread many times to identify themes across the 12 selected radio conversations. Where relevant, I have used some notes from my commonplace books to

illuminate specific conversations. The themes emerging from the discussions and stories with Indigenous leaders focused on Indigenous histories, cultural practices, values, learning processes, and the meaning of Land, music, stories, decolonization, and reconciliation. I have used both the original names and pseudonyms of the radio show guests, according to each speaker's consent form requests.

Themes and Findings from Indigenous Elders' Radio Conversations

For this chapter, I drew upon radio conversations with residential school survivors, Indigenous knowledge keeper, Joseph Naytowhow, and Indigenous musician, Dwayne Lasas. I have also used my commonplace book notes to record my learnings from Indigenous scholars Dr. Alex Wilson, Dr. Marie Battiste, Dr. Yakotennikonhrare Doreen, and others in order to frame my analyses. Before any radio conversation was recorded, there were many informal coffee discussions at the studio, over the phone, and via social media, where I learned about various definitions of Indigenous knowledges.

Indigenous Knowledges

Non-Indigenous Canadians can contribute to improved reciprocities with this stolen Land and its original peoples by learning the meanings of reconciliation and decolonization. Indigenous knowledge is often described, rather than defined, because it cannot be reduced to any fixed meaning. Some sources and characteristics are shared among diverse Indigenous peoples. Still, Indigenous scholars, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders are invested in affirming knowledge fluidity and are hesitant to make fixed claims. By defining Indigenous knowledges, they do not want to limit their evolving pathways.

Indigenous Knowledge comes from the Land and is all about community, the environment, and people's pathways in the world. Indigenous Knowledge is embedded in community practices, rituals, stories, and relationships. As a living knowledge, it is holistic, contextual, and relational. Indigenous peoples focus a lot on family, children, youth, adults, and Elders who have the opportunity to develop their gifts respectfully in inclusive community spaces. All community members (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) can respectfully contribute to, share, and engage with community members. Indigenous scholar, Dr. Marie Battiste notes that, "Indigenous Knowledge comprises the complex technologies developed and sustained by Indigenous civilizations. Often oral and symbolic, it is transmitted through the structure of

Indigenous languages and passed on to the next generation through modelling, practice, and animation, rather than through the written word." (Battiste, 2002, p. 2)

Indigenous peoples have their unique ways of knowing, being, valuing and living in this world (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Indigenous knowledges represent the local and culturally specific knowledge of a dynamic array of cultures and peoples, adapting over time and place (Battiste, 2005). Indigenous knowledge comprises a group's practices, values, stories, and beliefs and is intimately linked to their ways of seeing and making sense of the world (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Battiste and Henderson describe Indigenous knowledge as a "complete knowledge system with its epistemology, philosophy, and scientific and logical validity" (2000, p. 41).

Indigenous knowledge and education are considered medicine for the community. Indigenous education takes a holistic approach while promoting a culturally safe environment where Indigenous histories, values, and knowledges are respected. Family and community are at the center of Indigenous education. Indigenous children and youth learn from oral stories and land-based education, which includes experiential learning processes that are social, inter-generational, holistic, oral- and narrative-based (Battiste, 2000; Castellano, 2000). Indigenous Knowledge has at least five characteristics. It is:

1. Personal
2. Orally transmitted
3. Experiential
4. Holistic
5. Narrative (Castellano, 2000, p. 31)

Also, according to Marlene Brant Castellano (2000), Indigenous Knowledges evolved from three knowledge sources: 1) Traditional, 2) Empirical and 3) Revealed.

What is Indigenous Land-Based Education?

Many Indigenous Elders and scholars say that Land is the first teacher, and Land-based education does not have a fixed definition. The Land is the foundation for all Indigenous cultural and traditional teachings. Indigenous scholar, Dr. Alex Wilson, teaches Land-based education at the University of Saskatchewan. Her Opaskwayak Cree Nation does not give any specific definition of land-based education. I want to share a quote from my common place book. She

says, "You need to find out the meaning by yourself. It is different for every person, depending on who you are" Another Indigenous scholar from McGill University, Dr. Yakotennikonhrare Doreen, whom I met online to learn about Land-based education. I am sharing another quote from my common place book. Dr. Doreen said, "Land-based education is very contextualized; it comes from our connection with the Land, water, cosmos, and who we are and where are we coming from." Doreen's explanations recognize that the Land is home to all people (races, genders, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples) and species. We are each responsible for protecting the Land, so that we all can share this home with everyone and everything.

After moving to Saskatoon, I started to meet Indigenous scholars, community activists, and Elders through community activities, and began to appreciate that Land-based education is imperative for all Canadians. This learning helped and encouraged me to commit to community garden activities and to stay committed to supporting Indigenous rights. I realized that connection with the Land is the first step in the decolonizing process and an avenue toward gentle power. I learned from Dr. Alex Wilson that "Land-based Education is also a form of understanding our place within, and our responsibility to, the wider universe." Through this network of Indigenous scholars and community people, I was invited to read the book *Braiding Sweet Grass* by Robin Wall-Kimmerer. She is an Indigenous scientist who shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer precious gifts and many life lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. Wall-Kimmerer affirms that, "The land is the real teacher. All we need, as students, is mindfulness."

Land-based activities are a vital part of life for many Indigenous communities. Daily Land-based outings reinforce intergenerational relationships with the Land. Land-based learning is not simply a way of preparing young people for future employment, unlike the goals of the neoliberal university, but is rather an ethical nation-building practice (Yerxa 2014; Palmater 2017). Indigenous peoples understand that all entities of nature – plants, animals, stones, trees, mountains, rivers, lakes, skies, clouds, air, and a host of other living beings– are embodied in sacred relationships that must be honoured. They perceive themselves as living in a sea of seeking, making, sharing, and celebrating these natural relationships.

I have learned from Dr. Yakotennikonhrare Doreen that Land-based education recognizes Indigenous peoples' philosophies, epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies (engaging all of

these relationships as part of how humans come to know. Indigenous musician, Dwayne Lasas, talked about the connection of the land to everything from mathematics to music and the universe as a whole, giving examples such as the diameter of the moon being precise, stating that “There are no mistakes when it comes to decisions made in the higher realms; it is almost perfect.” This statement resonates with me because of many similar interpretations from other communities on the meaning of Land. If all beings live as stewards of the Land, western models of democracy and the confounding neoliberal capitalisms upon which they rely, are deeply deficient.

Indigenous musician Dwayne Lasas taught me that Land-based education recognizes songs, natural music, and stories as fundamental to Indigenous land-based education because they are grounded in knowledges of ancestral origins within creation and the experiences, values, and lessons that have evolved since stories began travelling across generations. Elder Joseph Naytowhow talks about the “importance of knowing yourself and where you are from” because that “empowers you and encourages others to look into who they are and find their connections with land.” I learned from him that we came from Land and will go back to Land, which resonates with many of the scientific and spiritual discourses with which I am familiar, as well.

Dr. Yakotennikonhrare Doreen taught me that Land-based education incorporates the importance of language and place names - because Indigenous languages come from the Land. Therefore, it is essential to know Indigenous languages and continue learning them. In today's colonized world, in an effort to erase Indigenous presence, Lands are often named after western explorers, Queens' or kings', but Land-based education encourages Indigenous people to reclaim their Indigenous place names, languages, and identities, especially when they have been appropriated by settler colonials, as is the case with the names of Canada, Saskatchewan, and Saskatoon.

Dr. Alex Wilson has often explained that Land-based education reflects gender fluidity. If a person does not respect gender fluidity and queerness, then they are not practicing Land-based education. This is a vital issue to raise because many Indigenous stories, practices, and ceremonies have been influenced by white supremacy and heteropatriarchy. As a result of colonial institutions, many Indigenous people have since created gendered protocols, influenced by these invasive norms. If gender fluidity is not accepted in these current protocols, Wilson

suggests stepping back and inquiring whether this is how Indigenous ancestors lived their lives. Land-based education is inclusive and does not perpetuate any type of exclusionary practices.

Land-based education is based on relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility to and with humans and more-than-human species. Giving back to the community and Land and being responsible for people, our planet, Land, rocks, water, sky, clouds, and plants are deeply embedded within Land-based education. Indigenous Elders define responsibility as responding to one's ability. As responsible human beings, we need to be knowledgeable, and we need to be in tune with our responsibilities to our communities and planet and be cognizant of how to share those responsibilities. We need to learn how to appreciate Land as sustenance and medicine.

