

# Transnational Modernity/Coloniality: Settler Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Punjabi Diasporic Positionalities for Critical Solidarity on Turtle Island

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## ABSTRACT

This paper offers a transnational framework on colonialism, indigeneity, and environmental justice by connecting the historical contexts of Punjab and Turtle Island. Specifically, I analyze the origins of Punjabi out-migration to British Columbia on Coast Salish territory in the early 1900s, Indigenous and settler relations, and the positionality of Punjabis during this time negotiated through the legacies of the *Komagata Maru* and the anti-colonial Ghadar Party's formation as a way to reimagine critical environmental justice solidarities for the contemporary Canadian context. This project interrogates the ways in which interlocked histories of oppression and dynamics of power between the Punjabi diaspora and Indigenous communities emerged through British imperial policies of modernity/coloniality in the Punjab region, specifically with the development of the Canal Colonies, as well as the Punjabi relationship to settler colonialism on Turtle Island. I discuss the significance of these relationships to environmental justice thought and action and engage Indigenous and decolonial scholarship for a critical discussion on the normalization of westerncentric knowledge through empire while retracing Ghadar histories of anti-colonial resistance on Turtle Island.

## FOREWORD

This Major Research Paper is a component of my Master of Environmental Studies Plan of Study and fulfills several of its intended learning objectives. My area of concentration, Decolonization and Environmental Justice, is well reflected in this paper and the scholarship and knowledge with which it engages. The research questions identified at the start of this process, particularly the question of “How is Environmental Justice understood by the Punjabi diaspora in Canada and how do the processes of modernity/coloniality of Turtle Island and Punjab play into this understanding” have been brought into this work and informed its direction. All components of the area of concentration and learning objectives identified in my Plan of Study have been critical to the development and completion of this paper (particularly 1.1, 2.1, and 2.3). My field work research in Punjab, India and Vancouver, BC was also an important aspect of this paper’s development, particularly in helping to situate my positionality and social location within this work.

It is imperative for me to offer a note of positionality for this paper as I analyze the settler colonial project of Canada rooted in white supremacy and the relationship between Punjabi migrants to British Columbia and Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. I have produced this project as a non-Indigenous person, born into the Canadian nation-building project to immigrant parents from the post-Partition Indian region of Punjab who settled on unceded Coast Salish Territory. Therefore, I am partially informed of the processes and dynamic realities of colonialism through my personal lived experiences and my own location within settler colonialism as a result of my family’s multi-generational migratory experiences from Punjab to

Canada. As I engage in this discussion, I want to bring into focus the relative privileges tied to the production of academic knowledge as a result of being a Canadian-born settler with immigrant parents and belonging to a community that has a deeply rooted historical presence in Canada upon which I am relying to produce this critical work. I also want to echo the desire of settler communities of colour for increased access to more complete migration histories and repositories of knowledge from which to continue to learn and grow in the diaspora. Lastly, my project intends to contribute to the amplification of the lived experiences of Indigenous scholars who write about ongoing settler colonialism and genocide of their communities across Turtle Island through the complex systems of Canada's nation-building project.

To the memory and experiences of my father, Harbhajan Singh,  
for whom education served purpose.

For my mother, Pavittar Kaur.

ਮੇਰੇ ਪਿਤਾ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਹਰਭਜਨ ਸਿੰਘ ਦੀ ਯਾਦ ਅਤੇ ਤਜੁਰਬੇ ਲਈ,  
ਜਿਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਲਈ ਸਿੱਖਿਆ ਦੇ ਮਕਸਦ ਮੰਨੇ ਜਾਂਦੇ ਸਨ |

ਮੇਰੀ ਮਾਤਾ, ਸਰਦਾਰਨੀ ਪਵਿੱਤ ਕੌਰ ਲਈ |

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conversations. In Vancouver, I am grateful to Renisa Mawani at the University of British Columbia for her scholarship that has greatly informed this paper and for sharing her time to meet with me. I am thankful to have met Paneet Singh, learn from his work as a historian, and find myself, a diasporic Punjabi born on unceded Coast Salish territory, represented in his artistic work.

I am grateful for the knowledge and work that has been produced by so many people of colour-- particularly those identifying as womxn, non-binary, non-gender conforming, and queer-- across diasporic spaces that engage with critical ideas and disrupt normative and restrictive discourses of knowledge, building a strong foundation for work such as this to rest upon. And so, I am thankful to my supervisor, Enakshi Dua, for being patient, supportive, and enthusiastic of my ideas and vision. Also, this note of gratitude extends to my partner, Natasha Mendonca, who has supported my curiosity and participation in various spaces that ask for a lot of time and energy. Thank you for your unwavering support, care, and sharing of knowledge. I am particularly grateful for the women/womxn who have and continue to exercise energy for my learning/unlearning process and for those who educated me through their lived experiences: my partner, my grandmothers-- nani (ਨਾਨੀ) and dahdi (ਦਾਦੀ)-- and mother (ਮਾਂ/ਮਾਤਰ). I am grateful to my father, whose life, death, and memory continues to educate me.

My gratitude also extends to the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, particularly the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations, upon which I was raised and have been able to develop my identity as a diasporic Punjabi.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the final days of May 2017, a public dialogue organized by the Indian Summer Festival took place between Indigenous and diasporic South Asian historians, elders, and scholars on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlilwətał (Tseil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations, upon which Vancouver, British Columbia is settled, in an effort to “support solidarity between South Asian and Indigenous communities through the arts” (Indian Summer Festival, 2019). That year, organizers of the festival introduced a new programming stream based on the Punjabi word *taike* (pronounced tha-A-kay), which “was used when First Nations and South Asian men worked and lived together at lumber mills. It means ‘father’s elder brother.’ [Organizers hoped] to highlight and reinvigorate this special and shared sense of community and kinship between these communities” (Indian Summer Festival, 2019). In my personal conversations with Renisa Mawani and Paneet Singh, the two South Asian panelists from the inaugural *Taika* programming in 2017, I learned that this word was used by early Punjabi settlers to refer to Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, upon which Canada is settled and created, and that its etymology is specifically rooted in the settler colonial constructed space and intracultural circumstances of British Columbia. However, I also learned that this word eventually came to be reimagined with pejorative connotations, complicating the clear notions of respect and kinship that likely informed its origins which are referenced in the Indian Summer Festival programming description.

Through these conversations with Mawani and Singh, I realized that my own research goals and intentions for this analytical project were in some ways reflected in the festival’s programming: to understand the nuances of settler colonialism, solidarity, complicity, and

forging new and critical paths of kinship that are informed by shared and interwoven histories of oppression and dynamics of power. A central aspect of this analysis, however, also concerns the land upon which these conversations of solidarity and reimagining relations, and others like it, have begun to take place. The following sections of this project peel back complicated layers of place-based stories that continue to be told and those being recovered by multi-generational Punjabis (as well as other South Asians more broadly) to honour immigrant lived experiences of resilience and resettlement. Understanding the ways in which the retelling of these stories, implicitly as well as explicitly, silence and erase Indigenous stories and experiences that have existed since before Punjabi immigration to Canada, and continue to persevere under settler colonialism, is critical to cultivating a sense of kinship and solidarity.

This paper offers a transnational framework on colonialism, indigeneity, and environmental justice by drawing in the contexts of Punjab and Turtle Island between 1849 and 1920. In order to understand the relationship between Punjabi migrants and indigeneity, I analyze the origins of Punjabi out-migration into polities of the British Empire, such as British Columbia, and the positionality of Punjabis on Turtle Island negotiated through the legacies of the *Komagata Maru* and the anti-colonial Ghadar Party's formation. I trace the similarities and links between policies in Punjab under British rule and those in Canada concerning land and settlement. I put this project forward with care and humility, taking direction from work by Indigenous scholars and activists in order to avoid perpetuating the erasure of Indigenous communities' experiences on Turtle Island and exercising a move to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012) for myself or on behalf of Punjabi settlers to this land. To be clear, while I refer and engage with interlocked histories of oppression and dynamics of power between the Punjabi

diaspora and Indigenous communities in British Columbia, this should not be understood as an argument that looks to debate or question the oppressive structure of settler colonialism in which Punjabi settlers came to participate in the early 1900s, albeit indirectly, or that the British imperial/colonial history in Punjab can somehow be equated and compared to that of colonization and ongoing settler colonialism in Canada for Indigenous peoples. Instead, my analysis seeks to specifically interrogate the ways in which these histories and experiences were connected through changing relationships to land/territory for Punjabis as a result of British legacies of modernity/coloniality in the Punjab region as well as their complicity in settler colonialism through their eventual settlement on Turtle Island and the significance of this relationship to environmental justice thought and action.

This research project takes place against a backdrop of contemporary social and environmental injustice impacting Indigenous communities of Turtle Island as well as the people of Punjab. A deep-rooted history of imperialism in Punjab provided a foundation for the highly exploitative and environmentally-destructive Green Revolution of the 1960 and 1970s, resulting in the water, farmer suicide, and agricultural crisis gripping Punjab today. The urgency for action around environmental issues has reached a heightened state in recent years due to the increasingly extreme impacts being felt from climate change on a global level. However, calls for environmental justice have long preceded contemporary global movements and action by political and civil society (Haluza-DeLay et al., 7). Within the Canadian context, “since European contact, [Indigenous] peoples have been articulating environmental injustices in relation to loss of land, [Indigenous] title, and devastation of their traditional territories and the life forms they support” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 7). Indigenous communities across Canada

continue to feel the impact of these injustices. Hundreds of reserves are still without access to safe drinking water (Haluza-DeLay et al., 15; McGregor, 2012: 6) and toxic pollutant emissions and chemical runoff into local water systems from large scale industrial projects continue to disproportionately impact Indigenous communities. As one of many examples, Aamjiwnaang First Nation, a reserve in immediate proximity to “Chemical Valley” in Sarnia, Ontario, one of Canada’s most concentrated epicentres of petrochemical and industrial plants, has reported a sustained long-term decline in the number of male births in its community, which studies have attributed to the high levels of toxic pollutants from nearby plants (Scott, 12). The Athabasca tar sands, perhaps the most infamous example of environmental degradation in Canada, if not the world, “has been claimed as the cause of health complications downstream” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 17) on Indigenous reserves. The extractive industry specifically, continues to be responsible for numerous recurring environmental disasters (Haluza-DeLay et al., 15), threatening the livelihood and ways of life of Indigenous communities which depend on the water, land, and air (Trainor et al., 148). Despite being most disproportionately impacted by environmental injustice, Indigenous communities and their experiences continue to be marginalized in calls to action concerning the environment. Indigenous and non-Indigenous ally activists and scholars have noted the deliberate nature of this marginalization as a means to ignore the ties between environmental justice and settler colonialism and preserve “settler futurity” (Tuck and McKenzie, 70).

Thus, in my analysis, I engage with histories of Punjabi<sup>1</sup> settlement in British Columbia and develop extended links to policies of development in Punjab under British imperial rule. I draw upon and centre Indigenous experiences and scholarship regarding environmental justice, settler colonialism, and epistemologies and connect this knowledge to histories of Punjabi settlement while critiquing normative colonial westerncentric systems of knowledge. In effect, I intend to invoke and recenter the core principles of humility and kinship of *taike* within my analysis, an active effort to reimagine Indigenous-centric environmental justice solidarities in Canada among the Punjabi diaspora, as well as settlers of colour more broadly.

Within contemporary discussions regarding settler colonialism and social and environmental justice, the scope of analysis is often limited to histories and analytical points of entry that centre white European settlers and Indigenous communities. I seek to begin deconstructing normalized binary discourse of white settler/Indigenous relations around environmental issues in the context of the Canadian settler state. I utilize histories of Punjabi displacement and migration from Punjab, highlighting the shared historical links between European colonization, settler colonialism in Canada, and British environmental colonialism/imperialism in Punjab, as well as the subsequent entrenchment of power relations and positions of settler colonial complicity of Punjabi migrants over Indigenous communities. In other words, contemporary discussions of settler colonialism and movements of social and environmental justice in Canada can and must be broadened beyond the white settler/Indigenous binary by re-engaging with histories of both complicity and anti-colonial resistance of early Punjabi migrants

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<sup>1</sup> This paper uses the term Punjabi to refer to those from the pre-colonial geographical region of Punjab. While in the diaspora this term can often be associated with members of the Sikh faith, this analysis uses this term to centrally position human-land/territory relationships in its discussion. Specific analysis on social constructions of difference are also made clear (i.e. 'Jat Sikh').

to Canada and by expanding the frame of analysis beyond colonial state-imposed territorial borders and temporally restrictive articulations of settler colonialism that often situate these events “in the past” and/or confine them to specific geographies (i.e. within South Asia or Canada).