Studying Indigenous Land-based education in books is not a straightforward way to learn the definition. Indigenous Land-based education is more than received ideologies about trees, land, and water. It brings together the language, geography, cosmologies, world views, land protections and rights, relationality, accountability, reconciliation, and more. Indigenous land-based education focuses on the relational aspects of understanding how knowledge connects to and comes from the Land.

Land-based education provides us with learning opportunities about Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, pedagogies, and ethical ways of being and knowing. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are responsible for engaging with Land-based education on Turtle Island. This learning includes sharing traditional teachings, worldviews, histories, and oral traditions, ultimately strengthening a wider understanding of Indigenous cultures, languages, and practices.

Indigenous Knowledge is often Orally Transmitted

Indigenous Elder, Joseph Naytowhow, and musician, Dwayne Lasas, explained that Indigenous children and youth learn from oral stories and land-based education. As Basso (1996) argues, “Oral traditions form the foundation of Aboriginal societies, connecting speaker and listener in communal experience and uniting past and present in memory.” Therefore, many Indigenous children and youth are engaged in experiential, land-based, narrative, and inter-generational learning. Many Indigenous friends and colleagues have told me that their children regularly take part in traditional cultural camps where children and families go out on the open land to learn and carry out traditional activities, such as hunting, fishing, plant gathering,

storytelling, medicine picking or learning about the medicinal plants and communal practices associated with traditional life.

Indigenous parents, Elders and knowledge keepers explain the role of oral storytelling and its connection to our present-day context. Community Elders play a vital part in raising children. They regularly visit to tell children and youth local stories and show them how to do traditional activities, such as preparing medicines, picking berries, and catching fish, demonstrating how knowledge is passed on through the generations. During those walks, they learn about medicine and other endangered Indigenous plants, how and when to gather them, and their medicinal purposes and uses. Therefore, most Indigenous parents and community members try to make sure that their children go for daily walks on the. Their regular visits and efforts to make relationships with the Land, rivers, lakes or oceans and prairie and bush activities inspire them to talk more about landscape, traditional food sources, and stories about traditional Indigenous life.

Inspired by these stories, I do the same with our children. I am raising my children in connection with Land-based education and Indigenous knowledges. I have taken them to several Indigenous cultural camps. For example, in James Smith Cree Nation, Saskatchewan, we participated with people from all walks of life who have chosen to participate in traditional Indigenous sweat lodge ceremonies for physical and mental healing and respect for Indigenous cultural teachings. The sweat lodge looks like a hut or dome, which Indigenous community members have told me, represents the womb of a mother and, therefore, of the earth. Such purification ceremonies are a part of Land-based education. According to Castellano (2000), Indigenous knowledges forms a collective endeavor to live well and in balance with all beings through oral traditions. Repeating stories creates more comprehensive narratives that reflect the actual contexts, wherever they are told.

Learning About the Meaning of Indigenous Spirituality

Joseph Naytowhow and Dwayne Lasas shared their views on the meaning of Land, music, and spirituality. The way they express their gratitude to the Land, nature and all the relations of this earth illuminates more effective ways of living within the limits of our ecosystems. I learned from Joseph Naytowhow, Dwayne Lasas, and many more Indigenous scholars, activists, and cultural camps that Indigenous spirituality is deeply linked to the Land and all the natural forces that shape the relationships it contains. They believe all objects are

living and share the same soul or spirit; therefore, everything has a spirit and a meaning that informs its existence. They respect each living and non-living part of this world because they believe that entire ecosystems are interconnected and relational.

Humans have a role in taking care of the Land, which they share with the trees, shrubs, plants, and unknown and invisible insects, birds, and animals. They keep telling us to treat the land gently because the Land feeds us and supports the survival of all species and planetary processes. Indigenous people believe that nothing is inanimate; everything is alive and has a purpose in the sustainability of life. For example, animals, plants, rocks, and all-natural forces are energized by a spirit. Humans are part of this nature and are morally obligated to treat animals, plants and land, fire, rocks, and air with respect and generosity. Joseph Naytowhow gave an excellent example in the radio show. He advises, "walking across the Earth gently and with intention." He also told the radio listeners that humans are all equal to animals and naturally inhabit the Land's surface, a corrective way of challenging prevailing hierarchies. Joseph's examples invite listeners to appreciate and experience the implications of Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

I have learned from these Indigenous leaders how to acknowledge and express gratitude, show love and respect for the bugs, berries, and interwoven food systems that produce humans, harvests, and more. I learned from them the importance of respecting all-natural processes in sustaining a healthy relationship with the planet; if we take care of the Land, the Land will provide us with fecundity and abundance. Giving thanks to nature individually and as a group, as Dwayne Lasas explains, demonstrates that nature contains the directions, the sky, and the air we breathe. We must thank the four directions, north, south, west, and east, along with the natural energies and light. Dwayne's account of these interdependencies can reshape social relations when understood and embraced with openness and curiosity.

Dr. Doreen teaches that the whole of all relations with the Land form our home; no single part can belong to one person alone because we are a part of the Land, all of us together. Learning about the Land's history from ancestors and passing that knowledge on to future generations can make human efforts to care for the Land more sustainable. My learnings of the meaning of Land acknowledgments and Indigenous spirituality have helped me embrace a model of gentle power that operates in generative directions that invalidate the destruction and greed that undergirds capitalist acquisition via aggression.

One of my ethnic community members has mentioned his insight into taking out underground minerals from Land. He thinks today's world needs to feed more people, and like many people, he does not believe in returning the Land to sovereign practices of care that the Indigenous people would bring to the project of decolonization. He is not aware of how spiritual the lands are and how Indigenous people value the spirit of the Land. Westerners and many settlers, newcomers, and states have often overlooked Indigenous people's spiritual relationships, traditional experiences, and knowledge practices and claim that the Land has different spiritual and material destinations than capital. What I have learned through the radio stories sampled here has profoundly changed my outlook; I've learned to cherish the Land I have come to understand my home and the places where I walk now, not just as providing a place to live, but also for what the Land gives us spiritually. I have taken the message from the Indigenous Elders that we need to stop the extractive use of Land and its natural sources. We should not abuse the Land to maximize profit, but maintain the equilibrium of the natural environment and keep the spiritual sustenance it provides as we learn to unpack the histories and teachings informing our respective cultures in connective ways.

The Meaning of Honorariums in Indigenous Cultures

I did not know what an honorarium meant to Indigenous people, as a newcomer. I have learned that an honorarium is not transactional; it is a gift that engages an Indigenous cultural protocol as a sign of respect and reciprocity, in the context of sharing Traditional Knowledge. When inviting an Indigenous person to share their culture or knowledge, there is an Indigenous cultural protocol to offer them a humble gift. It can often be tobacco, medicines, money, food, cloth, or other symbolic and spiritual items. If any non-Indigenous people are unsure about the protocols of honoraria, Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers can help them learn. I have given tobacco, homemade foods, and non-materialistic gifts to my Indigenous radio speakers out of respect for their endangered cultural knowledge and to support the survival and sustainability of Indigenous Knowledges, including among non-Indigenous communities

Ceremonies and Traditional Practices

As a racialized newcomer settler woman, who has developed friendships with Indigenous community members, I have learned from communities and ceremonial events that Indigenous people want to pass their knowledge and teachings forward across generations. Due to

colonization and residential schools, many Indigenous communities did not have the opportunity to teach their languages and cultures to their children. Therefore, the children must learn about gift-giving, showing respect to their families, Elders, and community members, by using their traditional songs, languages, drumming, or dance, making relationships, sharing cultural foods, wearing traditional regalia, braiding hair, and witnessing ceremonies closely with honour and respect. This includes consuming less and taking no more than whatever they need.

The Meaning of Music in Indigenous Cultures

I have observed as a newcomer that music is an integral part of Indigenous people's daily lives and spiritual beliefs in Canada. Music, drumming, singing, and dancing are part of the backbone of Indigenous spiritual, cultural and kinship connections. I got the opportunity to participate in Indigenous social music, community round dances, and have observed their ceremonial music. Dwayne Lasas' discussion of the Indigenous meaning of music informs my decolonial learning. Indigenous community musicians and dancers are respected because they convey their culture's heart through their stories, singing, dancing and instrumental sounds. Dwayne Lasas introduced the Cree Way on air, and explained the meaning of music which is different than my colonial ways of learning music and dance:

Music begins at *Mitehi* (Cree) means heart. It starts from the heart of human beings. The first thing you hear is your parents' heartbeats – As soon as we are aware of sound, before we are born, the first thing you will listen to is your mother's womb, heart, emitting a beautiful universal force called love. When you were born, your mother would hold and sing songs to you, hearing each other's heartbeats and the sound of taking a breath. Music starts with our languages. I will begin with our language of how it interconnects with the music and the rest of creation. We call the drum the heartbeat of our nation, and there are a lot of words that have the word heart in them.