Of course, given the European roots of the colonization of the Americas, engaging with white settler complicity with regards to settler colonialism in scholarship and social and environmental justice action around the white nation-building project of Canada is quite obvious and necessary. Concentrating environmental justice attention within the white settler/Indigenous binary, however, presents an incomplete frame through which to understand the complex way in which this settler colonial project has and continues to operate. People of colour entering and settling in Canada throughout its colonial history, including Punjabis during the early twentieth century, have been placed in “colonial relationships” (Lawrence and Dua, 134) with Indigenous communities which, ironically, often only seemingly become most visible through overt instances of their own exclusion and marginalization by the Canadian state. For example, explicit policies of exclusion against migrants from South Asia contemporaneous to the *Komagata Maru* “incident” resulted in calls for inclusion and justice from the diasporic community in Canada which also further invisibilized Indigenous communities and their pre-existing and ongoing experiences of marginalization (Mawani, 2012). At the same time, deconstructing this white settler/Indigenous analytical binary also reveals the multi-layered histories of Coast Salish land following European contact and subsequent non-European immigration, including the origins of the anti-colonial Ghadar resistance to British rule in India and its links to peasant movements fighting imperialism in Punjab (Talbot, 7; Puri, 17). This

project engages with these complexities around inclusion/exclusion, Punjabi diasporic positionality with regards to settler colonialism and the contentious notion that “people of [colour] are settlers” (Lawrence and Dua, 134), as well as the role of the Ghadar party in transnational anti-colonial resistance in an effort to fill in analytical gaps and broaden conversations relating to critical environmental justice in Canada.

It is imperative to recognize, however, that the structure and mechanisms of settler colonialism extend beyond the historical settlement of white Europeans (Tuck and Yang, 5), or even non-white settlers, and into contemporary contexts of ongoing realities of social, economic, and environmental injustice faced by Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. The settler colonial project works to position the policies and lived experiences of genocide being faced by Indigenous peoples as having taken place in the past, perpetuating “nation-building myths, whereby ‘Indians’ become unreal figures, rooted in the nation’s prehistory, who died out and no longer need to be taken seriously” (Lawrence and Dua, 123) within present-day settler social formations. Policies of genocide inflicted upon the Indigenous communities of Turtle Island continue to sever human relationships to land through the modernity/coloniality apparatus so that “epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage” (Tuck and Yang, 5). Then by extension, if “Indigenous nationhood is seen as something of the past, the present becomes a site in which Indigenous peoples are reduced to small groups of racially and culturally defined and marginalized individuals drowning in a sea of settlers” (Lawrence and Dua, 123), de-centering settler colonialism and perpetuating an erasure that stands to benefit settlers. Increased focus is

placed on settler colonialism and its inextricable link to land, water, and other parts of what is commonly referred to as “Nature” in subsequent sections.

However, it is important to note that the perpetuation of nation-building myths, constructed upon westerncentric logics of modernity/coloniality, shapes the hostility and negative perception that Indigenous-led environmental justice resistance and anti-colonial action is often met with by non-Indigenous people, including settler of colour, in Canada. Therefore, as the presence of Canadian settler society continues to be further entrenched and reinforced on stolen Indigenous territory through the state and ongoing migration and development of multi-generational ancestral roots of all settlers-- white europeans *and* settler communities of colour-- it is becoming increasingly urgent to bring in broader analytical perspectives that engage with the nuances of land and territory, migration and displacement, and settler colonialism in order to begin reimagining environmental justice solidarities of resistance in Canada in a way that is increasingly representative of its settler population.

The first section of this project is a discussion on its methodology and overall analytical structure. This includes an overview of scholarship relating to decoloniality and modernity/coloniality which is derived from decolonial scholarship originally theorized by Anibal Quijano (2000; 2007) which has subsequently been developed further by scholars such as Maria Lugones (2007), Walter D. Mignolo (2009), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011), Ramon Grosfoguel (2012), and Tanya Casas (2014) among others. The notion of coloniality can be understood as the “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, [labour], intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism” (Maldonado-Torres, 97).



Modernity is articulated as the celebration and propagation of European Enlightenment-era thinking and its specific traditions, social norms, and technological advancements (Mignolo, 2011: 2). The Enlightenment can be understood as the European “creation of a new framework of ideas about man, society, and nature, which challenged existing conceptions rooted in a traditional world-view...which was sustained by the Church’s authority and its monopoly over the information media of the time” (Hamilton, 24). Furthermore,

science was the epitome of enlightened reason...and intimately bound up with the Enlightenment’s concept of *progress*...because it seemed to offer the prospect of increasing man’s control over those aspects of nature most harmful to human interests. Science could ensure a more efficient and productive agriculture, and thus the elimination of famine; it could lead to the invention of processes and machines which would convert raw materials into goods that would be of benefit to mankind...[and] roll back the frontiers of a nature hitherto quite hostile to man (Hamilton, 37).

As European modes of social life derived from the Enlightenment period became increasingly normalized, attaining the raw material supply to fuel these social norms, such as tea, sugar or cotton, spurred European imperial/colonial pursuits to sustain them. Colonial missions by the British Empire to discover new trade routes and land on which to produce sugar and tobacco, for example, facilitated the power and global network of the British Empire (Mignolo, 2011: 318). The historical legacy of British imperialism in India, revolving around the accumulation of land and raw materials, is well documented in academia and has also been widely captured in the orientalist gaze of popular culture, often eliciting imagery of the spice and silk trade, sugar, tea, opium, and perhaps to a less romanticized degree, indentured labour for other polities of the Empire, including the Americas. Thus, locating the origins of modernity/coloniality within the European Enlightenment-era unveils its connection to the emergence of “a new type of economy

(capitalism) and the scientific revolution” (Mignolo, 2011: 6) which facilitated the epistemic and physical violence of colonialism/imperialism.

Working through the inextricable links between modernity and coloniality (Mignolo, 2011: 318) is a necessary preliminary step in beginning to understand how through coloniality, normalized westerncentric knowledge has facilitated the ideological separation of human beings from what is commonly referred to as “Nature” or “the environment.” In turn, this has allowed for an enclosure of the commons through, for example, development and promotion of large scale agricultural farming, exploitative resource extraction, and the privatization of land. This is a critical component of understanding how settler colonialism and struggles for environmental justice are so intimately linked in Canada and how communities of colour have become complicit in the mechanisms of settler colonialism despite often resisting their own legacies of colonialism.

While the locus of my analysis is situated in British Columbia with settler colonialism as a point of focus, its methodology offers a transnational framework to unsettle the ways in which space is imagined, created, and normalized through a broader system of modernity/coloniality while interrogating how different communities come to understand their position within these constructed spaces as well as their relationship to others. For example, as I articulate in later chapters, in this specific case, the white colonial spaces within Canada during the arrival of the first Punjabi migrants were produced through systems of knowledge originating in Europe but were implemented and sustained through policies of restrictive immigration, development, and modernity specific to the colonized land and Indigenous people of Turtle Island. This unsettling of normalized westerncentric knowledge and white space, Razack explains, “[begins] by

exploring space as a social product, uncovering how bodies are produced in spaces and subjects come to know themselves in and through space within multiple systems of domination” (17). In Canada, the white settler formations of nation-building under settler colonialism are linked to the production of white spaces of domination through which Nature becomes something separate from and to be dominated by “civilized” human beings in the name of capitalism (Acker, Kaltmeier, and Tittor, 7). This separation becomes normalized as a function of colonial domination over Indigenous people, positioning their existing knowledge systems as inferior and in anterior time (Tuck and Yang, 5). For example, within Indigenous epistemologies, human beings exist as *a part* of the ever-changing expressions of nature rather than *apart* from it. Westerncentric colonial narratives of modernity and development, however, are inconsistent with the fundamentals of Indigenous knowledge as there is an inherent link between epistemology and the land (Battiste, 8). I highlight work by Indigenous scholars and authors on how environmental justice and settler colonialism in Canada are inextricably linked, where one cannot be separated from the other.

Following this, in chapter two, I refocus this critical lens onto early British colonial/imperial policies in the Punjab region following its annexation in 1849 in order to trace the root causes of the out-migration from Punjab and into other parts of the Empire such as Canada’s west coast, building links between land, settler colonialism, and global modernity/coloniality. Specifically, this includes the significance of the development of the canal colonies, an extensive network of perennial agricultural irrigation that transformed the Punjab region into “one of the major centres of commercialised agriculture in South Asia” (Ali, 1987: 3) and the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, under which British mandated social reforms constructed and deeply

entrenched an interlocked triad of caste, land ownership, and militarization within Punjab (Ali, 1987: 4). This large scale shift towards development discourse and modernity under British rule linked Punjab, through the military, capitalism, and migration, to British Columbia. From this historical point of analysis, we can trace the displacement and migration of Punjabis to British Columbia as an expendable labour force to further the British Empire's settler colonial aspirations for a colonized Canada. In effect, I look to not only critique the canal colonies as a project of modernity/coloniality, but to also highlight how their construction worked to de-link Punjab from its territory, land, and people and absorb it as an extended space of the global "webs of empire" (Ballantyne, 2012).

Shifting the analytical frame once again, in chapter three, I refocus on the context of settler colonialism during the time of early Punjabi migration to Canada in order to create transnational analytical links, allowing for an exploration of how settler colonialism has and continues to function in Canada, not in isolation, but as a part of the modernity/coloniality nexus globally. Building on existing scholarship of localized histories of Punjabi settlement in Canada, I delve deeper to analyze the nuances of positionality and hierarchies with regards to the white supremacist nation-building project of the colonial nation-state, which "was one of white settlement. It displaced Aboriginal peoples and targeted them for physical and cultural extermination to open land for settlers, while marginalizing and restricting the entry into Canada of people of colour" (Lawrence and Dua, 134). Engaging with critical scholarship on inclusion/exclusion, the Punjabi diaspora, and settler colonialism in Canada, it becomes possible to explore the ongoing links between environmental exploitation through the new relationships between land and territory in Canada for Punjabi settlers and how it relates to Indigenous sovereignty and

environmental justice, specifically through the need for expendable labour for the developing logging industry in British Columbia and the eventual construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Nayar, 11). Therefore, my frame of analysis stretches across the Pacific Ocean, following early Punjabi migrants to British Columbia from British controlled Punjab at the start of the 20th century and investigates the global nexus of modernity/coloniality by which this migration occurred from one part of the British empire to another and its implications for the settler colonial project of Canada.

In the final chapter of this project, I investigate the origins of the Ghadar movement in North America as an example of transnational resistance to British imperialism/colonialism in India and modernity/coloniality more generally. This provides a historical reimagining of anti-colonial solidarities around issues concerning the “environment,” that arose specifically out of the spatial formations of British Columbia through the “colonial proximities” (Mawani, 2009), particularly between Punjabis and Indigenous peoples, produced by empire.

Approaching environmental justice thought and action through a wider transnational modernity/coloniality framework allows for a reimagined analytical lens for critical solidarities between settler communities of colour and Indigenous communities. This paper identifies the ways in which human relationships with land have changed as a result of colonial power and dominance and what these histories can offer evolving social and environmental justice movements in the contemporary context of the settler colonial state of Canada.

## **CHAPTER ONE: FRAMEWORK OF MODERNITY/COLONIALITY, EPISTEMOLOGIES, AND (INDIGENOUS) ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE**

While different diasporic communities possess their own individual histories of migration to Canada, this project approaches the histories of the Punjabi diaspora in British Columbia at the turn of the 20th century with a critical lense, providing a means for these histories to be re-interrogated and re-articulated in order to recenter the experiences of Indigenous communities with ongoing settler colonialism and environmental injustice while also articulating the role played by the global nexus of modernity/coloniality. In order to work towards an increasingly critical form of environmental justice solidarity, one that integrates and centres settler colonialism and takes into account the positions and histories of Punjabi settlers in Canada, a wide but focused transnational analytical frame is necessary since the British Empire and its “far flung jurisdictions, including the Dominions (Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa), colonies (Hong Kong and India), and territories (the Straits Settlements) were not discrete or separate polities but were integrated through a coordinated network of railways and steamships that joined land to sea” (Mawani, 2018: 8). Furthermore, the channels of migration to British Columbia that had opened for Punjabi migrant labourers in the early 1900s were developed through these modes of modernity and in response to policies of inclusion/exclusion in other parts of the British Empire (Puri, 15). Thus, a historical analysis of Punjabi settler positionality in relation to Indigenous communities in Canada actually requires an examination of the relations of power that originate through the global mechanisms of colonial empire that first and foremost necessitated the normalization of westerncentric knowledge, including the alienation of human beings from their land under the guise of development.

Indigenous knowledge articulating environmental justice and sovereignty, highlighted in the latter half of this chapter, offer a means to critique and unsettle dominant westerncentric systems of knowledge while also providing non-Indigenous communities in Canada with an opportunity to learn/unlearn about the epistemic as well as other forms of violence being faced by Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. Specifically, I highlight select works from a range of Indigenous authors and scholars that share perspectives informing environmental justice. In doing so, I am keeping in mind the concerns shared by Eve Tuck and Marica McKenzie (2015) around being mindful of the co-option of Indigenous knowledge and “an acknowledgement that Indigenous identities and knowledge are not static” (58) as well as that Indigenous epistemologies are often stereotyped through a romanticized and homogenized universal cosmology that can perpetuate the stereotype of the “Ecological Indian” (Tuck and McKenzie, 58). I also recognize the words of Haluza-DeLay et al. (2009) that “co-creating a space of shared storying not only brings a different kind of relationality within academia, it also encourages more equitable, diverse, complex, and complicating narrative engagements” (5). Thus, I focus specifically on examples that can be connected to Punjabi migration histories and works that have been written in relation to environmental justice in a settler colonial state so that it can be applied to broaden existing discussions and include the context of Punjabi migration to Canada through a modernity/coloniality framework.