Dwayne explains how music is embedded everywhere in nature. For example, eagles, wolves, and other animal sounds, raindrops, waterfalls, ocean waves, and rivers' flow all make natural musing. Dwayne's Land-based lessons about song and poetry extend to relational laws and intentional acts (walking, ceremony, dance, and smudging). Cultural practices inform the relational dynamics that condition the kinds of behavior that shape ideas of power.

Learning about Decolonization and Reconciliation

In this section, I outline my collaborative learning about why, *as* a Canadian citizen and newcomer settler woman of colour, I must engage with the histories of Indigenous people in Canada and the meaning of decolonization and reconciliation, to heal myself and my relationships with my many interwoven communities. This section has been organized around a radio conversation with Dr. Marie Battiste, renowned Indigenous scholar, public intellectual, and an expert on Indigenizing education. Recently, she has been named an appointee to the Order of Canada. This award recognizes Canadians who have distinguished themselves in their fields or contributed to making Canada a better country. She shared her stories live in collaborative discussions twice at the CFCR community radio studio, in 2017, and 2019.

Most newcomers migrate here to Canada for a safer and better life, but they do not ask who they are in this Indigenous Land, nor about their received positionality as settler people of colour. Over the years, I have learned that it is essential to know *who I am, where I am coming from, and why I am here*, in order to be part of decolonization. I began looking for decolonizing approaches to my education to rid myself of my multi-layered and unearned privileges because I could see the harms enacted through these systems. After arriving in Saskatoon, I learned from the multiple community activities that there is a silent and invisible conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Within diasporic ethnic communities, women become minorities within minorities, due to their many intersectional layers of exclusion. As ethnic people living on the margins and across national state boundaries, women are targets of multi-faceted systemic oppressions, but also agents engaging in new identities and spaces as settlers. Intercultural, inter-generational, and transnational exchanges about sustaining communities and ecosystems lives at the core of the Indigenous worldview, linking decolonization, reconciliation, and empowerment. (Battiste, at the CFCR community radio coffee talk, 2019)

The Indigenous worldview has helped me understand my positionality as an autoethnographic researcher, developing coping mechanisms in this settler-colonial country as a racialized newcomer settler woman. Today, I understand that many life struggles are a legacy of the world's colonialist histories, in which all of us are implicated. I have been learning every day from my lived experiences and doctoral studies that colonizers create politics that use people's lives and differences as a battleground, a technique that has survived for centuries, right up to the present day.

I have found Indigenous spiritual practices for connecting with the Land can help me find my way as a minority within a minority toward deeper solidarities. Over the years, opportunities to engage with the Blanket Exercise, Sweat Lodges, pipe ceremonies, talking with Elders, listening to Indigenous knowledge holders, and making Indigenous friendships, including with artists, has given me new ways of thinking and developing creative ways to practice as an artist and activist, committed to decolonization and reconciliation.

Because Indigenous people have a colonized history that is linked to the histories of India and Bangladesh, I have learned about partition stories and the various social and political factors that have influenced people's lives and thoughts in South Asia (Pandey: 2001). I have found a connection between the oppressive, racist, colonized history of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and North American Indigenous people's histories. For example, during the partition of India in 1947, there was rioting between Hindu and Muslim peoples. During the liberation war of Bangladesh, there was a genocide in 1971, where the extremist Muslim Pakistani military killed three million people. While religious Hindu people were their primary targets, many random people were also killed during the liberation war of Bangladesh and the preceding Bangla language movement, in 1952.

Although I came to Canada knowing little about Canada's Indigenous peoples or histories, through community activities, informal learnings, and conversations, I have been developing a deeper understanding of how immigrant community people's experiences, thoughts, integration challenges, and daily life struggles are parallel to and informed by Indigenous people's realities in Canada. As the original people of this Land, Indigenous people may not need to know the history of all the non-Indigenous communities' migrations, but they are forced to understand the processes of settlement in ways that newcomers and long-time settlers may misunderstand. It is hard for newcomers to grasp the concepts of decolonization and reconciliation because their thoughts are quickly colonized and capitalized as they are overwhelmed by the initial demands of survival and adaptation. Therefore, their attention is directed away from understanding Indigenous people's lives and histories, because the imperatives of assimilation inform their complex positionalities.

My community activities have provided a context for gradually learning about how newcomers are positioned in the context of settler and Indigenous peoples in Canada. As a lifelong learner, community activist and anti-racist, decolonial feminist researcher, invested in

interdisciplinary knowledge and Land-based education, I have developed a visceral understanding of how various community activities could provide lessons in cross-cultural socialization, decolonization, and reconciliation.

North American Indigenous scholars Marie Battiste (2013, 2017) and Eve Tuck (2012) suggest that developing transnational solidarity requires continuous life-long decolonization practices, grounded in unlearning dominating and relearning reciprocal processes that move away from the patriarchal ideals by decentralizing dominant perspectives and questioning normative discourses. Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that the concept of decolonization means "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor" (p. 2) and that "Decolonization is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" (p. 35). Transnational solidarities must be founded on an affirmation that Indigenous women have always had inherent sovereignty over their bodies and spirits, even though colonial violence has operated to traumatize whole peoples and places. Decolonization helps to reclaim and re-establish Indigenous and subaltern non-Indigenous voices, particularly those of women (Battiste: 2000, 2017, Tuck: 2012, 2013), whose subordination undergirds the formation of all modern nation-states. However, Tuck (2013) and Ross (2009) argue that Indigenous feminists need to distance themselves from and decolonize western and transnational feminisms.

If we want to know about Indigenous peoples and their histories, it is essential to learn about the meaning and processes of decolonization first, before learning about reconciliation. Because Indigenous world views honour peoples' relationships with the Land, water, and nature, while offering a broader understanding of human and interspecies kinship relationships, Indigenous peoples are concerned with issues of sovereignty that exceed human claims. Thus, decolonial feminist researchers, educators, and activists need to develop transnational solidarities, drawing not only from our thoughts, experiences, work, localities, and positioning, but respecting Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and understanding how the processes of subordination work in the lives of the most disadvantaged, who often live on the verge of danger and death (Mbembe:2003).

Tuck, Arvin, and Morrill (2013) have outlined the ways heteropatriarchal "settler colonialism has been and continues to be a gendered process" (p. 9), while Luana Ross (2009) has described her own experiences of hearing "feminist" treated as the "f word," owing to the

persistent stigma that feminism carries within Indigenous communities and the academic world for its assumed association with whiteness (p. 45). Of course, proliferating feminisms far exceed any such colonialist models.

Indigenous Scholars' Stand on Decolonization

Dr. Marie Battiste, a renowned Mi'kmaw Indigenous scholar, has given a straightforward way to understand the importance of decolonization and reconciliation. She (*Banglar Gaan O Kotha, CFCR Community Radio, 2017*) argues that decolonization offers "a way to help people to understand . . . how they are in an inequitable situation." It builds "recovery from colonial impact, restoration of Indigenous people's identities, Indigenous people's languages, Indigenous people's experiences . . . in this country, which builds on treaties that have been signed, ignored, marginalized for many, many years in Canada (p. 12). Battiste also explains (*Banglar Gaan O Kotha, CFCR Community Radio, 2017*) how decolonization can empower researchers, educators, activists, and others to ask questions: "How are we related to the colonial oppressions? Who are the people who belong to colonial cultures? Who are the people benefiting from the oppressive systems? Who is privileged by oppressing others?" (p. 13).

Datta (2017) suggests that a better understanding of colonial legacies and their impacts can help researchers re-evaluate their relationship as a researcher to the field of research: "However, reaching to this point is a difficult and long-term process. Once it is understood that colonialism harms everyone, it should not be so easy to go back to colonial processes in research" (p. 13). Battiste (2013, 2000) and Datta (2017) thus invite scholars to look at our cultural histories, contexts, positionalities, and complicities, to unlearn our social privileges in order to establish more ethical relationships grounded in critical literacies that take the issues of local and global social Justice seriously. In her radio interview at *Banglar Gaan O Kotha, CFCR Community Radio* in 2019, Battiste explains:

The curriculum today is something where we have a place; we could do something about in an education system that caused part of this problem. We also have a constitutional right to our Aboriginal rights, and the treaty rights that were negotiated in those early meetings with them that were called Indians across Canada. And so, part of it I call decolonization in my work. Decolonization, for me, is a two-prong process. And the two-prong process that I talked about is, first of all, it's called deconstructing and reconstruction, big words! But basically, deconstruction is merely that we understand from the head what happened, and we are complicit in what has occurred, to bring that information to the forefront of our minds. And then, when it is in our mind, we need to take it to our hearts.