It is not possible to critically engage with environmental justice and the positionality of the Punjabi diaspora in relation to Indigenous communities by using a post-colonial methodology and analysis that situates settler/indigenous tensions and the realities of settler colonialism in the past. For Indigenous communities in Canada, “there is no ‘post’ in post-colonial” (Haluza-

DeLay et al., 16). As Tuck and Yang explain, “the disruption of Indigenous relationship to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence...[which] is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation” (5) and continues until today. This epistemic violence is rooted in the assertion that westerncentric European logics of modernity, which “rests on the antithetical and hierarchical separation of ‘Humanity’ and ‘Nature,’” (Casas, 32) are superior to non-western ways of knowing and understanding the world. A foundation of decolonial theory, as opposed to an analysis that relies on post-colonial scholarship, allows space for the articulation of Indigenous nationhood, cosmologies, and ontologies independent and separate from western notions of state and nationhood which often perpetuate the myth of “‘terranullism,’ the erasure of an ongoing post-contact Indigenous presence” (Lawrence and Dua, 132).

I utilize a decolonial scholarly foundation in my own critique of normative westerncentric knowledge relating to the separation of “Humanity” and “Nature” which, as I argue, was a precursor for exercising and entrenching imperial power through colonial developmental policies of modernity in Punjab (Gilmartin, 5057) as well as ongoing policies of settler colonialism (Grande, 99). These longstanding preserved patterns of power are apparent in and connect both contexts through their legacies of colonial/imperial development under European, primarily British, rule that emphasized an “ideology that commoditizes all matter-- living and otherwise” (Casas, 31) and re-articulates it into a “natural resource” (Tuck and Yang, 4) for exploitation that extends until today. Thus, a decolonial framework of modernity/coloniality, which takes into account how dominant westerncentric colonial epistemologies are re-configured and perpetuated, is required in order to delve deeper into the ways in which hierarchies of



colonial power have been sustained over time through settler colonialism while also tying in migration histories and legacies of settlers of colour. It is through these reconfigurations of modernity/coloniality that hegemonic relations of power and hierarchies of humanity persist along intersections of race, class, and gender, extending the realities of coloniality through structures like settler colonialism in contemporary contexts.

Colonial developmental projects, such as the canal colonies of Punjab (explored in the next chapter) and Canada's mining and oil and gas extractive industries on Indigenous land, for example, that are predicated on harnessing the monetary value of so-called natural resources, are rooted in an understanding that the perpetual expansion of commodification, private property ownership, and a competitive labour force are measures of progress (Grande, 99). Within western logics, modernity is the means by which this progress is achieved. As a result, non-westerncentric knowledge systems are continuously silenced and rendered "uncivilized" or "backwards" in an attempt to preserve normative hegemonic discourses of modernity. Coloniality and its enduring colonial power structures are pushed forward through developmental policies in the name of progress as "the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality are...two sides of the same coin" (Mignolo, 2011: 318) where one cannot exist without the other.

Modernity as well as coloniality, however, should be understood "in terms of fluid grounds, which are not fixed but permanently renewed and challenged by shifting thoughts, administrative practices, and decolonial struggles" (Acker, Kaltmeier, and Tittor, 7), where development and tradition both imply a constant movement to simultaneously sustain and "progress," coupling modernity with coloniality. Thus, modernity/coloniality is not temporally

or geographically contained, but rather operates as a “web of empire” (Ballantyne, 2012) that undergoes reconfigurations in response to anti-colonial resistance and counter-hegemonic pressure in order to be sustained. The formation of the Ghadar movement provides a good example of this notion, which I explore in the final chapter of this project. As another example of the interconnected ebb and flow of this global nexus, during the period of the American Civil War, the Punjab canal colonies, the British Empire’s imperial project in the Punjab following its annexation, became a significant producer and exporter of raw cotton to meet demands to supplement American cotton plantations (Banerjee, 57). For Tony Ballantyne, this “web of empire” exists as “‘horizontal’ linkages [that] were the networks and exchanges that fashioned new forms of interdependence *between* colonies” (Ballantyne, 16), a reimagining of the simplistic and traditional centre/periphery articulation of empire (Mawani, 2018: 12). The origins of the eventual migration of Punjab’s labour pool to Canada, made abundant following the policies enacted by the British Empire, can be found within this web, as this labour pool would become linked with the imperial polity established on Turtle Island. Therefore, this discussion presents modernity/coloniality as interlocked terms that exist and operate in unison.

Through modernity/coloniality, westerncentric knowledge is weaponized in order to establish and entrench hierarchies of power that are consistently reconfigured and sustained overtime and so, “in spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European -- also called ‘Western’ -- culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination” (Quijano, 2007: 169). Part of this process includes the persistent normalization of westerncentric articulations of a subject-object dualism in which human beings are rendered superior over other living and non-living things in our natural world. By extension,

this dualism drives a wedge between Humanity and Nature (Acker, Kaltmeier, and Tittor, 7) in order to deliberately separate those who were considered human beings according to European worldviews (i.e. White, Christian men) from Nature: “the ‘subject’ is a bearer of ‘reason,’ while the ‘object,’ is not only external to it, but different nature. In fact it is ‘nature’” (Quijano, 2007: 172). European Christian men were regarded as the exclusive bearers of this capacity to reason and bare subjectivity, a notion that was universally imposed and promoted and normalized by European thinkers who would “situate the subject in a ‘non-place’ and a ‘non-time’” (Grosfoguel, 88). By doing so, it effectively allowed the European subject to attain a sense of absolute objectivity: “to be able to place the individual subject at the foundation of all knowledge, the internal monologue of the subject without any dialogical relation with other human beings allows him to claim access to truth in its *sui generis* form, that is, as self-generated, insulated from social relations with other human beings” (Grosfoguel, 88). European epistemology, and the understanding that they held an exclusive ability to produce rational thought, was encouraged through this individualistic and self-generated position the subject-object dualism allowed. However, an integral aspect of this understanding, which would become vital to colonizing powers during the conquest of Turtle Island by European powers, is the notion that this rational and self-aware subjectivity was intrinsically European. Furthermore, it is this particular subjectivity that was thought to be necessary for advancing humanity towards a collective civility by means of industrial projects of modernity.

As colonial missions brought Europeans into contact with Indigenous populations in what would eventually become European territories, dominions, and colonies, a hierarchical organization of humanity was established on the basis of race through the subject-object dualism

and capacity for rational thought. For example, colonization utilized the understanding that, “only European culture is rational, can contain ‘subjects’—the rest are not rational, they cannot be or harbor ‘subjects.’ As a consequence, the other cultures are different in the sense that they are unequal, in fact inferior, by nature. They can only be ‘objects’ of knowledge or/and of domination practices” (Quijano, 2007: 174). The exclusivity of rational thought was equated with the exclusivity of civility, an understanding which justified the colonization of Indigenous people around the world, including Turtle Island and eventually India. Thus, European culture, its practices, religion, and worldview were established as a norm through colonizing the bodies and epistemologies of non-European societies: “from an Aboriginal perspective...academic, religious, and governmental Eurocentrism has made itself the default position of what counts as being legitimate knowledge and practice, dismissing or marginalizing ‘other’ed epistemologies, bodies, stories, and practices” (Haluza-DeLay et al., 4).

Westerncentric epistemology normalized, and continues to normalize, the temporal arrangement of humanity along a continuum: “history was conceived as an evolutionary continuum from the primitive to the civilized; from the traditional to the modern; from the savage to the rational...And Europe thought of itself as the mirror of the future of all the other societies and cultures; as the advanced form of the history of the entire species” (Quijano, 2007: 176). In effect, colonial epistemologies, through mass extermination and the use of local populations as expendable labour, propagated modernity as aspirational and established it as a means of accessing power (Quijano, 2007: 169). Overtime, colonial racial hierarchies aligned Europeans, and eventually white settlers in settler colonial contexts, with the civilized and modern, while people of colour continued to be aligned with the past and perpetually confined to

an inferior subjectivity. In the context of Canada, it's white settler society systematically colonized Indigenous epistemologies and bodies by containing them in the past; in a perpetual state of incivility and Nature. In Punjab, this functioned specifically through caste, as explored in chapter two.

Through this logic, Nature and non-white bodies are conflated and become synonymous with the uncivilized and pre-modern. By extension, both Nature and non-white bodies, become objects that need to be incorporated into the productive and dominant capitalist-based world system; the capitalist paradigm is the means by which this aspirational modernity is achieved. For Mignolo, the process of modernity was taken over by Christian theology beginning in the sixteenth century as it affirmed itself with capitalism, giving rise to its hegemonic power over non-subjects (i.e. non-White, non-Christian, non-capitalist, non-Europeans) and their epistemologies (Mignolo, 2010: 325). This tie with capitalism was the foundation of imperial civilizing missions in pursuit of increased accumulation of land, territory, markets and resources. It is through this nexus of global modernity and upon this base of epistemic violence and expendability of labour that the links between Punjab and Turtle Island begin to emerge.

The hegemonic discourse of westerncentric knowledge, which continues to justify and normalize projects of modernity, such as the settler colonial nation-building project of Canada, are based on the persisting intersection of race, capital, and knowledge employed during colonization. This colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2007) emerged “as a necessary epistemic structure that legitimized at the moment the epistemic supremacy of Theology and, later on, the epistemic supremacy of Philosophy and Science as the ultimate proof of the empirical existence of ‘races’” (Mignolo, 2009: 71). The fundamental idea presented by modernity/coloniality is that

European-articulated civility is an end to which individuals must evolve, which is only possible through the development of that which has been rendered unproductive and uncivilized, including racialized bodies and Nature itself (Tuck and McKenzie, 49).

Westerncentric knowledge, which normalized modernity/coloniality as something society should strive for, placed Indigenous peoples in direct opposition with colonial settlers. In particular, colonial instruments of capitalism, such as private property regimes, sought to undermine Indigenous epistemology and societal organization in the name of Enlightenment-era derived logics of modernity and development (Tuck and McKenzie, 102). Dempsey, Gould, and Sundberg (2011) articulate private property regimes, particularly in the context of the Canadian settler state, as an environmental formation, which they define as “a hegemonic and normative discourse that establishes appropriate and inappropriate conceptions of human-land relations and, by extension, standards for how land and subjects should be managed and/or governed” (238). Private property is a clear example of how the westerncentric logic of capitalism is sustained through the structure of settler colonialism and is made visible through contemporary tensions between the Canadian nation-state and Indigenous communities including those resulting from the extractive industries and oil and gas pipeline projects sponsored by the Canadian nation-state that undermine Indigenous self-determination and treaty rights to land in the name of advancing modernity. In the following chapters, I further interrogate the role of such environmental formations (Dempsey, Gould, and Sundberg, 2011) that came to link the colonial polities of Punjab and British Columbia.

## **Indigenous Epistemologies & Environmental Justice**

Essential to the survival of the Canadian settler colonial project, as well as the broader system of modernity/coloniality, is the creation and maintenance of contained and bordered spaces, such as the separation of Nature and Humanity explored above. However, some scholars, such as Tuck and McKenzie (2015), wonder “why is it so easy for most social scientists to ignore place in their inquiries” and “call for more attention to place and space” (151) analysis with regards to environmental justice. Challenging the structure of settler colonialism, which has and continues to operate through the dispossession of Indigenous land and perpetuates this separation of Nature and Humanity, bordered spaces, and the erasure of place-based knowledge, is fundamental to critical environmental justice thought and action in Canada (Haluza-DeLay et al., 4).

Indigenous epistemologies are dependent on the different places, local ecologies, and the Indigenous populations that inhabit them (Henderson, 260). However, one fundamental difference that does exist between the cosmologies of Turtle Island’s Indigenous communities and western knowledge is the subject-object dualism which drives a wedge between human beings and Nature. Instead, what is constructed and often reinforced as “the wilderness” and “Nature,” and “the environment” more generally, by westerncentric knowledge is embedded within an interconnected web of all living entities. According to James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson, Nature is not measured materially and as an object, but is considered to share its subjectivity with other living beings, including humans:

Most Aboriginal worldviews are founded on two understandings. First, they understand the ecosystem as an external system tolerant of flux and refined by endless renewals and realignments. Second, they understand that each ecosystem encapsulates and enfolds

many forces or parts, none of which can enfold or encapsulate the whole. The forces express nature instead of creating it. These two understandings focus on the interdependence of the life forces. They also express the need for respectful behaviour to all parts of the sacred spaces. Thus, Aboriginal people perceive all the various forces of nature as connective fibres in a larger pattern that enfolds a fluctuating ecological system (Henderson, 260).

What is commonly referred to as Nature, or the environment, then, can be understood as an expression rather than an object of the multiple interlocked forces of an ecosystem that are in a relationship of mutual dependence. On the other hand, a human-centric assumption in which human beings, ordered on a hierarchy of humanity, represent the central figures of life whose purpose is to progress through time by learning to harness the utility of Nature for development and modernity is a colonial constructed and normalized worldview. What is absent from the paradigm of modernity, overall, is a relationship of reciprocity between human beings and other living beings.

In order to propel the modernity machine forward, colonial development discourse must undermine Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and Indigenous relationality. This concept of relationality has been articulated by Winona LaDuke: “the relations all around—animals, fish, trees, and rocks—[are] our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas. Our relations to each other, our prayers whispered across generations to our relatives, are what bind our cultures together” (LaDuke, 2). Human subjectivity, then, is not separate from the surrounding environment and its various expressions. Instead, human beings are causally linked to the trees, water, and animals of their surrounding environments. However, hegemonic Westerncentric knowledge imposes the subject-object dualism, violating this notion of relationality which promotes the detrimental impacts of modernity on Indigenous populations by undermining their



cosmologies to which territory and land are critical. Ecosystems that have been impacted by deforestation, mining, damming, and other processes of modernity are examples of such environmental injustice. As LaDuke explains, species of plants and animals that have been negatively impacted “are our older relatives—the ones who came before and taught us how to live. Their obliteration by dams, guns, and bounties is an immense loss to [Indigenous] families and cultures. Their absence may mean that a people sing to a barren river, a caged bear, or a buffalo far away” (LaDuke, 2). Through these sustained colonial processes, Indigenous communities continue to feel the adverse effects of colonialism in the contemporary context, particularly through increased proliferation of extractive industry activity.

The adverse effects of increasing industrialization and modernity can be captured through the concept of relationality and Indigenous understanding in the striking example of toxic contamination of animals and human breast milk. In particular, the Mohawk First Nation at Akwesasne has been designated as the most contaminated reservation in the Canadian Great Lakes region from the large concentration of industrial activity located nearby (LaDuke, 15). As a result, the toxins dumped into the surrounding waterways were found in species of fish and drinking water supplies that overwhelmingly affected the Indigenous communities who relied on these sources of sustenance. More strikingly, however, is the chain reaction that was recorded in 1985 through the Mothers’ Milk Project, a “bioaccumulative analysis of the entire food chain at Akwesasne, from fish to wildlife to breast milk” (LaDuke, 19).

Implicit in developmental rhetoric, especially which pertains to Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, is the notion of a progression towards modernity. As this discussion has previously explored, there is an arrangement of beings along a temporal spectrum moving from

the savage past towards a civilized future. However, Indigenous epistemologies do not operate on a unilateral and linear progression of time as these are Westerncentric constructions. For example, the Anishnaabe people, in ensuring their responsibilities to Creation are met, consider not only relationships between people but also the relationship among all other living things and their ancestors (McGregor, 2009: 28). These responsibilities are not only to the ancestors of current beings but also to “those yet to come (at least as far ahead as seven generations from now) [who] also have an entitlement to environmental justice” (McGregor, 2009: 30). The linearity of time which is foundational in Westerncentric knowledge is at odds with the multi-directional conceptions of life prevalent in Indigenous knowledge. In other words, there is no westerncentric notion of modernity to which to aspire or past from which to evolve. Instead, “information, insight, and techniques are passed down and improved from one generation to another. Knowledge workers observe ecosystems and gather eyewitness reports from others so that they can continually test and improve their own systemic, predictive models of ecological dynamics” (Battiste, 8).

In this understanding, human beings exist as *a part* of the ever-changing expressions of nature rather than *apart* from it. Narratives of modernity and development are inconsistent with the fundamentals of Indigenous knowledge as there is an inherent link between epistemology and the land. As Marie Battiste explains, “Indigenous knowledge is also inherently tied to land, not to land in general but to particular landscapes, landforms, and biomes where ceremonies are properly held, stories properly recited, medicines properly gathered, and transfers of knowledge properly authenticated” (Battiste, 8). Thus, notions of modernity, which encompass human-land relations based on extraction and exploitation of resources, are not only constructs of

Westerncentric knowledge, but are inherently unjust according to Indigenous “natural law” (McGregor, 2009: 27).

Through this analysis of westerncentric and Indigenous knowledges, it becomes clear that environmental justice in the Canadian context is inextricably linked to the colonial origins of the nation state and the dispossession of land from Indigenous communities. Therefore, environmental justice action and cross-community solidarities require understanding how modernity/coloniality has been and continues to be advanced through epistemic violence and settler colonialism. This settler colonialism, however, extends beyond early white European settlement and into the often celebrated multicultural mosaic of Canada today. In chapter three, I examine settler colonialism and how it relates to environmental justice in more detail, with an emphasis on the ways in which channels of migration emerged for Punjabis during the early 1900s.

## **CHAPTER TWO: MODERNITY/COLONIALITY IN PUNJAB**

Punjab's modernity/coloniality legacy and absorption into the global nexus of empire began under British imperial rule following its annexation in 1849, by which time the settler colonial project on Turtle Island had already been well underway. Punjab, translating to the "land of five rivers," has and continues to have a deep-rooted connection to its territorial water and soil through agriculture, making it a critical area of conquest for British imperialists. Additionally, the annexation of Punjab was militarily strategic for the British Empire since "it was a frontier region through which successive waves of invaders had entered the plains of central India from the time of Alexander the Great onwards" (Talbot, 4). This deeply rooted history of militarism and conflict embedded in the region's land would be reinvented and further entrenched under British rule as I elaborate on below. Today, the pre-colonial territory of Punjab and its rivers remain divided between the nation-states of Pakistan and India following multiple movements for independence from British rule and a violent Partition in 1947. In order to build an understanding of the interconnected system of modernity/coloniality and how Punjab and Canada became interlinked through the global nexus of European colonial dominance, it is necessary to first focus an analytical frame on post-annexation Punjab during the height of British imperial policy reforms concerning land and water, a tool that helped install and normalize westerncentric colonial knowledge in Punjab.

Prior to the annexation of Punjab, the British "had found an immense variety of structures of social relationships and adaptations to the land" (Gilmartin, 5060) that were at odds with their colonial imperatives. The canal colonization project and policies are arguably the most significant aspect of the British imperial legacy that began to uproot Punjab's people from their

land. Ian Talbot (2011) emphasizes the importance of the canal colonization policies and “the development of a system of colonial law in the Punjab [as] the conflicting pulls of the region’s strategic importance and the tying in of its agricultural economy into the world market” (9). In effect, the “webs of empire” (Ballantyne, 2012) were extended to connect the Punjab region, its reimagined territorial borders under colonial rule, and emerging pool of labour with other established poles of the British empire through the movement of goods and labour. These policies are a part of what Imran Ali (1987) refers to as the “agricultural colonization in the Punjab” (3), which took place during this post-annexation period and would serve as the primary catalyst for displacement and subsequent waves of migration of Punjabis out of the region in search of new opportunities, eventually bringing them to the territories of the Coast Salish people in what came to be known as British Columbia and embedding them within the ongoing settler colonial project already taking place on Turtle Island.

The cornerstone of this agricultural colonization was the development of the canal colonies, a massive irrigation system aimed at instituting perennial agriculture with longer growing seasons and increased production (Ali, 1987: 8) which began in 1885 and quickly led to Punjab being “regarded as India’s model agricultural province” (Talbot, 3) for British colonizers. The massive project “was seen as the colonial state’s greatest achievement” (Talbot, 7) through a lens of western modernity. However, the canal colonies resulted in the epistemic foundational shift that brought a future of environmental, social, and economic devastation for Punjab that would be reconfigured through subsequent cycles of the same developmental logics of modernity/coloniality following Partition in 1947, during the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and into contemporary contexts of environmental and social justice related issues. For

the purposes of this project, of which the locus of analysis is situated in Coast Salish Territory, I focus on the transnational events concurrent to the canal colonies' formation: the start of Punjabi migration to Canada and the origins of the Ghadar movement, which grew from a peasant response to British colonial rule in India as well as exclusionary colonial policies in Canada.

The canal colonies project encapsulated westerncentric ideas of modernity and sought to exploit the region's supply of water, land, and bodies to meet the imperial vision of the Empire. This feat of ambitious engineering would result in the "transformation of 6 million acres of desert into one of the richest agricultural regions in Asia" (Talbot, 7) and entailed "the construction of a network of canals that took off from the rivers, with branches and distributaries spread over the flat, alluvial plains of the western Punjab. The canals were laid out primarily on uncultivated land, which was but sparsely inhabited by a semi-nomadic population of cattle graziers and camel owners" (Ali, 1987: 8). The development of these colonies was to ensure "canal irrigation was extended to regions where settled agriculture was not yet the established mode of livelihood" (Agnihotri, 38) in a reimagining of land/human relations in the region. This was in line with the colonial logic of disrupting pre-existing cultural norms in order to advance the goals of conquest and modernity through the separation of Nature and Humanity, "a basic epistemological operation of coloniality" (Acker, Kaltmeier, and Tittor, 9). As Talbot articulates, the Punjab canal colonies project "was an attempt to remake both the natural environment and its people. Nowhere were the ideals of the modern rational state better epitomised than in the neatly laid squares of land in the canal colony villages, and the eight bazaars in the new market town of Lyallpur radiating out from the central clock tower, 'a telling symbol of middle-class regularity'" (Talbot, 7). European temporalities "imposed an epistemic shift...through the regimentation of

British calendars and its Greenwich-based clock; the reconfigurations of timekeeping demanded by new technologies--such as railways and irrigation systems” (Mooney, 280). Similar to the European colonization of Turtle Island and Indigenous communities, temporal hierarchies were established, positioning specific social groups of Punjabis at different proximities to the “colonial present” during the early periods of the colonial reimagining of Punjab (Mooney, 280). Thus, the effects of the canal colonies project were far greater than simply the expansion of irrigation for agriculture and would permanently alter the cultural and social structure of Punjab with global reverberations.

The British legacy of coloniality in Punjab actively worked to reimagine the land, water, and people of Punjab through the newly constructed spaces of the canal colonies, an attempt to rewrite existing stories of place in the language of westerncentric normative knowledge as a force of epistemic violence. Punjab’s water played an especially noteworthy role within this process. As David Gilmartin reflects, “colonial water engineering in the Punjab grew out of emerging 19th century European ideas about the relationship between science and political economy more broadly. These ideas defined Punjab’s river waters as a ‘resource’, open to increasing state control for purposes of productive ‘use’ and ‘development’” (Gilmartin, 5057). Engineers working on the construction of the canal colonies in Punjab operated through a western scientific doctrine “defined by a common struggle for production against a wasteful nature” (Gilmartin, 5059), where the term “waste” was attributed to water that went unharnessed for agricultural production. Thus, “the language of opposition between engineering science and natural ‘waste’ paralleled the dominant language of market efficiency shaping late 19th century ideas of political economy and economic man” (Gilmartin, 5059). British policies in the Punjab

operated with the specific purpose of “cultural and intellectual colonization, via epistemologies of difference and superiority, which embedded Indian communities allochronically and differentially within the corpus of modern historicity and thus time” (Mooney, 279). The exertion of power over Punjabis, then, was dependant upon the control over knowledge and the utility of the region’s water and land, where “increasing state control over water -- and thus over the land-- defined new frameworks for the exercise of control over the local ‘communities’ comprising Indus basin society” (Gilmartin, 5057). As one British colonial official stated in his accounts: “A tribe in the chains of its own customs, unrelaxed and unrefined, may stand still for centuries, but a tribe recognised and lifted into the system of British administration...has, in the guardianship of the governing body, the best possible chance of disguising savagery and learning the wisdom of civilised men” (Talbot, 9). The means by which this ascent to civility would be effectively realized, according to the British, was through European articulations of modernity and thus,

the raj commissioned and depended on the production and implementation of a broad range of expertise: its diverse offices undertook censuses, surveys and maps, engineered canals and railways, recorded land titles and revenues and administered tax and legal systems, and its officers-- in both public and private capacities-- wrote diverse treatises on India: gazetteers, military guides, histories, religious commentaries, ethnologies, glossaries, travelogues, memoirs and so on. Colonial forms of knowledge and representation were paradigmatic exercises in power...written within a project that sought to characterize India as in a state of “arrested development”...that required British intervention” (Mooney, 279).

Narratives of rendering non-White bodies as uncivilized and savage are consistent with European discourses and processes of modernity/coloniality that were also applied to the colonization of Turtle Island. The positioning of Punjabis along an evolutionary continuum relative to British conceptions of modernity and civility not only facilitated British efforts to redefine the ways in



which local communities interacted with their land and water, but also extended to include the reconstruction of the Punjabi social ladder by reinforcing and recreating caste identities, particularly the Jat Sikh, and their association to these new environmental formations.