Dr. Battiste posed a few complicated questions to CFCR radio listeners:

Some people would say well, we can't measure today by the past or take the past measured by today's justice standards. Then I say, yes, we can and should because justice did not happen then. If we think that justice is happening now, we have to bring it home, and we have to say, well, what does justice look like today? And in my heart, if I take all those particular elements of the oppression that we have lived and if we bring that home to our heart, we then have to say: what role do we play in maintaining colonization? What role do we play in reproducing the narratives of deficiency of Indigenous people? What role do we play, even when we watch somebody walk across the street, or somebody's sleeping on a bench that I saw this morning, In Saskatoon! What do we say in our head when we do that? Because what we are saying in our head is really what we have learned. What have we learned in the system what we have learned in the media? What have we learned from our great, great grandparents or grandparents or even, you know, people around us? And we continue to continue thinking and believing those kinds of narratives, all the while posing it as in this is a problem created by laziness by a lack of initiative. It becomes all about "them." What they lacked, not the oppression made systemically and is also operating continually, even in our prejudices of narratives about Indigenous peoples today.

She adds:

The second and most important part, I think, for Indigenous people, is reconstruction, engaging all of that which has happened to us in the past – all of the losses of our language, the loss of our culture, the denial of our community, the lack of connection with our Elders, and the disconnect from our Indigenous knowledge systems, which is uniquely different from a Eurocentric western knowledge system, with its own principles, protocols, foundations. It comes from a relationship with the land and all things. It is embedded within a language system. It is embedded within communally activated learning through the kinds of ceremonies and traditions in our communities. And so, for many of us that have been colonized, our job is to understand: Where do we go? How do we go? forward to change the past picture for ourselves, effectively? How do we then recover our languages? How do we rebuild our communities? How do we formulate a robust economic plan that will enable our communities to survive in the places They are because they need to have a place to be together? How do we help Canada and all of those in it understand that when we are looking at land issues, sometimes we are looking at how the crown continually gives away our land to corporations, you know, for their benefit? Maybe we might want to have some benefit go back to Indigenous people. Perhaps we want Indigenous people to want to have that land to have the resources and that they decide whether it's then used to do fracking or oil or any other kinds of things that will affect our future. And our seven generations ahead of us. So, it's reconstruction, reconstruction of ourselves as people and our relationships with each other. Our relationships with the land, our relationships with our languages, our people and so on, and to share that as we have always shared as a sharing culture and as a result that sharing cultural be able to bring in people from other places, so they know and understand what it means to do that. That kind of work in Canada as well.

Riti Rahaman, a newcomer (Bangladeshi-Canadian) high school youth, responded:

It's been great to listen to you. I've learned so much in just the past half an hour. So, thank you for that. I immigrated to Canada five years ago. I am a settler of colour on Treaty Six territory. I'm a very honoured guest on this land. I'm very grateful for the opportunity this has presented me with today at this radio studio, a great learning place, like a classroom. So, my journey of learning about reconciliation and the history of Indigenous people on this island has been a long one, and I know there's so much for me to learn; you know, umm, and it's been a pretty graceful journey for me to learn about what it means to be an ally, and so, I have learned throughout this process that most newcomers here don't get a chance to learn about the history of Indigenous people. It is not something you know is presented to us throughout the immigration process. The only way my siblings and I have been able to learn about it is through school, and obviously, that's still very flawed. As you said, there's a long way to go within the curriculum. Yeah, there's been so much that I would have to unlearn and learn within five years. The concept of reconciliation and sovereignty of Indigenous people is something that I think is a very crucial part of giving justice and rights to Indigenous people.

This young high school second generation student's voice may give us hope. Recent newcomer parents are busy surviving, but young people in school have an open mind to learn about decolonization, reconciliation and to build the bridges.

Challenges of Learning and Teaching About Decolonization and Reconciliation

There are some challenges to learning about decolonization and the reconciliation process. There is guilt and shame involved for many people to look back. In that case, it is essential to know how to deconstruct oneself and learn how and where they accessed or were denied privileges, and how that relates to the legacies of colonization. Dr. Battiste shared her life story to help explain how to learn about decolonization and reconciliation, by deconstructing her own life:

How did I get here? I have to say I'm a very privileged Mi'kmaq person today. I have my doctorate, I have a master's degree, and they are from the top universities in the world. I went to Harvard for a master's degree. I went to Stanford University in California for a doctorate. I have four honorary doctorate degrees. I am a member of the Royal Society of Canada. I am currently a Pierre Elliott Trudeau Fellow, so all of these have come about and how? How does that come about? You know, because my parents lived, they lacked the reserve when they left the reserve in 1947, before I was born. They went to pick potatoes; my father and I worked at hard labour and potato picking on potato farms, and we lived in a tarpaper shack behind the pit house. So, from that, we had nothing, nowhere to know how! How did I get forward? My father had a keen interest in reading; he didn't get beyond grade 4 or 5 in his education, but he learned to teach me how to read from his reading passion. He's been reading all the time, this and that, you know, primarily magazines and Time Magazine, whatever kind of thing; we had a lot of magazines seemingly in the house, but he also had a keen interest in education. He always said, "Do

the best you can and keep on going and keep on going doing your job.” They were delighted when I came home with Bs and A grades, and even he rewarded me, you know, with a dollar for As and, so it was kind of like small little effort and gift sharing. But it was my pride in giving them that joy because they had so little, because they had nothing else to gift them, but watching kids get on through school gave me joy and gave it back to them. And they then give it back to the others, and so as I went up in school and was among those who were the only ones you know through high school and then onto university. I got it through scholarships. I worked at the university, and I took loans. I did everything that everyone did to get through school, but each time I graduated or was rewarded for something, it gave them such joy and pride in me that I just kept going on. You know, “make the parent happy” kind of syndrome, but so does the pride they always had that my dad would always go back home and talk to his family about his children and how well they were doing, and they took all the pride. So, I do all of these for my family, communities, and Mi’kmaw people.

Many non-Indigenous newcomers have come from a relatively privileged positionality. Therefore, they do not feel a need to pay attention to the ways that Indigenous peoples in Canada have undergone five hundred years of colonization by settler society, through attempted physical and cultural genocide. Non-Indigenous Canadians and newcomers need to appreciate that reconciliation represents only the minimum standard for the survival, dignity, and well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada. After engaging in community activities for the last ten years, I can see that this knowledge needs to be present in Canada's political, legal, and educational systems, religious institutions, media, and corporate sectors. I have learnt from my community activities that reconciliation means connecting with my own and Canadian colonized histories creatively.

When Dr. Battiste discussed the meaning of reconciliation at the community radio show (July 2, 2019) with second-generation cross-cultural youth, she said,

We are trying to look at many lifetimes of work in a concise period, so indeed, this is not a project of, you know, probably a year or a month or even, you know, my life. It will be several lifetimes ahead for us to make the different changes that need to come about. The reconciliation process cannot at all be called a buzzword. I am offended sometimes when I hear people saying that, because I do not believe it is. I think it is a word that captures what we're trying to achieve when we want to shift the boundaries of the colonial oppression that Indigenous peoples have lived worldwide and what we have lived in Canada and beyond in my lifetime. For me, living in poverty, living under colonial rule during their lifetime, my parents were alive and well. They lived in poverty under a patriarchal government that took away their lands, moved them onto reserves, gave them very little to live on, and held them in poverty, not letting them leave the reserve, their own lands, or territories. It has led to very long layers of oppression that Indigenous people live with today. So, reconciliation to me is a long-term process. It is the long-term goal of Indigenous people to acquire the power to live their lives.... So, reconciliation is

about our understanding. First of all, who we are, understanding where we come from, how our language was taken away from us, and why we don't speak that language today. Many of us don't because we have experiences of not having that language in our homes, sometimes in schools. I had it while growing up, but I didn't have anyone else around who needed to talk. (*Banglar Gaan O Kotha*, CFCR, Community Radio, 2019)

Listening to Dr. Battiste, I can see that reconciliation, for me as a racialized settler woman, means connecting with my country of origin and Canadian colonized histories. When I first arrived in Canada, I understood the importance of reconciliation from my challenges in life and through lived experiences as a member of a "visible minority." Reconciliation is not about hiding my past life story. If I do, others will continue to reproduce the same religious racism or situated oppression due to their own learned colonial approaches, which is something I have experienced and witnessed. As I try to educate people about intercultural and inter-religious relationships and their benefits, I have come to appreciate that the original peoples of this Land have never asked me to justify my faith or religious identity. In return, I am constantly working to define and redefine my upbringing and identity as a process of personal decolonization. I have taken the responsibility to share my own story because I need to know why, whether in Bangladesh or Canada, education presents colonial histories instead of Indigenous ones, and how this is connected to the formation of nation-states. I have learned that we need to make a connection with the Land before we can work together as people.

Too few non-Indigenous Canadians know about the deep historical roots of the conflicts that brought them here, which has severe consequences for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, and Canada. In government, this lack of knowledge can lead to poor public policy decisions that reinforce ignorant, racist attitudes and fuel civic distrust between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians. Meaningful engagements with the Land can help learners understand colonial legacies of oppression. Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, and connections to the ground are essential to reconciliation's ongoing progress, even as non-Indigenous Canadians must do most of the work. Canadians can benefit from listening to the voices, experiences, and wisdom of Survivors, Elders, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers—by understanding themselves as members of colonialist histories with much more to learn about reconciliation.

Dr. Battiste touched on the question of how to take responsibility for reconciliation:

I guess I start with the ally. I think one of the things I said, one of the things I do is teach at the University of Saskatchewan, and I train teachers in two required courses that every

teacher has to have, and the first one is a course in anti-racism. It's a way to situate your identity, situate yourself at the back; that's called situated identity in anti-oppressive education. And the other one is First Nation Métis in your education foundations. And the anti-racist education course that we teach asks each of our students to examine their own situated identities. And what that means is, well, first of all, is understanding. Where did you get your privileges?

At a Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum sponsored by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Anishinaabe Elder Mary Deleary spoke about the responsibility for reconciliation that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people carry. She emphasized that the work of reconciliation must continue to honour ancestors, respect the Land, and rebalance relationships. Indigenous Scholar Dorothy Christian (2011) invites Canadians to consider reconciliation and decolonization's deeper meanings. She says,

Settler peoples, particularly new immigrants, and refugees, come from all over the world to our lands to reap the benefits of this land of milk and honey. They send their financial and other resources to their homelands. What do they give back to these lands' Original [Aboriginal] peoples? Do they ever take the time to learn about the Indigenous people whose lands they occupy? (p. 76)

Connecting with traditional Indigenous ways of storytelling, prayer, songs, ceremonies, and cultures, I have learned that I have come from Land, will go back to Land one day, and that the Land forms my identity. Where human identities are socially constructed to divide and oppress people, I have learnt that it is our responsibility as immigrants to talk about reconciliation and learn about those treaties and territories upon which we live. If we feel connected to the future of this country, through the treaties and to unceded territories we can build the future of the next generation, by caring about Indigenous people, their knowledges, and approaches to reconciliation. Intercultural, inter-generational, and transnational exchanges about sustaining communities and ecosystems are at the core of decolonization, reconciliation, and mutual empowerment and becomings, and belongingness. We need to start the journey together toward healing as a community by developing a passion for learning about each other.

Discussion

This community radio show initiative focuses on newcomer immigrants, settlers, refugees and international student life challenges and the processes of integration in Saskatoon. We have explored some of the best ways to integrate international and immigrant students into the University of Saskatchewan and the Saskatoon community through this weekly community radio show. Over the years, we have learned how community engagement can be an alternative form

of learning for resilience, how it can encourage us to think about what we have to offer to the community, what community information and opportunities we can leverage together, and how we can pool our different skills to engage community members in transformative action for change. I tried to form an active community radio host group through this radio initiative to keep the community and conversations going. *Banglar Gaan O Kotha* has created opportunities to build understanding and relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups of people! It is a tool for Immigrant families' cultural empowerment and showcases their integration challenges and unheard stories. I got the opportunity to share with the community radio how Indigenous Land-based learning became healing and empowering for me as a newly arrived racialized settler woman on this stolen Indigenous Land. Using decolonial relational feminist autoethnographic research, I challenged the assumptions informing the everyday racism and colonial practices ingrained in our daily lives through the Canadian nation-state.

Land-based learning is a powerful decolonizing tool that centers and honours Indigenous relationships with the Land and all of creation. Themes of Land as the first teacher, relationality, holism, reflection, and Indigenous resistance to colonial structures are common across the Land-based learning literature. Land-based learning initiatives commonly include community leadership, youth involvement, traditional languages, and sustenance practices. In Canada, that involves Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to support the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Non-Indigenous people need to learn through Indigenous pedagogies to become whole persons who support Indigenous people to reclaim their sovereign relations with the Land and with aspects of self, family, children, community, and healthy relationships harmed by colonialism. Battiste (2002) underscores the relationship of Indigenous languages to Indigenous knowledges, asserting that their symbolic, verbal, and unconscious orderings give structure to Indigenous knowledges. Coming together on the Land, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can share what each community has learned from their ancestors to build healing relationships that begin to transcend the trauma caused by past and present colonial processes. Indigenous knowledge is non-discriminatory; there is something that everyone can learn and apply to their own lives and their involvements within a community.

Dwyane Lasas' story of being a residential school survivor has affected his experience with Land acknowledgement and with processes of racialization as part of unseating people from

their Lands, whether through slavery, displacement, “voluntary” or coerced migration. We may all look different because we have adapted to our various environments, but as humans who live in the same Land in Canada, we have a responsibility to connect with one another through our relationships with the Lands we live on. Joseph and Dwayne have influenced my education on Land acknowledgments by expressing how vital it is to understand our differences and yet recognize how we are all now linked.

Everything comes together through our relationships with the Land from the Indigenous perspective. Indigenous knowledge is not focused on establishing control through interpretation but primarily on learning through embodied experience. Each experience illustrates how all these factors are interwoven within each other, allowing a deeper understanding of human ideas in the context of the wider natural world and all of the relations the Land sustains. Therefore, reconciliation requires consistent and collaborative planning to ensure that Indigenous education flourishes in ways that engage families and communities in relationships that sustain mutual flourishing among all peoples and places.

In conclusion, becoming an Indigenous ally has helped me reposition my understanding of my relationships with my family and communities in empowering ways. Practicing anti-racist, anti-colonial, trauma-informed, and decolonial feminist methods have unfolded for me into new understandings of empowerment in academe and everyday life. There is a levelling of hierarchical structures in Indigenous ways of knowing that has helped me see my oppressions differently. This requires critical reflection, community discussions and evaluations of the intentions of systems and institutions of power. To be anti-racist and decolonial is to question who benefits and suffers and how does this affect others?

Wark (2021) argues that Land acknowledgments are “performed for the benefit of non-Indigenous speakers” (p. 196) and “have been accused of facilitating settler moves to innocence (Anderson et al., 2019, as cited in Wark, 2021), which diminish settler responsibility, perpetuate settler innocence, and try to rewrite Indigenous history (Wark, 2021). I understand that my status as an uninvited guest in Canada and Saskatchewan is not innocent. My pursuit of a better life through western education systems steeps me in capitalistic strategies that are poisonous to the substantive changes Indigenous knowledges offer, as correctives to colonialist practices. I have learned that reconciliation and solidarity efforts cannot be scripted through my efforts to find new connections with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples on these stolen Lands. Still, they

can be encouraged by settlers taking responsibility to develop a deeper understanding of how Indigenous knowers interpret formal and informal learning interfaces that engage settlers of all stripes. Ultimately, healing the distortions of western power-knowledge systems requires non-coercive solidarities with Indigenous ways of knowing. That kind of commitment needs to come from the heart.

Chapter Eight, Conclusion: Taking Responsibility for Reconciliation and Making Change is a Lifelong Commitment

This research has sought to address significant gaps in the available literature and to recognize the contributions of racialized settler women's unpaid, underappreciated, and unrecognized community-building efforts. These women have the potential to participate in and contribute to decolonization and reconciliation in Canada via their social integration and empowerment processes. While I am privileged to be able to pursue an academic life, in my efforts to do so, I have witnessed my own and other BIPOC women's efforts and challenges in finding relationally meaningful pathways toward leading change in expanding Canadian accountabilities for all participating publics. Still, the nation-state routinely minoritizes BIPOC women's roles in knowledge-making and policy development.