### **Land Grants, Social Structure, and the Punjabi “Jat Sikh”**

Efforts to permanently establish colonies on the land between the newly formed network of canals, or *doabs*, were supported by the introduction of land granting schemes and proprietary status in order to promote migration from the more densely populated areas of Punjab (Ali, 1987: 13). However, the distribution of *doabi* land was done through strategic and divisive means which would not only serve the colonial imperial aspirations of the Empire, but also legally entrench existing social caste distinctions, exacerbate social differences, and completely transform land/human relations. Specifically, the British land grant schemes for the resettlement of *doabi* land identified three separate groups of recipients: peasants, yeomans, and capitalists (Ali, 1987: 19). While land distribution in the newly created canal colonies initially claimed to prioritize Punjab’s peasantry, as the British “believed that both agricultural progress and political order could be best maintained by strengthening the position of the landholding peasantry” (Ali, 1987: 16), in reality the canal colonies became a driving force of imperialism, providing a means for the British to secure the political loyalty of those “aligned with the state structure” (Ali, 1987: 17) through large land grants, and thus, “the landless poor remained landless, their association with the colon[ies] was limited to the roles of labourers and subtenants” (Ali, 1987: 23). The pre-existing elites in village society would be the recipients of these grants, which reinforced their dominance and further restricted the social mobility of the poor (Ali, 1988: 118). In effect,

British policies of modernity/coloniality in the Punjab looked to aggressively institutionalize the environmental formations of private property (Dempsey, Gould, and Sundberg, 2011) and capitalism as an extension of empire.

Capitalists grants were set aside for “those whom the British wished to reward for their political, military, or administrative services, and for those individuals with capital who would invest in improved farming and thereby help to raise agricultural standards” (Ali, 1987: 20). The motivation behind the capitalist grants was to inject a stimulus of capitalism into the transitioning society in the hopes of creating a new privileged few to emerge as leaders and create a foundation for future expansion of capitalist farming (Ali, 1987: 21). Since some parts of the *doaba* lands still required the construction of wells to supplement only seasonal irrigation, land grants in these colonies were fixed to fifty acres and required those with “a certain amount of capital” (Ali, 1987: 14) to construct wells. Thus, in these early constructed *doaba* districts, it became “clear that colony land was deemed too valuable a resource to entrust to the poor and landless sections of the peasantry” (Ali, 1987: 15).

However, it was the land grant scheme category of yeoman, focusing primarily on the Jat caste and its stratification, that was perhaps most significant in shifting cultural and social norms for Punjab under British rule and which clearly highlights the processes of modernity/coloniality in the region as well as its developing connection to Canada during this time. Yeoman grants varied between 50-150 acres, grantees of which, like peasant grants, “had to belong to hereditary landowning castes” (Ali, 1987: 123). However, the allotment of much of the canal colony land came to be deliberately tied to promoting wide scale military recruitment for the British Indian Army that heavily favoured Jats (predominantly Sikhs), a caste in Punjab that the British sought

to socially position and legally entrench as superior to others and that could be relied upon for continued political and military loyalty (Ali, 1987: 5). As Mooney explains, “caste distinctions were categorized, quantified, administered and imposed to preserve and extend imperialism through the well-known tactic of divide and rule and religious categories were joined to caste and similarly reconfigured and fixed in tactics of colonial domination” (280). Therefore, the colonial project in Punjab not only involved an exacerbation and entrenchment of existing social class distinctions, but also included the reformation of land relations through westerncentric notions of modernity that wove together private property ownership, military expansion, and agricultural development.

Through accounts by British ethnographers and colonial administrative officers, Jat Sikhs came to be celebrated “as both a martial race and a caste of yeoman agriculturalists” (Mooney, 278). Malcolm Darling, who was the Assistant Commissioner of Punjab, provides an account that captures the epitomization of the Jat Sikh:

The Jat...is the very marrow and soul of the peasantry. [Jats] have a tenacity of character and a skill in farming which make[s] them the best cultivators in India.... It would be difficult in any country to find a more remarkable combination of cultivator, colonist, emigrant and soldier. Educated and organized, and relieved of the handicaps imposed upon him by custom and debt, he might well become the foundation of a new rural civilization in the Punjab (Mooney, 283).

However, these imagined colonial identities of Punjabis, particularly the idealized Jat Sikh, were constructed “through the Orientalist imperial gaze, which denied contemporaneous modernity to colonial subjects” (Mooney, 278), but co-opted pre-existing knowledge and histories relating to agriculture and militarism (Mooney, 283) in the region and reconfigured them to serve British imperial interests of modernity, specifically through military expansion and agricultural

development. A deep history that connects narratives of invasion and military prowess and the Punjab region, as well as the end of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's rule prior to Punjab's annexation, helped provide a frame for not only the homogenization of Jats and Sikhs, but the construction of Jat Sikhs into a romanticized martial race. This construction would serve British "interests through an essentialist and masculinist view of the men of particular communities, not races nor necessarily castes or religions but ethnic groups-- among them Dogras, Gurkhas, Marathas, Pathans, Rajputs and both Jats and Sikhs-- as being especially suited to military recruitment by virtue of their bravery, fortitude and heroism" (Mooney, 281). Following a rebellion in 1857, in which the Sikh militias and British would find themselves fighting on the same side (Gajrani, 2000), there began a "Punjabification of the Indian Army from the 1870s onwards" (Talbot, 4). Thus, the British resettlement project of Punjabis into the newly created canal colonies following annexation intimately embedded the imperial facets of militarism and revenue extraction through agriculture within a deliberate effort to target and appeal to the Jat Sikh colonial subject. The significance of this process and the construction and celebration of the Jat Sikh identity would become apparent in the eventual migration of Punjabis to British Columbia, impacting their own identity formation and positioning among white British settlers and Indigenous communities (Mawani, 2012), which I examine further in the next chapter.

Overtime, with the further entrenchment of the military and agricultural links, the original motives of "population congestion and the fostering of agricultural excellence" (Ali, 1987: 23) behind canal colonization were replaced by military interests. In the later phases of development of the canal colonies, particularly in the Jhelum Colony, there was a move away cultivation and towards horse breeding as it proved increasingly more profitable and useful for the expansion of

the British army (Ali, 1987: 25). As a result, the canal colonies project became fundamentally linked to westerncentric modernity/coloniality through agriculture and military. Furthermore, “as Punjabi agriculture was commoditized and both prosperity and debt exacerbated...the military provided an important means of financial recourse to struggling families, as did the burgeoning opportunities of the Punjabi diaspora” (Mooney, 283).

The out-migration of Punjabis into the diaspora, particularly to British Columbia, during the early twentieth century developed from these processes of modernity/coloniality that alienated Punjabis from their land through colonial subjectivities and opened new channels of migration and opportunity: “the extension of railways in the twentieth century was meant primarily to forge linkages for the export and import of foods for trade, though these lines promoted passenger traffic as well” (Grewal, 45). In the next chapter, I explore these channels that would facilitate the out-migration of Punjabis to Turtle Island and the positional negotiation of identity among these settlers in relation to Indigenous communities and White European settlers.

### **CHAPTER THREE: SETTLER COLONIALISM, PUNJABIS, AND REINFORCING WHITE SPACES OF MODERNITY/COLONIALITY ON TURTLE ISLAND**

At the beginning of the 20th century, Punjabis began what would become decades of migration out of India and onto Coast Salish territory, extending their diasporic arm as a result of British colonialism/imperialism in Punjab and other parts of India. New channels for students, tourists, and labourers from South Asia, particularly the Punjab region, emerged as a result of the global nexus of modernity/coloniality facilitated by the expansion of empire across the Pacific Ocean, tying together the colonial projects taking place in India as well as on Turtle Island. It is at this particular historical juncture that this chapter is focused, critically analyzing settler colonialism with particular attention to the settlement of Punjabis through the circumstances of colonial rule in India, under the global system of modernity/coloniality, and their positionality in relation to white settlers as well as Indigenous communities on Turtle Island.

Early Punjabi migrants to Canada, the first of which arrived in 1904, found themselves working primarily in British Columbia's forestry industry and to a lesser extent its fishing industry (Jagpal, 19). As gold mining in the province began its decline, natural resource industrialization in British Columbia, specifically with the forestry and fishing industries, began to grow, coinciding with the development of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Nayar, 11). Recalling the earlier analysis on modernity/coloniality, its ties to British imperial policies around land and water specific to Punjab and its role in the global nexus of empire and power, this particular need for manual and exploitable labour for the lumber industry ties the colonial projects of Punjab and Turtle Island together. This particular transnational connection, of predominantly farmers impacted by British imperial policies in Punjab migrating to Coast Salish

territory, was significant and became so entrenched to a point where “the Punjabi male immigrant living in British Columbia became equated with manual sawmill labour. This long standing association persisted until the 1960s. In turn, Punjabi settlement patterns reflected the changes in BC’s forestry industry” (Nayar, 28) and in early and mid twentieth century Canada, “lumber labour had become associated with ethnicity” (Nayar, 28).

Furthermore, racialized migrant labour was utilized in building the Canadian Pacific Railway, in its construction as well as the logging industry that produced its materials. The railway would help the settler colonial project in stratifying a sense of Canadian national identity through the symbolic and material unification and amalgamation of territory and resources dispossessed from Indigenous communities under state control. The construction of the railway and employment of racialized migrant labour was dependent upon the clearing of land of its Indigenous inhabitants who were subjected to purposeful and planned starvation by the Canadian state in the name of modernity (Maynard, 32). Furthermore, this industrialization and modernity of the railway served as a conduit for market capitalism through the natural resource exploitative economy in Canada that had begun to take shape. Therefore, Canada’s industrialization following colonization, the marketization of its so-called “natural resources” and Indigenous land through exploitable migrant labour from the British colonies, specifically those from British-colonized India, to work on nation-building projects of modernity such as the Canadian Pacific Railway (Puri, 21), illustrate the densely intertwined positionality of settler communities of colour within global processes of modernity/coloniality.

A connection can be made between the migration of Punjabis to Coast Salish territory and the British colonial project in Punjab due to the structural nature of settler colonialism (Tuck and

Yang, 5) which has and continues to operate within broader processes of modernity/coloniality. However, settler colonialism is itself “different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain....Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth” (Tuck and Yang, 5). While some of these dynamics of power can also be identified in different contexts of colonialism, such as that which took place in Punjab (analyzed in the previous chapter), “settler colonialism operates through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony...[and] the horizons of the settler colonial nation-state are total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments” (Tuck and Yang, 5). In Punjab, “recording of rights in land, periodic settlements of land revenue, and extension of agriculture through canals” (Grewal, 47) represented the foundational planks of an imperial policy that was consistent with an “external colonialism” as described by Tuck and Yang (2012) in which an administrative colonial dynamic of power operates to construct aspects of what is called Nature into natural resources to be exploited for the benefit of the colonizer: “bodies and earth for war, bodies and earth for chattel” (Tuck and Yang, 4). However, there are consistencies in colonial power dynamics that exist between these two different contexts, tying them together in the global nexus of modernity/coloniality and space-making that was explored in more detail in Chapter one, particularly through the normalization of westerncentric epistemologies relating to land, the separation of Humanity and Nature, and the utilization of this Nature for production through the labour of racialized bodies. It is within a specific context of settler colonialism, however, that settler



communities of colour have come to find themselves complicit within and arranged along colonial hierarchies, simultaneously encountering both their own experiences with inclusion/exclusion as well as contributing to the erasure of Turtle Island's Indigenous communities. Understanding the migration histories of different communities of colour in Canada, along with their own experiences with European colonial legacies through a more complete, nuanced, and critical lens, allows for Indigenous experiences with settler colonialism to be recentered in efforts to building more appropriate and honest solidarities for environmental justice thought and action without reinvesting in settler futurity (Tuck and McKenzie, 70).

Obtaining Indigenous land has been the cornerstone of the Canadian nation-building project, an imperative facilitated through the normalization of private property ownership over pre-colonial Indigenous relations to land. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) articulate that

through the process and structuring of settler colonialism, land is remade into property, and human relationships to land are redefined/reduced to the relationship of owner to his property. When land is recast as property, place becomes exchangeable, saleable, and steal-able. The most important aim of recasting land as property is to make it ahistorical in order to hack away the narratives that invoke prior claims and thus reaffirm the myth of terra nullius (64).