This dissertation integrates critical feminist, postcolonial, anti-racist, anti-colonial, decolonial, and empowerment scholarship to unpack the significance of colonial legacies in the lives of racialized immigrant women moving across the borders of nation-states. Simultaneously, I examined how colonialist legacies target Indigenous peoples and racialized settlers differently. The inter-related critical theoretical approaches I mobilized in this dissertation challenge the notion of an isolated, objective researcher controlling the terms of reference operating in the field of study. Mobilizing autoethnography as a reflexive and relational practice, I am interested in understanding the ways "settlement," "building relationships/ bridges," and "empowerment" can be reconceived, with important implications for my methodology and academic knowledge building practices (Repko, 2008).

Ontology and epistemology are vital to my theoretical framework and feminist decolonial auto-ethnographic methodology. "Locating oneself is important to knowledge production and validation. It is also crucial for how a narrative or discourse is read, understood, and interpreted. Personal location contributes to producing meanings" (Dei, 1999, p. 397). In exploring the research questions examined in this research, my socialization, my hybrid identity as a minoritized Bangladeshi-Canadian, my social sciences education as developed over many years in Bangladesh, Sweden, and Norway, my cross-religious marriage (with my Hindu partner, which is a taboo in South Asian political contexts), my cultural activities, community-engaged leadership and gardening activities, as they intersect with my intersectional and environmental

activisms, have all contributed to my emergence as a critical decolonial feminist researcher with informal and professional experiences in women's and newcomer's settlement organizations. All are relevant to exploring a racialized woman's emotional, reproductive labour in seeking empowerment by engaging local communities in projects of collaborative social change and learning the meaning of Land, decolonization, and reconciliation.

Scholars such as Ferreira and Gendron (2011), Meyer (2001), McCarthy and Moje (2002), and Smith (1999) argue that a researcher's responsibilities are to conduct significant research, rather than to dwell on their evolving identities. However, I feel strongly that researchers must acknowledge who they are, their situated knowledges, and how they take responsibility for their community roles because these will affect the processes and outcomes of their research. Like Meyer (2001), McCarthy and Moje (2002), and Smith (1999), I think a person's mind and hybrid identities are formed by how individuals and groups interact relationally, and collaboratively, according to their socialization processes and everyday knowledges. Therefore, when Torre and Ayala (2009) suggest that the researcher's responsibility is to make a space in which to rethink their own identity and challenge their received ways of being a part of prevailing narratives, I believe they are asking for more engaged and accountable researchers, with capacities to mobilize our research programs toward decolonizing and substantively inclusive ends.

Asking "Who am I as a researcher?" is an important aspect of conducting research with and among marginalized racialized immigrant communities. I agree with Wilson (2007), who suggests that research knowledge cannot be separated from who researchers are and what we are doing. Research is about exploring relationships "with our environment, families, ancestors, ideas, and the cosmos around us [which] shape who we are and how we will conduct our research" (p. 194). Therefore, a researcher's identity is a key component of their research, as situated in relational and cultural networks and frames. Indigenous scholar, William Ermine, has argued for creating an ethical space for community-engaged research (Ermine, 2007), in which participating parties learn to encounter one another, respectfully, through learning about each other's histories and perspectives. Through my research and community activities, I have tried to establish hybrid, relational practices that enable more inclusive power systems, that help community members become more aware of potential solidarities.

Academic and community readers will learn from this dissertation how to create social spaces for collaborative learning and to be resilient in resisting the oppressive systems that animate biopower, necropower, othering, and strangeness. Community and Land each have their own collaborative forms of agency, and community people have the power to choose through decolonial, relational approaches to reconciliation, caring ways to implement gentle practices of mutual empowerment. I also have learned that women need to participate in holding social spaces and be recognized for the ways we work through informal social spaces to protect our earth from more aggressive power systems and practices. I believe women can challenge dominant systems by demonstrating alternative ways of conceiving relational networks, by sharing our stories, histories, and knowledges.

Like Indigenous communities in Canada, members of minority religions in many nations are well acquainted with the meanings of suppression, oppression, mainstream negligence, religious racism, and economic hardship that evolve from the nation-state and the dominant communities it represents (Roy, 2000). Religious minorities, including Indigenous communities, have been regarded as an underclass in Bangladesh (Adnan, 2004; Mohsin, 2002). Therefore, I have experienced majority and minority positions in my diasporic transnational life stories. Being a middle-class family member from a privileged majority community in a South Asian country, I didn't experience much class or religious discrimination in my early years. However, as a female, I was treated differently since birth, in my family, at school, and university, on the street, in shopping malls, and in all sorts of public spaces and workplaces. As a Muslim woman, I did not enjoy the same rights, freedom of movement or speech as male members of Bangladeshi society. However, compared to minority community women, I received better opportunities and privileges because I was a middle-class Muslim woman.

What Alice Walker might refer to as “womanish” (Walker, 1983) experiences and actions in African and diasporic cultures, resonates with me as a cultural performer in a devalued cross-religious marriage with a racialized, “visible minority” Bangladeshi-Canadian identity. Walker's anti-racist feminist work has led me to want to better understand the ethical imperatives of forming collective feminist frameworks, occupying social spaces, and making minorities experiences visible under the shifting conditions of neoliberal globalization.

I grew up with a secular father who was a university graduate and bureaucrat, who nevertheless favored a patriarchal system; however, I enjoyed a relatively liberal family

structure, where my mother and sisters were supportive of feminism and embraced secular ideologies, as negotiated in a male-dominated nation-state, where women's talents and reproductive labour were devalued. Women were considered second-class citizens, excluded from many family and community decision-making processes deliberately. My mother did not have enough opportunity and, therefore, had limited capacity to raise her voice as an advocate in her children's upbringing. Even as third daughter, I was not welcomed as a girl child. But my early feminist secular training enhanced my understanding of different modes of socialization and prepared me to engage the integration challenges faced by Bangladeshi immigrant women (like other non-Christian communities) in Canada, through a feminist and anti-oppressive lens.

My subsequent interdisciplinary, anti-racist, decolonial feminist education has made me aware of my shifting social and geo-political positions and my responsibilities as a researcher. In addition, my professional research work in diverse academic contexts, and my informal networking around the larger local community in Saskatoon, have helped me understand my research roles more deeply. As a racialized settler woman researcher, my informal and professional experiences have helped me appreciate the respect that is owed to community members as knowers, including Indigenous and other racialized minorities, among them, the Bangladeshi-Canadian and South-Asian women I have connected with over the last two decades. Navigating efforts to build community across multiple knowledge frames has prepared me for my investigation of the constructive interactions that can arise when consciously seeking to engage diverse ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies of becoming toward more resilient, reconciliatory, and invested in decolonized feminist futures.

This dissertation has examined the collaborative learnings I have developed in seeking to appreciate Indigenous meanings of Land-based knowledges, reconciliation, decolonization, and women's empowerment. I have used anti-racist transnational and decolonial feminist lenses throughout my research. My dissertation traces how I have been empowered to engage with new knowledges, accept new relations, and speak against injustices and othering. Part of my challenge has been to convey how the avenues to such learnings are multiple, situated, and complex. They are always inevitably partial and arise from intercultural experiences informed by different languages, histories, religions, spiritual orientations, geographical locations, cultures, cross-cultural ways of interacting, learning, and understanding, and the multiple roles of nation-states in global processes.

Understanding reconciliation through transnational lenses requires a dialogic exchange between theory and practice, achieved through repositioning and co-positioning projects, undertaken in community spaces. Educating for transnational literacies requires a deep understanding of the structural formations that create intersecting identities and systemic practices of targeting differences, as they inform experiences of diasporic hybridity, within and across borders. In my research, I have explored empowerment as a corollary to processes of reconciliation, by examining how I and members of my many communities engage with or disengage from multiple concepts: decolonization, necropolises, subalternity, abyssal thinking, situated knowledges, hybridity, relationality, otherness, intersectionality, and gentle power. My intercultural experiences are informed, then, by relational contact with multiple constituencies and spheres of influence, all critical of neoliberal capitalisms and neocolonialist imperialisms.