Westerncentric private property land ownership regimes were “a key site through which First Nations peoples were racialized as uncivilized and inferior due to their apparent lack of this particular land management regime...The institutionalization of private property rights in Canada, therefore, was a crucial mechanism in colonial projects of whitening both space and subjects” (Dempsey et al, 240). Thus, the colonization of Indigenous territory, knowledge, and bodies included the stratification of a social, racial, and epistemic hierarchy that reinforced notions of westerncentric, European, white superiority by aligning Indigenous bodies and their

epistemologies with Nature and the uncivilized, narratives that would be echoed, albeit with different consequences and relations of power, in the colonization of Punjab in the late 1800s. As Sunera Thobani articulates, according to westerncentric colonial worldviews, “Indigenous peoples were not fully human; they were not Christian; they were not civilized; they had not evolved; they were doomed to extinction by history and progress; they had no recognizable legal systems or concepts of property rights and were thus lawless; and they did not cultivate their lands” (Thobani, 41). Thus, the Canadian state’s colonial origins include a process of unifying settled and stolen land through western law and the designation of this space within the imposed spatial boundaries of the nation-state as a white space: “Settler colonialism wants Indigenous land, not Indigenous peoples, so Indigenous peoples are cleared out of the way of colonial expansion, first via genocide and destruction, and later through incorporation and assimilation” (Tuck and McKenzie, 66). This process of establishing westerncentric thought, racial hierarchies, and white supremacy allowed European colonial empires and the eventual Canadian nation-state to normalize the capitalist exploitation of non-European bodies, their labour, and Nature rendered “natural resources” in the name of progress and modernity while also eventually constructing a brand of multiculturalism to further facilitate its nation-building project and sanitize its erasure of Indigenous peoples. Subsequent restrictive immigration policies, however, would help preserve this white space even under the guise of a multicultural inclusivity.

## **Racialized Labour and Reinforcing White Settler Formations**

While Canada's early industrialization was a result of cheap labour from different migrant communities-- both European and non-European-- and Indigenous peoples, race has been a fundamental determinant of inclusion within the standardized Canadian identity that has been fabricated through settler colonialism and modernity/coloniality more broadly. Whereas the links between European colonialism/imperialism and the development of the "Americas" through the transatlantic slave trade has been widely documented and analyzed, Canada is often exempt from complicity, presenting a history that is seemingly benign compared to that of the United States. Furthermore, links between settler colonialism and slavery are often absent from discussions of historical racialized labour in Canada. However, slavery and anti-Blackness have been a fundamental element of the matrix of exploitation that continues to serve the modernity/coloniality project of Canadian nation state's identity formation. As Robyn Maynard points out, "white individuals and white settler society [in Canada] profited from owning unfree Black (and Indigenous) people and their labour for hundreds of years while exposing them to physical and psychological brutality" (Maynard, 20).

Early settlements by European colonizers sought to utilize the natural landscapes, territory, and breadth of resources in Canada through processes of modernity/coloniality. Colonists imported their systems of slavery in their attempts to "replicate the wealth they had seen in the slave economies of the West Indies and as a means of obtaining free labour for domestic and agricultural work" (Maynard, 20). Reinforced by European and westerncentric normative understandings of hierarchies of humanity, European modernity/coloniality in pre-

Confederation Canada enabled participation in the transatlantic slave network<sup>2</sup> through ports and trade of commodities from other slave plantation colonies in the Americas and the Caribbean (Maynard, 24). Manual labour, exploitative, and precarious work have been inextricably linked with Black and brown bodies in Canada from its colonial inception which has persisted into contemporary Canada but has been reconfigured and washed through the language of multiculturalism and globalization.

This analysis, however, does not intend to posit the Indigenous, Black, and Punjabi histories in Canada as having shared equal experiences of violence and trauma in relation to colonialism. Furthermore, this is not to argue that the modernity/coloniality nation-building project of Canada has continued to impact different racialized and oppressed communities equally and to the same degree over time through changing Canadian policies. And while there are shared experiences among people of colour in Canada as a result of the white supremacist underpinnings of its social fabric, there are and always have been intercultural differences and tension between communities of colour in Canada that are themselves the mechanisms of colonialism and determined by the access or a proximity to whiteness as regulated by modernity/coloniality (Mawani, 2009: 4), a notion I elaborate on below with regards to early settlers from India. Analyzing anti-Black racism that has existed throughout Canadian history in conjunction with settler colonialism challenges the narrative that often-cited historical examples of racism in Canada were isolated and independent events and instead exposes wider and systemic relations

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note here, that indentured labour from India helped the British Empire fill the void of exploitable labour left by the abolition of slavery in its colonies, extending the transnational threads of empire and reconfiguring the modernity/coloniality apparatus (also see Mohapatra, 1995).

of power between white European colonist settlers, Indigenous peoples, and non-white settlers within Canada's nation-state formation.

The connection between race and the nation-state extends into the foundation of the philosophical underpinnings of the state where Canada has maintained a consistent effort to produce an ideal Canadian citizen within a carefully regulated white space by means of racist, exclusionary, and assimilationist policies. As Sunera Thobani highlights in her articulation of David T. Goldberg,

racialization has been constitutive of the modern state formation, not only of nation formation. Racialized distinctions instituted by the state produced homogeneity out of heterogeneous populations: 'Colonialism...was about managing heterogeneity, dealing with difference through imposition and restriction, regulation and repression.' Demonstrating that 'the modern state has always conceived of itself as racially configured,' Goldberg notes that 'race is integral to the emergence, development and transformations (conceptually, philosophically, materially) of the modern nation-state.'" (Thobani, 24).

In Canada, "the question of migration and citizenship are thus deeply entwined in national formation, with immigration policies organizing access to formal citizenship" (Thobani, 74). However, "the central contradiction of Canadian citizenship, deeply rooted in its earliest stages of development, is that the citizenship rights of settlers, nationals, and immigrants remain based in the institution of white supremacy" (Thobani, 74). For example, the channels for migration and residency in Canada for people of colour, including those arriving from India, were, and continue to be, contingent upon the capitalist need for exploitable and dispensable labour and a willingness by these settlers to adopt European, Enlightenment-era, westerncentric values embedded within Canadian identity. Assimilationist policies based on this institutionalized white supremacy continue to demand that migrants to Canada exercise gratitude for their resettlement,

leading to an internalization and reinforcement of the settler colonial structure that further displaces Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (Nayar, 15). Thus, in contrast to the multiculturalism that is outwardly promoted by Canada today, the nation-state has demanded a homogeneity from its citizens that is directly in line with modernity/coloniality and the normalization of westerncentric knowledge to spatially construct and uphold its Canadian identity through genocidal and assimilationist policies since its inception.

Specifically, Canada has consistently demarcated specific groups as “Others,” rendering them inferior and thus exploitable and their labour dispensable, through policies that have been designed to regulate their entry and participation in Canadian society. This manifested through policy and the institutional structure of the state where “for over a century after Confederation, the state...organized and solidified white racial identity as *political* (citizen) identity” (Thobani, 75). The events surrounding the *Komagata Maru* in 1914, the Chinese Head Tax, Japanese internment during World War II, and limited voting rights for specific groups are among only some of the examples often treated as isolated and unrelated incidents of discrimination in Canada’s history (Nayar, 15) which have been relegated to the past and written off as growing pains and the natural evolution of a civilized society. In actuality, however, these are interconnected examples, among others, of the Canadian state’s foundational systemic racism and exclusion of non-Europeans that extend from its settler colonial roots and the ways in which the modernity/coloniality processes are consistently reconfigured in order to be sustained.

White settler formations of the Canadian nation-state, including the racialization of Canadian citizenship, were a critical unifying imperative of Confederation, particularly in the context of British Columbia where non-European settlers had a significant presence. For

example, Dua points out that “by 1867, Chinese residents made up over 40 per cent of the non-indigenous mainland population in British Columbia...however, after Confederation, the British Columbia provincial government, followed by the federal government, moved to restrict migration from China partly by defining Chinese residents as aliens to the emerging nation-state, and legally and socially ineligible for citizenship” (Dua, 1999: 121). These policies of exclusion, under the imperative of preserving a white settler formation, would also come to have repercussions for migrants from British India, which I examine in more detail below.

Lawrence and Dua (2005) point out how these specific exclusionary policies impacting different settler communities of colour have been “decontextualized” from their direct impacts to Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, such as the “[Chinese] ‘head tax’ and other legislation...restricting non-European immigration in Western Canada...from the suppression of the Cree and Blackfoot peoples after the 1885 rebellion” (134) that looked to promote white European settlement of land cleared of Indigenous peoples. As Mynard explains, “Canada’s history as a white-dominated, Anglo-Saxon state was not a natural evolution but required careful, indeed brutal, engineering [through] colonization [that] was premised upon an explicitly white supremacist racial hierarchy, whereby white male settlers were seen as the rightful inheritors of Canadian lands, wealth and social and political rights” (Maynard, 32). Therefore,

the colonial governments competing aspirations of capitalist accumulation and racial purity thus produced a deep paradox: whereas capitalism thrived on the heterogeneity and plurality of productive populations, racial purity was contingent on a perceived homogeneity and on the expulsion of those internal and external racial threats (Mawani, 2009: 37).

This paradox would eventually come to necessitate the adoption of multiculturalism policy in Canada as a reconfiguration of how it managed its increasing immigrant population and

heterogeneity without disrupting the flow of cheap and exploitable labour from other poles of empire and the white supremacist pillars of its own foundation.

While Canadian multiculturalism seemingly suggests a shift away from discriminatory policies and narratives, it maintains processes of racialization that help to render specific communities as Others against the consolidated whiteness of Canadian identity. As Thobani explains, “multiculturalism has sought to constitute people of colour as politically identifiable by their cultural backgrounds” through which “race [becomes] reconfigured as culture and cultural identity [becomes] crystallized as political identity, with the core of the nation continuing to be defined as bilingual and bicultural (that is, white)” (Thobani, 145). The conflation of culture with race through the adoption of multiculturalism policy in Canada provided the means by which the processes of modernity/coloniality could continue to operate. For example, it “placed the onus for racial inequalities experienced by people of colour onto their own (collective) cultural inadequacies (that is, their differences) and (individual) lack of linguistic skills” and “suppressed the legal distinctions between immigrant and citizen, ideologically equating their status and identity by emphasizing only their shared membership in ‘their’ cultural communities” (Thobani, 156). As a result, the epistemic foundation of westerncentric knowledge that elevated European colonizers above non-White Others and produced the rationale for European colonization and subjugation of Indigenous communities, is reconfigured through the institution of the Canadian multicultural state.

Thus, the construction of nationhood within Canada has consistently been closely aligned with the process of racialization, migration, and labour while operating through modernity/coloniality. These links can be identified through the ongoing processes of Othering that have



allowed the colonial settler state to fulfill its capitalist exploitation over time, from the time of European empire and into global neoliberalism, at the expense of non-white bodies. The Canadian state's shift towards adopting its official multiculturalism policy in the 1970s was prefaced by the opening of "its doors to the immigration of various non-European ethnic groups, including East Indian<sup>3</sup>" (Nayar, 16) in order to fill its labour needs. The specific case of early Punjabi migration to British Columbia as a result of British colonialism/imperialism in India and the community's positionality in relation to white settlers and Indigenous communities, offers a particularly striking example of how historically rooted and interconnected race, labour, and migration have been in the Canadian nation-building project, its broader links to modernity/coloniality, and its relevance to contemporary Indigenous-lead environmental justice movements through the Ghadar Party's history of anti-colonial resistance.

### **Racialized Citizenship and Rearticulating Punjabi Settlement and Positionalities**

Analyzing the creation of spaces, particularly by colonial powers looking to drive a wedge between Nature and Humanity in order to expropriate and dominate Indigenous land as well as channels of travel and trade, provide further critical insights and a retelling of prevailing histories of migration and settlement by communities of colour (Mawani, 2018: 7). Renisa Mawani has used the *Komagata Maru* and its legacy tied to Canadian immigration policies, inclusion/exclusion, and settler colonialism as a means to develop an analytical lense that traces its journey through time and space (Mawani, 2018: 7). This is critical as "histories of the *Komagata Maru* have focused almost exclusively on the related themes of British-Indian

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<sup>3</sup> Nayar uses the term 'East Indian' to refer to settlers from South Asia.

migration to settler colonies and on the racial exclusions of Canadian immigration law...[but] these accounts have neither addressed nor engaged with questions of indigeneity” (Mawani, 2012: 370). The analysis presented in this project attempts to echo this methodology of breaking open analytical constraints that often limit experiences of coloniality within specific times and geographical places, using a framework that intends to reimagine histories of migration and recentre Indigenous experiences. For example, a critical engagement with modernity/coloniality with regards to Punjabi settlers, their proximity to European colonial settlers and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island, and their positionality within the settler colonial project of Canada requires bringing in the legacy of British colonialism in India (see chapter two) into the conversation. However, this legacy is not static nor spatially confined to Punjab. The eventual settlement of Punjabis and others from South Asia on Turtle Island was greatly influenced by dynamics of power, imperial policies, and narratives of race and settler colonialism taking place in various spaces of the British Empire at that time, including the changes to land and water relations through the canal colonies project in Punjab.

A process of unlearning and rearticulating the histories of migration for Punjabi settlers on Coast Salish territory that engages with the global modernity/coloniality nexus requires reframing and perhaps even challenging identity formations that have relied exclusively on celebrating the experiences of resilience of early settlers. There is a temptation within these identity formations by settler communities of colour to position themselves outside of the European settler colonial project, absolving them of complicity through the retelling of their histories. However, solidarity in environmental justice through a lens that centres Indigenous experiences means understanding the power dynamics, which may be distinct from the dynamics

of power with white Europeans, between settler communities of colour and Indigenous communities produced through global modernity/coloniality. For example, “colonial subjects who are displaced by external colonialism, as well as racialized and minoritized by internal colonialism, still occupy and settle stolen Indigenous land. Settlers are diverse, not just of white European descent, and include people of colour, even from other colonial contexts” (Tuck and Yang, 7). The flow of racialized migrant labourers, such as Punjabi settlers during the early 20th century in British Columbia, has been regulated throughout the settler colonial project’s history and thus these racialized communities have been “invited to take part in ongoing colonialism” (Lawrence and Dua, 133) despite being impacted by colonialism themselves and “brought onto seized Indigenous land through other colonial projects” (Tuck and Yang, 7). Therefore, the canal colonies history in Punjab and the subsequent displacement of Punjabis from their territory and onto Coast Salish land, for example, can be brought to the forefront to inform developing critical solidarities in which migrant communities of colour, specifically the Punjabi diaspora in Canada, can support Indigenous-lead environmental justice by centring the persisting structure of settler colonialism on Turtle Island.

In order to work towards this, re-articulations of settlement histories and their ties to space-making are required. For example, as Mishuana Goeman articulates, “foundational to normative modes of settler colonialism are repetitive practices of everyday life that give settler place meaning and structure. Yet space is fluid, and it is only in the constant retelling and reformulating of colonial narratives that space becomes place as it is given structure and meaning” (Goeman, 236). Settler colonialism and migrant positionalities in relation to Indigenous communities are often missing from the celebrated migration histories of

communities of colour that have settled in Canada. Furthermore, the relationship of settler communities of colour, specifically settlers from the Punjab region for this project's purpose, to shared colonial histories in other parts of the British Empire are largely ignored. As Mawani explains, "although Indians traveled to colonial geographies including settlement colonies that were long inhabited by indigenous peoples, colonial legal histories of indigeneity and British Indian migration continue to be written as if they occurred in distinct and successive spatiotemporalities: *first* the indigenous, *then* the British-Indian" (Mawani, 2012: 371).

In "Specters of Indigeneity," Mawani re-traces the journey of the *Komagata Maru* which serves as a historical marker of modernity/coloniality and its global system: "the *Komagata Maru*'s journey was a formative moment in British colonial history in that it connected Britain, India, Hong Kong, and Canada within a circuitous, albeit uneven, movement of peoples, and within a global regime of law, legality, and violence" (Mawani, 2012: 370). Through this analysis, Mawani sheds light on the ways in which colonial hierarchies extended across the Pacific and were utilized by those aboard the *Komagata Maru* looking to challenge the discriminatory continuous passage legislation and disembark onto Coast Salish territory, whereby "making claims to their own racial superiority and their readiness to join the Imperial polity" (Mawani, 2012: 372). Furthermore, those aboard the ship,

and their middle-class supporters in India and elsewhere were well aware of these hierarchies and strategically made demands for inclusion by flattening some racial distinctions and emphasizing others. Claiming to be "Imperial citizens," they drew comparisons between themselves and white Britons, thus demanding the same rights of mobility and residence across the empire (Mawani, 2012: 380).

The legal challenge undertaken by the passengers of the *Komagata Maru* and its representatives in Vancouver, among whom included Ghadar Party affiliates (Mawani, 2018: 208), to allow

passengers aboard the ship to disembark highlighted these dynamics of power that undermined Indigenous sovereignty, played into colonial racial hierarchies, and reinforced the westerncentric epistemological foundation of the colonial settler state.

Lawyers representing Munshi Singh, who became the representative of the ship's passengers in the legal challenge and by extension all racialized migrants looking to immigrate from British India (particularly Punjab) to British Columbia at the time, argued that Munshi Singh and others should have the same rights of mobility as the British throughout the Empire and be allowed entry due to their British subjecthood (Dua, *The Passage from Subjects to Aliens* 156). Examining the legal proceedings of cases made during this time, Dua (1999) traces the ways in which race and citizenship became intertwined with white settler formations of the nation-state as a direct result of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian presence in British Columbia. In one report highlighted by Dua, Judge McPhillips provides the following rationale for using race to define and restrict 'Asiatic' migration:

The Parliament of Canada - the nation's Parliament- may be well said to be safeguarding the people of Canada from an influx which is no chimera to conjure up might annihilate the nation and change its whole potential complexity, introduce Oriental ways as against European ways, eastern civilization for western civilization, and all of the dire results that would naturally flow there from ... In that our fellow British subjects of the Asiatic race are of different instincts to those of the European race - and consistent there with, their family life, rules of society and laws are of a very different character - in their own interests, their proper place or residence is within the confines of their respective countries in the continent of Asia, not in Canada (Dua, *The Passage from Subjects to Aliens* 157).

Race and its connection to subjecthood and citizenship would become a critical point of negotiation within these proceedings. Munshi Singh's lawyers also argued that he and other Punjabi migrants were "'not of the Asiatic race' but of the Ayran one, and thus, the order-in-

council that excluded Asiatics did not apply to him...[and] ‘that the Hindus<sup>4</sup> [sic] are of the Caucasian race, akin to the English’” (Mawani, 2012: 386).

This narrative, however, extended beyond the specific context of *Komagata Maru* and its passengers. It invoked internalized racial hierarchies and aspirations to whiteness embedded within and implemented through the global nexus of modernity/coloniality (Quijano, 2007: 169) which, in the context of British imperialism/colonialism in India and Turtle Island, would position migrants from British India, specifically the Punjabi Jat Sikh (see chapter two), as superior to racialized others, namely native Africans in South Africa and Indigenous communities of Turtle Island (Mawani, 2012: 394). As Mawani explains, “during his time in South Africa, [Mahatma] Gandhi gestured repeatedly and strategically to the putative racial superiority of Indians over Africans” (Mawani, 2012: 395) by utilizing the colonial and westerncentric trope of the industriousness and hardworking Indian while positioning native Africans as lazy and uncivilized (Mawani, 2012: 395), feeding into westerncentric narratives of measuring humanity through capitalist productivity. Thus, belonging among Indian migrants within the spatial bounds of the British Empire, including Punjabis travelling to British Columbia, became contingent on a likeness to whiteness and the internalization of westerncentric epistemologies. The tensions around inclusion/exclusion and space-making through the settler colonial project, then, extended beyond the spatial territorial boundaries of Canada and India to include other polities of the empire that would inform the racial dynamics between different settler communities of colour, further perpetuating an erasure of Indigenous presence and sovereignty on Turtle Island.

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<sup>4</sup> The term Hindu or ‘Hindoo’ was a homogenizing term used by white settlers and the state to refer to South Asian immigrants despite many of these early settlers from Punjab being Sikh.

The Canadian state would ultimately rule migrants from India to be inherently different and less civilized than white Europeans and unable to assimilate. According to one judge's ruling during a challenge to the continuous passage legislation targeting migrants from India, "peoples of non-assimilative—and by nature properly non-assimilative—race should not come to Canada' but should instead "remain of residence in their country of origin and there do their share, as they have in the past, in the preservation and development of the Empire" (Mawani, 2012: 388). Recalling the analysis presented in the last chapter regarding the construction of the Jat Sikh identity as superior but restricted to anterior time (Mooney, 2013) these remarks outline how normative constructions of the separation of Humanity and Nature as well as the spatial and temporal limits of civility worked in tandem to maintain and uphold the power structures of modernity/coloniality between different polities of the web of empire such as, in this specific analysis, Punjab and Turtle Island.

Within analyses that engage with the migration histories of South Asians-- particularly Punjabis-- to Canada during the early 20th century, it is increasingly imperative to recover and bring forward silenced and interconnected threads of these histories for critical solidarities in social and environmental justice. Much in the way that Indian migration to South Africa through the British Empire informed the racial dynamics between Indians, Europeans, other racialized "Others," and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island, legacies of British imperialism/colonialism in Punjab and the social dynamics of power explored in chapter two of this project continue to inform Punjabi diasporic positionality in settler colonialism, particularly with regards to environmental justice solidarities and can contribute to the perpetuation of modernity/coloniality through settler colonialism. For example, Tuck and McKenzie explain how "drawing

out the problems of settlement is an important distinction to make, especially when considering the strategies of ecological and environmental justice; justice efforts that aim to disentangle from capitalism, for example, may in effect reinforce settlement” (68). Furthermore, Tuck and McKenzie go on to state that

Critically thinking about the constructions of space is crucial to the project of dismantling on-going colonialism and indigenizing our bodies, land, and waters. Yes, the recovery and maintenance of land itself is necessary for our survival, but so too is a careful attention to our formations of the social, which determines everyday experiences in place. An examination of embodied spatiality in a settler state is necessary if we are to avoid replication of colonial systems of power at work in the nation-state (238).

For settler communities of colour to engage in critical solidarity action around environmental justice, engaging with the spatial construction of the settler colonial state and its connected threads to diasporic identity formation through migration histories that often silence Indigenous community experiences is imperative to the learning/unlearning process that re-centers Indigenous experiences, knowledge, and histories. Looking critically at the early settlement experiences of South Asians, particularly those from the Punjab region, on Turtle Island provides an entry point to connect the emergence and contextual significance of the anti-colonial Ghadar movement that originated on Turtle Island during this time period in response to British colonial policies in both Punjab and British Columbia. In the final chapter of this project, I specifically engage with this history and its relevance to contemporary Indigenous-lead environmental justice movements in Canada.



## CHAPTER FOUR: TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES OF ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE ON TURTLE ISLAND

Having located Punjab's own legacy of modernity/coloniality and the ongoing settler colonial project on Turtle Island within the global nexus of empire, returning to the notion of solidarity with contemporary Indigenous-led environmental justice thought and action presents a seemingly complicated notion. Re-tracing and re-articulating the migration histories of Punjabis to Coast Salish territory against a backdrop of settler colonialism reveals how early migrants from British-occupied India utilized different relations of power against Indigenous communities to exercise their own belonging which is seemingly at odds with the overall prospect of solidarity. The word *taike* presented at the outset of this project offers a glimpse into this dynamic relationship between early Punjabi settlers to Turtle Island where multiple and changing connotations of the term have reflected empathy and solidarity with Indigenous communities as well as an internalized colonial rhetoric of superiority over them. Previous chapters have analyzed the ways in which these early settlers from British-occupied India, particularly Punjabis, navigated colonial hierarchies to validate their own inclusion within the colonial settler project as British subjects, helping to stretch the reach of coloniality and the web of empire. This global reach of empire also produced a counter-hegemonic response to modernity/coloniality among the earliest Punjabi settlers to Turtle Island through the formation of the anti-colonial Ghadar movement.

However, the history of the Ghadar movement on Turtle Island is multi-layered and can also be critically analyzed to recentre settler colonialism and the experiences of Indigenous communities. This chapter briefly examines the Ghadar movement's origins on Turtle Island, its

transnational connections with peasant resistance to British imperial policies in Punjab, its contradictions and the opportunities for learning it presents to environmental justice movements and the goal of strengthening solidarities in the contemporary context of Canada.

Chapter two analyzed the canal colonies project by the British in Punjab in detail, examining its impacts on human-land relations as well as on the region's social fabric due to the normative westerncentric knowledge that centered modernity as imperial policy. The out-migration from Punjab that occurred due to the canal colonies project would lead to the development of channels of migration to Coast Salish territory, facilitated through the British modernity/coloniality project that tied Punjab and its reformed economy to other polities of the Empire. These migrants travelled by foot from Punjabi villages in western India to main cities of departure from which they were able to take trains to Calcutta's ports in the east to board cargo ships travelling to Vancouver via Hong Kong (Verma, 100). The increasing numbers of migrants from British-occupied India that undertook this arduous route quickly gave rise to new businesses looking to profit from this emerging migration route. For example, by "1906, the shipping agents of the Canadian Pacific Railways in Calcutta city were playing a role in attracting emigrants towards Canada" (Verma, 103). Thus, the settler colonial nation-building project of Canada became inextricably linked to the modernity/coloniality project of Punjab by promoting channels for the newly created labour pool of displaced farmers, as a result of the canal colonies project (see chapter two), to participate in the settler colonial project separating Indigenous communities from their land on Turtle Island. It was in response to these processes of modernity/coloniality that early migrants from British-controlled India and those stationed in

Eastern polities of the empire under the British India Army (Bhoi, 36), as well as a building peasant based resistance in India, that the Ghadar movement would be created.