Becoming an Anti-Racist, Decolonial Feminist Researcher

Advancing substantive social change requires me to transform myself into an anti-racist, critical decolonial feminist social justice researcher, one who recognizes that not all such development occurs through formal educational processes. Indeed, my transformative, collaborative community learnings have made me who I am today and are an integral part of who I am becoming, as a researcher, as outlined below:

- Using relational autoethnography enables me to position myself as a racialized settler woman with limited resources and some privileges, who remains invested in personal and collective decolonization.
- Seeking out collaborative processes of unlearning, learning, and relearning in the community enable me to co-identify with Indigenous and racialized settler women and academic leaders who share my interests in developing more promising practices for working on decolonization and reconciliation together.
- Starting literally from the ground up, discussions of environmental justice based on food sovereignty practices and spiritual connections with the Land, have helped me understand the politics of representation around food, gendered labour, and human impacts upon and interdependence with the natural environment.

- By valuing women’s investments in collaborative intergenerational learning, I have come to appreciate how informal labour can support relational accountabilities through networking and mutual empowerment.
- Learning about colonialist histories through activities such as the Blanket exercise in the garden helped me see how the lack of cross-cultural education frames the pressing need for critical unlearning, learning, and relearning through anti-racist and feminist critiques of multiculturalism, and the stereotypes it frames.
- Loss of language and culture threatens both Indigenous and racialized settler communities, fighting to preserve their heritage despite patriarchal and religious discrimination and spiritual abuses aligned with dominant forms of necropower.
- Building cross-cultural solidarities has helped me learn to fight back against neoliberal imperialisms and to help recognize and create new contexts for connective mutual empowerment, organized around the gentle generative powers of the natural world, Indigenous ways of knowing, and women’s collaborative community-engaging work.

Throughout my research process, I have documented how I began to learn how Indigenous ways of knowing include a holistic, non-discriminatory collection of complex knowledge systems based on Indigenous understandings and cultures, strongly positioning human relationships in concert with the Land. Participating in their cultural teaching gifts and learning from their knowledge systems, while conducting independent research into the experiences of racialized settler women is a small step toward establishing decolonial practices early enough in settlement processes to ensure that reconciliation is not postponed for another several generations. Many argue that non-Indigenous research and participation can never truly achieve the necessary understanding of Indigenous Land-based knowledges. However, I believe that a significant opportunity to extend the effort to empathize and connect with Indigenous peoples and learn from one another remains vital to decolonization and reconciliation. As a non-Indigenous racialized settler woman, I am responsible for offering careful consideration and meaningful analysis in that direction. Datta et al. (2015) affirm the essential responsibilities and significant roles that must be fulfilled along the path to decolonizing participatory research and following the lead of Indigenous peoples in building reconciliation. Critical responsibilities include “empowering participants, building trustful relationships, recognizing spiritual relationships, honouring relational and holistic knowledge, taking a political stand for the

participants, and centering the Indigenous voice,” all in the best interests of Indigenous people and participants who wish to learn. (Datta et al., 2015, p. 591)

Many newcomers, settlers, and institutions fail to acknowledge and educate ourselves about Indigenous knowledges, cultures, and experiences due to a structured lack of opportunity founded on toxic hegemonic generalizations from which we must free ourselves. These stereotypes, which are built right into the assimilation and integration processes that shape the futures of racialized settlers, inhibit Indigenous people from seeking relationships with newcomer communities, who often lack understanding and empathy towards the situations of Indigenous peoples, even though both groups are subject to constant pressures to assimilate. When that happens, settler colonialisms contribute to Indigenous trauma. To remedy this complicity with systemic violence, all settlers, new and established, must accept our ethical responsibility to work together to build an empathetic environment that is well educated about ongoing colonialist violence and our parts in it. This requires the capacity to listen to the pain of cultural and environmental genocide with an open mind, free of judgment, and awareness of our shared diminishments through neoliberal colonialist capitalisms. Indigenous knowledge is corrective to the very processes that have enabled the centuries of imperialist violence their communities have endured.

Our collective responsibility is to be compassionate, to listen deeply, and to be supportive of the Indigenous community’s efforts to decolonize their homelands and the minds of those of us who continue to benefit from their losses. We need to take responsibility to encourage others to learn about their histories, stories, traditions, and cultures and to promote cultural and intercultural conversations about the relational connections that colonialisms and neoliberalism suppress. This means meeting Indigenous peoples on the Land, not just inviting them to settler events, remembering that we remain uninvited guests. Unless racialized newcomer and settler communities take a political position, speak up and take meaningful responsibility to build alliances across cultural and racial identities in ways that address colonialist injustices around local community spaces, nothing will be changed. I believe marginalized community people need to take leadership by mobilizing locally to foster decolonization and reconciliation, as the most promising direction for all future generations.

I have learned from Indigenous scholars and educators that Indigenous worldviews can empower everyone (all races, genders, abilities, ages, etc.) and that feminism and decolonization

are necessary for developing non-imperialist models of gentle power based on mutual flourishing. Indigenous communities and allies across Turtle Island (North America) are leading movements like 'Idle No More,' standing and dancing together against ongoing colonialist neoliberal capitalism and environmental destruction in order to protect their Lands, waters, forests, prairies, communities, languages, cultures, and peoples by raising their voices for Indigenous sovereignty. When racialized and majoritarian settlers participate consciously and unconsciously in settler colonialism's ongoing processes, the vital recognition that Indigenous sovereignty movements can benefit us can slip from view.

Non-Indigenous racialized settler communities have conscripted into silent complicities with ongoing colonialisms for a long time, as part of their settlement processes. Indigenous peoples are not the only targets of settler-colonial violence, past and present. Everyone and everything is victimized by that continuous imperialist system in varying degrees, but the willful violence toward Indigenous peoples, cultures, and nations is at the center. Members of newcomer communities of colour must position themselves in solidarity with Indigenous struggles against colonialism, neoliberal capitalism to protect all of our communities, using their own cultural heritages and losses as a resource in building allyships. Non-Indigenous communities are also divided by imperialist institutional powers, founded on neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, racism, sexism, classism, phobias about gender and sexual diversities, ableism, and ageism in colonial Canada. Newcomers must realize and un-learn how our own countries of origin have colonialist or oppressive histories that are deeply connected to the living presence of ongoing systems of oppression. Past imperialisms and contemporary neoliberally-supported disparities have contributed to the patterns of Indigenous suppression and chosen and forced migrations that brought us to Canada. Indigenous struggles for justice and Land rights are foundational to changing the coercions that are producing social and environmental disparities across planet Earth.

My relational autoethnographic project, therefore, has explored my own ethnic roots as a Bangladeshi-Canadian, cross-cultural settler learning about my troubled relationship with Indigenous communities in Saskatoon. Because I have observed, researched, and experienced the processes of marginalization that frame colonial and Canadian cultures throughout my life as a settler woman of colour, I can see that Indigenous and racialized settlers could create more life-sustaining approaches to empowerment by building connective communities and working

together. My own experiences of marginalization in colonialist Canada have helped me understand how colonial histories are interwoven throughout the globalized system of empire-building and that racial injustices continue to deliver harsh consequences to all marginalized groups, including in today's Bangladesh. Standing right beside our Indigenous relatives and neighbors can help us see that one cannot change the prevailing order without self-transformation. When we step away from dominating relational practices toward learning decolonization through reconciliation practices, and when we engage those practices of reconciliation with courage, we cannot fail to see that ongoing local and global inequities, disparities, injustices, and crises are part of the frame, requiring us all to commit to decolonization.

This dissertation has addressed the roles of racialized settler women in building community bridges that can help us meet our collective responsibilities concerning Indigenous Land and water sovereignty across Turtle Island. As a decolonial community activist, critical feminist, anti-racist practitioner, and autoethnographic researcher, I can understand and practice decolonial solidarity with Indigenous Land and water protectors through my community activities. By encouraging community dialogues and planting seeds to build relationships among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through unpaid community activities and formal-informal education, I have learned how systemic racism, oppression, and socio-political, economic, and cultural barriers continue to marginalize the Indigenous and racialized settler populations. Change requires new kinds of relationships, established from the ground up. Through the lived experiences of informal community learnings, I also have come to value the vital labour of holding spaces where we can share our dreams for justice. I have found that Indigenous teachings promise more effective and lasting change, by establishing processes of resilience that challenge prevailing systems from both without and within. Listening to Indigenous people's voices has reshaped my story as a racialized settler woman and my sense of what constitutes leadership and empowerment. Throughout the research, I have learned that empowerment is embedded in and earned through the community, in commitments to generosity of spirit not recognized by the western system; that generosity needs to be admitted and valued to create sustainable futures for all.