### **The Ghadar Party: Between Punjab and Turtle Island**

The Ghadar Party was a “coalition of Punjabi migrant workers and Bengali and Punjabi intellectuals and students that emphasized secularism and unity despite linguistic, religious, and regional differences...[and] though its core leadership was Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, nearly ninety percent of its membership was comprised of Punjabi Sikh males, nearly half of who were veterans of the British Indian army” (Sohi, 2018). The Party’s origins are situated across the multiple epicentres of San Francisco, Oregon, and British Columbia on Turtle Island (Ogden, 166) and the Punjab region in India, producing an interconnected transnational movement of resistance to empire. The revolutionary peasant-based movement was organized predominantly on Turtle Island but extended its reach globally across the South Asian diaspora, “[advocating] for the armed resistance to British imperialism and white settler nationalism” (Dua, 121). As Kasim Tirmizey explains, “the Ghadar Party developed a radical critique of colonialism and imperialism which went further than that of Indian liberal nationalists” (136) that would be informed by their experiences within settler colonialism on Turtle Island:

they experienced class and racialization in the workplace through differentiated wages with threats of deportation, special immigration regulations for Asians, and anti-Asian riots. This context was an opportunity to understand class exploitation and racialization as being structured by imperialism. They also saw their oppression in North America as being connected to British colonialism in India. Rather than making claims for extending liberal rights to the South Asian community in the United States and Canada, they made calls for ending empire (Tirmizey, 136).

Furthermore, the experiences with racism and exclusion that early migrants from British India encountered, including the specific incident of the *Komagata Maru* and its surrounding exclusionary narratives, prompted the rise of anti-colonial sentiments among the diaspora on Turtle Island against the white settler state of Canada which echoed the rising agitation against British imperialism in India (Puri, 42). Tirmizey provides the following analysis of the Party's interconnected transnational resistance to modernity/coloniality:

Its anti-colonial politics was informed by national liberation struggles in India and globally. The Party realized that racism was not a question of individual prejudices but was structural to a global imperial order. As such, it saw antiracist struggles in Canada as connected to a broader struggle against empire in India and elsewhere. The Ghadar Party helped us see that the *Komagata Maru* was not an isolated moment but was endemic to the operations of a white supremacist state (Tirmizey, 2019).

The Party would also respond to the increased limitations placed on Indian female migrants and the families of the men that had settled in British Columbia at the start of the twentieth century (Dua, 121), restrictions which the Canadian government implemented as a means to uphold its white nationalist imperatives (Dua, 120). Furthermore, the settler colonial project taking place on Turtle Island would come to impact the anti-colonial nationalist movement in India where “for the Ghadars, the racism of white settler nationalism was intimately tied to the racial discrimination inherent in British imperial policies which, in turn, was intimately tied to British colonial policies in India” (Dua, 127).

The implementation of westerncentric logics of modernity, which normalized the separation of Humanity and Nature through British imperial policies in Punjab, drew significant resistance from the peasant classes who were most significantly impacted (see chapter two) by the land allotment schemes tied to the canal colonies project as well as subsequent increased

water rates and grain prices (Puri, 17; Tirmizey, 135). The Ghadar Party articulated anti-colonial/anti-imperial narratives in Punjab by

linking questions of food insecurity to the British Empire's presence in India. Since the 1870s, cash crops like wheat and cotton were growing with increasing intensity in Punjab for export. Punjab was opened up for providing cheap food for the heart of the empire through the construction of irrigation networks, canal colonies, roads, market towns, railway system, and an export port in Karachi. The industrial revolution in Western Europe was on the backs of agricultural labourers in the colonies providing factory workers in Western Europe with cheap food” (Tirmizey, 144)

As I've illustrated, this rising anti-colonial fervour was directly linked to the agrarian policy reforms, including the Punjab Alienation Act and the development of the canal colonies, that also subsequently facilitated the creation of migration routes for displaced Punjabi labourers travelling to Turtle Island for more profitable working opportunities. Peasant uprisings in Punjab, notably led by Ajit Singh and Lala Lajput Rai among others, were held in response to oppose the canal colonization project (Hari Singh, 18) and represented a resistance to the separation of Punjabis from their land and territory through colonization and the British-imposed structures of modernity (Talbot, 7). Thus, the global nexus of modernity/coloniality that connected Punjab and Turtle Island, also produced this counter-hegemonic response of global anti-colonial resistance to empire. The peasant-based foundation of the movement and its emphasis on self-determination and relations to land and water echo contemporary sentiments of social and environmental justice thought and action.

While much of the historical resources of the Ghadars that are becoming increasingly available and uncovered seem to challenge empire through a transnational movement, it is critical to explore nuance and dynamics of power concerning the Ghadars and Indigenous communities of Turtle Island. For example, Dua (1999) highlights the reproduction and

extension of settler formations by the Ghadars: “as the strength of British imperialism was located in its ability to ‘colonise’ other parts of the world, the Ghadars put forward an anti-imperial strategy that employed the same process. Both *The Aryan* and *The Hindustanee* [newspapers] encouraged male migrants to see themselves as ‘colonists’ involved in a larger struggle” (130). Dua situates this analysis within the Ghadar challenge to Canadian restrictions on Indian migrant women, highlighting the Party’s ironic reinforcement of racial purity within the white nation state formation. Dua explains that

by drawing on Canadians’ fear of interracial sexuality, the Ghadars suggested that the presence of ‘their’ women, as wives, would protect the racialised nation. As importantly, their attempt to challenge the racism of the empire was based on extending a racialised privilege, the right to be included in white settler societies, by creating another racialised privilege: their own ethnic communities (130).

This example, coupled with the strategy of *Komagata Maru* passengers to argue for their inclusion and belonging in Canada on the basis of their British subjecthood examined in the last chapter, presents clear contradictions embedded within early South Asian migrant histories on Turtle Island.

As the Ghadar movement in India was primarily concerned with independence from British-rule, it upheld a nationalist vision for its sovereignty, free from colonial empire. However, as analyses of the Ghadar Party’s vision and lived experiences of its members continue to emerge, it is critical to consider how the retelling of this particular legacy, particularly with regards to mobilizing critical solidarities for social and environmental justice, may silence Indigenous experiences. For example, according to Partha Chatterjee, “nationalist opposition to European rule is driven by a faith in a theory. Yet the theory itself, and indeed the very attitude of faith in a theory, are the gifts of Europe to the rest of the world. But in the very conception of

its project, it remains a prisoner to the prevalent intellectual fashions” (10). In other words, conceptions of nationalism, even within an anti-colonial movement, are still rooted in and derived from westerncentric knowledge and modernity. Thus, in moving towards a critical solidarity between Indigenous communities, who continue to live under the structure of settler colonialism on Turtle Island, and settler communities of colour, such as the Punjabi diaspora in Canada, it is imperative to engage in a critical reimagining and retelling of its migration histories through a wide analytical frame while Indigenous knowledge and experience is situated upfront. The dynamic nature of these settler/Indigenous relationships, sheds light on the power of modernity/coloniality to sustain itself, as well as the settler colonial nation-building project which has consistently looked to promote a brand of multiculturalism that ensures its own preservation.

It is within the nuances of these histories, however, that opportunities for unlearning/learning exist to build contemporary critical solidarities. During the period of migration from British India to Turtle Island that has been examined here, Ghadar revolutionary publications looking to mobilize anti-colonial resistance in response to British imperial policies in Punjab were circulated by ship through private letters (Ramnath, 44). In one particular note, an acknowledgement of settler colonialism and its connections to the context of India is captured and shared. The unidentified writer states:

Now I will write about this country and what we see with our own eyes. The country belonged formerly to the Canadians [*sic*] but the English conquered it four hundred years ago. The original inhabitants now are not allowed to walk in the streets and they go about the country like wandering tribes. They do not possess an inch of land but subsist by fishing on the sea. In our country there is no sea. What shall we do? (Ramnath, 44).

While this passage does not offer direct evidence of solidarities that may have existed between Ghadarites and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island, it does provide insight into the existing colonial proximities (Mawani, 2009) that could have informed anti-colonial narratives during that time, building links of resistance against modernity/coloniality and empire. It is within these hidden folds of history that historical narratives can be made increasingly more complete. In doing so, reimagined critical thought and action can be articulated while interrogating complicity and positionality of settler communities of colour in an effort to inform contemporary contexts of Indigenous-centred environmental justice solidarities.

In its contemporary form, environmental justice has emerged as an interlinked and global response of resistance to policies of neoliberalism capitalism that have worked to sustain the logics of westerncentric epistemologies and modernity/coloniality. In the earliest conceptions of its contemporary articulation, environmental justice was “tied to struggles over the location of toxic waste sites and articulated as claims for ‘equal treatment’ of differently racialized communities” (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 9). The ties between toxic waste site location and race would also prompt the development of the interrelated term of environmental racism, adding nuance of race and power dynamics rooted in a place-based history of the Americas within environmental justice narratives. In recent decades, however, an increasingly broader understanding of environmental justice has been normalized through a process of tracing how modernity/coloniality and the global nexus of empire has operated interconnectedly, particularly with Indigenous communities in the Americas as well as people of colour in settler colonial contexts over history. For example, at the 1991 gathering of activists, scholars, and delegates at the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in Washington, DC, 17



Principles of Environmental Justice were developed that have since been consistently referenced for environmental thought and action organizing (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 9). The official preamble states the following:

We, the people of color, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, and hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth...to insure environmental justice...and, to secure our political, economic, and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples (Gosine and Teelucksingh, 9).

The continuity of modernity/coloniality impacting marginalized communities of colour, particularly Indigenous communities fighting for self-determination and autonomy on their traditional territories, requires action and solidarity that recognizes these processes as ongoing. For settler communities of colour, particularly in the context of an ongoing settler colonial project such as that of Canada, it is imperative to interrogate histories and legacies of complicity but also those of interconnected resistance that have been silenced and erased. The anti-colonial legacy of the Ghadar party on Turtle Island and its ties to peasant resistance in India to British imperialism/colonialism, particularly the canal colonies in Punjab, echoes principles of environmental justice as well as action by contemporary peasant based movements across the world that have expanded contemporary articulations of environmental justice to include food sovereignty and indigenous self-determination and sovereignty<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See peasant-based movements of La Via Campesina.

## CONCLUSION

At this particular moment in human history, climate change and mass migration demand increased attention and will prompt a reconfiguration of modernity/coloniality in order for it to be sustained, requiring movements of resistance and social and environmental justice to respond. Just as there is urgency for a response, there is also an urgency for a renewed framework with which this action can be undertaken. Modernity/coloniality operates as a system looking to absorb increasing resistance to it by preserving structures such as settler colonialism that it needs to survive. It is imperative to understand how relations of power and normative westerncentric epistemologies contribute to the ways in which injustices are upheld and maintained on stolen Indigenous land.

In order for critical environmental justice action to take hold in Canada, one that strengthens solidarities for critical action and moves beyond environmentalism set in settler futurity, settler communities of colour, like the Punjabi diaspora, must actively work to re-centre Indigenous experiences with settler colonialism in their own migration histories as well as the role that global modernity/coloniality continues to play. Therefore, without a critical framework that explores the deep-rooted, historical, and global linkages of empire between settler communities of colour and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island, achieving critical environmental justice solidarities remains threatened. The links between environmental injustice, the movement of people, and subsequent shifts in social relations has been examined here within the specific historical contextual frame of Punjab and Coast Salish territory on Turtle Island. However, within this analysis exists the potential to investigate and interrogate further

and understand the ways in which solidarities can be strengthened as well and made more effective moving forward across various settler communities of colour.

Rita Dhamoon, in a transcribed conversation between herself, Corey Snelgrove, and Jeff Corntassel (2014), states that “people of colour are...structurally implicated in dispossession, whether that’s our choice or not. So it posits that ‘your’ issues of Indigenous land are not separate from ‘my’ issues if I care about racism, sexism, and I must think about the ways they are related to settler colonialism” (19). Corntassel offers the following reflection on solidarity:

So there is a different sense of Indigenous place-based and living histories that should be understood by folks proposing to act in solidarity. If someone is just simply saying ‘I’m Canadian, and I don’t know my history,’ how useful is that to deepening solidarity? Maybe that forgetfulness... is also sort of convenient. You haven’t done the hard work to uncover your role, or your family’s role in, whether it’s direct colonial actions of just settling here” (20).

Thus, in putting forward this project, I offer a critical framework through which to understand histories of migration by settler communities of colour to Canada in a more complete frame and through a critical lens unveiling the interconnected realities between empire and polity. A thread of analysis can be extended between the multi-layered constructed spaces of the Punjab region, across the Pacific Ocean, to Turtle Island and the nation-building project of Canada in order to understand changing human/land relationships and settlement policies as a function of modernity/coloniality. Perhaps most importantly, an application of this analysis to the context of Canada today, under its guise of multiculturalism, can inform everyday intercultural relationships through language and community lived experiences.

In closing, I return once more to the notion of *taike*, the Punjabi term referring to Indigenous peoples in which kinship and respect is foundational in early relationships between

Punjabi migrants and Indigenous communities on Turtle Island. Conversations of place, reconciliation, and solidarity that have begun to take place must strive to extend beyond ceremonial acknowledgements of land and territory upon which diasporic identities have been formed and look to echo anti-colonial resistance to ongoing modernity/coloniality and a responsibility to Indigenous communities who continue to lead critical environmental justice action, resist, and persevere under the oppressive structure of settler colonialism today.

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