Indigenous people's identity politics are not unique to them or to people in Canada but can be recognized as familiar by colonized people worldwide. Anti-racist scholar, Dr. Verna St.

Denis teaches about historical practices of racializing Indigenous people and how the introduction of a capitalist economy, Christianity, and Western forms of patriarchy have heavily influenced Indigenous family and community structures. Institutional practices, including the fur trade and the Indian Act, have shaped ideas and methods of determining who and how one belongs to Indigenous communities. The fur trade initiated the development of the Métis people in Canada, and the Indian Act determined how membership would be decided. The Indian Act discriminated against women who married outside their race, stripping them of Indian status and access to reserves. This established a pattern of abusing Indigenous women within and beyond Indigenous communities that persists to this day. On the other hand, Indian men who married non-status women had the power to bestow Indian status upon their spouses. St. Denis (2007) describes residential school experiences and how they interfered with Indigenous identities and belonging on their own Lands. Indigenous people were severely punished and shamed if they spoke their own languages.

After coming to Canada, I have seen that second-generation immigrant children feel shy to share their language or culture in front of their white friends. While those experiences are not comparable with those of Indigenous children, they show how the racist practices that resulted in the establishment of residential schools are alive and well in contemporary public-school systems, as an ongoing evolution of the legacies of colonialisms. Instead of recognizing anyone's multilingual capacity as a resource, I am othered because of my different language and culture in Canada's colonialist assimilation processes. My children do not want to show their traditional ethnic clothes and language to their white friends. They fear being segregated from white culture and have learned to be ashamed of their cultural identities and who they are. They often try to hide their ancestral histories.

In the past 40 years, Indigenous communities have been engaged in the processes of cultural revitalization in decolonizing efforts to resist the effects and legacies of colonization and racialization. Revisions to the Indian Act only continue the erosion of the special rights and status of Indigenous peoples, at a slightly reduced pace. In the early 1970s, a conference of Indian leaders, spiritual practitioners, and traditional Elders turned into the Indian Ecumenical Movement, which involved thousands of Indigenous people working together revitalize their cultural heritage and traditions. Despite the benefits of those conversations, many are still faced with countless social problems, such as the inability to participate in cultural and language

revitalization, because resources for language classes have not been made readily available. Despite the numerous calls for Indigenous language maintenance and reclamation, those languages are continually endangered, and mistrust has developed amongst parents regarding which languages they speak with their children, another legacy of the residential schools.

In Indigenous ways of knowing, the concept of community is built on a basis of wholeness within the community, which must be learnt, through intergenerational collaboration. That holistic perspective considers the external and internal aspects of a person as connected to everything within and around them. There are no factors by which they are separated, and those connections, however beleaguered by colonialisms, can rebuild the living systems of mutual care with the Land that forms the basis of their knowledge. In the colonialist perspective, everything is separated, disconnected and marketable, formed under a hierarchy of rules and expectations. The concept of community advanced by imperialisms and neoliberal capitalisms is organized around a dominating model of power and authority that is constantly, and even unconsciously, being enforced within every state-oriented social system. Therefore, vital cultural qualities are treated as irrelevant and inferior, as each person with a culturally rich repertoire of knowledge learns to separate from this part of themselves. My dissertation has shown that when individuals, including artists, feel a sense of belonging and connectedness, they are empowered to work creatively together on solving problems as they no longer feel isolated in their struggles.

The analysis offered through anti-racist education needs to be acknowledged because it offers a way to explore how practices of racialization have positioned Indigenous people differently than newly arrived settlers of colour, who hold social positions constructed in opposition to Indigenous sovereignties, at the expense of a more productive common goal of challenging marginalization. An anti-racist analysis can provide common ground for building alliances for those concerned with the impact of racism and white domination on Indigenous and newcomer peoples. Denis (2007) describes how Indigenous teachers' lives remain a testament to Canada's ongoing legacy of racialization. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reported that even though there have been many sincere efforts to change the quality of Aboriginal education, too many youths do not complete high school, lack employment skills, and have been robbed of the language and cultural knowledge of their people. By ignoring the production of racialized identities, she argues, whiteness remains at once invisible and a marker of difference in a Canadian context, with discourses of race being ignored or seen as bad

manners in supporting assimilation to a “raceless” Canadian identity that functions as the norm in ongoing settler-colonialist education systems. Anti-racist movements remain performative, and we need to build an anti-racist artists’ community to advance meaningful changes. My research and community activities are my oxygen and strength. I will keep doing what I am doing for the rest of my life because I can see and feel the power of collaborative community learning. I am inspired, especially by the example of Indigenous communities, who cultivate resilience in the face of injustices trusting in the sustainable gentle power of communities connected with the Land.

Recommendations

My goal in this dissertation has been to unpack my collaborative community learning experiences, in order to recognize the multiple factors involved in connecting communities with more richly grounded approaches to the gentle powers of decolonizing solidarities. The findings of this research may support the efforts of future researchers and policymakers to recognize hidden knowledges and capacities that are vital to making changes and dismantling dominant structures. My recommendations include Indigenous Land-based, anti-racist education, and decolonial feminist education in formal institutions and curricula, as well as in ethnocultural organizations and settler communities, through supports for informal bridge-building efforts by Indigenous and racialized settler women, and others whose contributions are undervalued, yet priceless in efforts to turn the tide. I also recommend making anti-racist, decolonial feminist education mandatory in public school systems from grade one, not after people have been spoiled by consumerist colonialisms and go to university with dreams of becoming elitist settlers, themselves. If people engage anti-racist, decolonial feminist education at an early age, they can develop the skills to refuse the injustices inherent in othering practices. They can also begin to see that our collaborative efforts can be enriched by drawing upon our many cultural heritages and using the pain of lost connections across all communities as a resource in building solidarities with Indigenous peoples.

Therefore, informal community educators, learning spaces and women’s reproductive and solidarities labour need to be recognized and valued. Further study about activists’ and artists’ experiences as resources for community care are needed, to address the often-gendered lack of opportunity for self and family care in the lives of undervalued ethnic artists. Further study is also needed to develop theories of how diverse activists and artists of colour can

maintain mutual care practices, in order to deal with assimilative stressors. Land-based learning needs to be the foundational theoretical framework of all of these efforts, such that deep listening, building community, and making relationships with Indigenous communities are recognized as the baseline methods that sustain decolonial efforts among racialized newcomer settler communities.

All settler communities need to work on planning more learning activities to honour the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. People need more opportunities to develop our commitments to intercultural understanding, based on sharing our respective experiences of colonialisms, imperialisms, environmental destruction, and the distortions of perspective inherent in the neoliberal globalization of capital. Within my own enclave, further study is needed on how Bangladeshi and other diasporic communities can learn how to question and identify colonialist, patriarchal, and nationalist visions of culture in both sending and host countries, drawing upon our ethically and ethnically rich perspectives as diasporic transnational people invested in becoming better allies to one another, to Indigenous peoples, and to members of other racialized newcomer communities.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Approval



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 21/Oct/2020

Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 2161

Principal Investigator: Marie Lovrod

Department: Department of Women's and Gender Studies

Locations Where Research

Activities are Conducted: Saskatoon, SK, Canada

Student(s): Jebunnessa Chapola

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: A Racialized Settler Woman's Empowerment Journey in Canada: Examining the role of cross-cultural community activities in learning about reconciliation and decolonization

Approved On: 21/Oct/2020

Expiry Date: 21/Oct/2021

Approval Of: Behavioural Research Ethics Application

Recruitment Email

Consent Form

Transcript Release Form

Acknowledgment Of:

Review Type: Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TPCS 2 2018). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

A

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php>.

**Digitally Approved by Patricia Simonson
Vice-Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan**

Appendix B: Certificate of Re-Approval



Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 28-Oct-2021

Certificate of Re-Approval

Application ID: 2161

Principal Investigator: Marie Lovrod

Department: Department of Women's and Gender Studies

Locations Where Research

Activities are Conducted: Saskatoon, SK, Canada

Student(s): Jebunnessa Chapola

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: A Racialized Settler Woman's Empowerment Journey in Canada: Examining the role of cross-cultural community activities in learning about reconciliation and decolonization

Approval Effective Date: 28-Oct-2021

Expiry Date: 28-Oct-2022

Acknowledgment Of: N/A

Review Type: Delegated Review

* This study, inclusive of all previously approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php>.

Digitally Approved by Diane Martz
Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan