

# *REFLECTIONS*

NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING



“Coming and Going” photograph 4032x3024px Anh Ngo 2022

Artist’s Statement: Belonging is an elusive state for many inhabitants on settler colonial lands. The elusiveness in which social lives exist is mirrored in this glimpse of Lake Huron (Ontario) framed between snow covered sand dunes and trees. This framing brings to mind the complexities of exits and entrances, or comings and goings. We chose this image to encapsulate the complexities discussed in this special section, on conditions of belonging which work through the helping professions.

## Care and Control: The Intersections of Professional Helping and Nation-State and/or Citizenship Belonging

GUEST EDITORS: Anh Ngo and Maryam Khan

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# REFLECTIONS

## NARRATIVES of PROFESSIONAL HELPING

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# Reflections from the Guest Editors: Unraveling Care and Control: The Limits of Professional Helping Within Conditions of Belonging

Anh Ngo and Maryam Khan

**Abstract:** This Special Issue of *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping* delves into the complex interplay between professional helping and nation-state belonging, critically examining how these constructs intersect with power, privilege, and oppression. This collection unravels the conditions of “professional helping”—encompassing fields like social work, healthcare, and education—which often operates within a framework of care that subtly reinforces existing power structures rather than truly empowering marginalized communities.

**Keywords:** benevolence, oppression, belonging, marginalization

## Introduction

Disciplines within the broad field of “professional helping” have long been critiqued as operating within the discourses of charity, paternalism, surveillance, and benevolence (Chapman & Withers, 2019). Importantly, such discourses and their accompanying practices have their roots in racism, sexism, colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, heteropatriarchy, cisgenderism, sanism, and ableism, to name a few axes of privilege and oppression. Within North American nation-states, professional helpers are concurrently functioning as purveyors of care and control of marginalized individuals and groups in society. The extant social sciences literature has documented how care and control discourses and practices play an insidious and significant role in building the nation (Gibson, 2015). This Special Issue contributes to the critical and intersectional social science scholarship by addressing contradictions, negotiations, possibilities, and the im/possibilities of providing professional care within the broad nexus of nation-state belonging. Historically, professional helping has been intertwined with colonial and neo-colonial agendas, often serving to control and regulate marginalized populations. This can manifest in various ways, including the following:

- Benevolent charity: Charity operates as an extension of the state which needs to be interrogated as a site and technology of power and dominance in nation-building, rights-conferring, belonging, borders-patrolling, and homecare.
- Surveillance and control: Data collection and intervention strategies can be used to monitor and control marginalized communities, reinforcing social inequalities.
- Discourses of charity: Framing assistance as charity can obscure underlying power imbalances and reinforce the notion of “deservingness” among beneficiaries, thus perpetuating social divisions and undermining the agency of those they aim to assist.

As social work educators, this is a crucial area of inquiry because it challenges the often-unexamined power dynamics inherent in helping professions. The call’s emphasis on critical perspectives, including Indigenous, postcolonial, and intersectional approaches, requires a

commitment to addressing systemic issues and amplifying marginalized voices. This Special Issue encourages critical examination of these issues and a fostering of dialogue about more equitable and just approaches to professional helping. It is a timely conversation given the growing awareness of systemic inequalities within benevolent institutions, particularly regarding race, Indigeneity, and immigration. At the same time, we are in a paradoxical period where we are seeing creative and mass movements for social justice and decolonization where these issues are more readily acknowledged and challenged accompanied by a fervent disavowal of these same social injustices in all levels of society. Against a backdrop of ongoing global crises related to migration, displacement, and social unrest, the questions of how care is being provided and meted out against dominant and discursive conditions of belonging and citizenship are even more urgent.

This topic is significant for social work practitioners, researchers, and educators for several fundamental reasons. It forces social workers to confront the ways in which their practices, even when intended to help, can perpetuate inequalities and undermine the autonomy of the people they serve—which is in direct conflict with social work professional values and ethical obligations. Understanding how these power dynamics play out is crucial for social workers, who often serve as agents of the state and work within state policies with state resources, to avoid complicity in oppressive systems. At the same time, this topic is important given social work's complex history of creating and upholding discriminatory and paternalistic approaches. Recognizing this history and critically reflecting on the potential for current practices to replicate past harms is vital for the profession to move forward to identify areas for improvement in its practice. This might involve adopting more empowering approaches, challenging policies that perpetuate inequality, and advocating for systemic change. Finally, this topic is central to the profession's mission of promoting social justice through the provision of culturally responsive and effective services to people, whose experiences are shaped by the complex interplay of various social identities. By addressing the tensions between care and control, social workers can work towards creating a more equitable society where all individuals can thrive.

In alignment with our professional ethics and values, as well as the urgency in which we critically examine professional care, this Special Issue features complex works that contribute to reflective scholarship in several ways. The focus on narratives from diverse communities can provide valuable insights and perspectives that are often excluded from mainstream literature. The call's explicit interest in submissions from Black, Indigenous, racialized, sexually and gender diverse, and disabled individuals highlights a commitment to centering lived experience and challenging dominant narratives. Scholars, community builders, and activists answered this call and provided rich narratives that connect academic research with real-world experiences and practices. The inclusion of creative expressions like poetry and visual art offers powerful and nuanced ways of communicating lived experience and challenging dominant narratives. This approach recognizes that knowledge and understanding can be conveyed through various mediums, not just academic writing. Conversantly, these works center marginalized voices, explore the intersections of oppression, examine the role of nation-state belonging, and finally reimagine care through alternative models of care that prioritize community-led solutions, emphasize self-determination, and challenge existing power structures.

### **Highlights of this Issue**

The narratives submitted for this Special Issue offer compelling glimpses into these complex realities. Amanda R. Fraser's narrative highlights the importance of decolonizing personal and professional practices, emphasizing the need to center Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. Her narrative is a deeply personal account of her journey of decolonization. This suggests a focus on how individuals can dismantle internalized colonial beliefs and embrace their Indigenous identities. By emphasizing the need to center Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, Fraser argues for a fundamental shift in how we understand and approach various aspects of life, including professional helping. This could involve incorporating Indigenous perspectives into curriculum, policymaking, and service delivery models.

Delving into the complexities of subjectivities structured by nation-state identifiers, Brenda Polar Aliaga's research underscores the need for meaningful collaboration between Indigenous and immigrant communities, recognizing the limitations of simplistic notions of inter-Indigenous solidarity. By acknowledging the limitations of existing frameworks, Polar Aliaga highlights the need for nuanced and culturally sensitive approaches to collaboration between different Indigenous groups. This could involve addressing pre-existing biases and stereotypes, fostering meaningful dialogue and exchange, and recognizing the unique histories and experiences of each community.

Unmasking the hidden power dynamics even within progressive spaces, Ranjith Kulatilake's critical autoethnography exposes the inherent contradictions of settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. This critical autoethnography is a powerful exploration of the complexities of settler-colonialism in the context of neoliberalism. By examining his own experiences as a racialized and sexualized settler-immigrant, Kulatilake reveals how even progressive spaces and activist efforts can be implicated in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous Peoples. This analysis provides valuable insights into the ways in which capitalism and colonialism intersect to shape individual identities and social structures.

At the same time, Jess Kumordzie-Gyasensir and Scilla Owusu-Amoah's photo essay challenges the performativity of "belonging" and the ongoing surveillance of Black bodies both within and across national borders. By examining the surveillance of Black bodies and the constant questioning of their identity ("where are you really from?"), the authors highlight the ways in which systemic racism and colonialism continue to shape the experiences of Black people globally. This work contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and social impacts of racial discrimination and the importance of dismantling systems of oppression.

Finally, Saman Farah's narrative, focusing on the experiences of Afghan refugees, highlights the importance of cultural humility and ethical reflexivity when working with each unique marginalized community. By highlighting the power imbalances and ethical divides that often exist between international communities, Farah underscores the importance of listening to the voices of those affected, acknowledging their lived experiences, and working in solidarity with them towards meaningful and sustainable solutions.

These narratives, taken together, provide a diverse and compelling set of perspectives on the complex challenges and opportunities facing professional helping in the 21st century. They highlight the need for critical self-reflection, decolonization, and a commitment to social justice even when, or especially when, working in progressive and benevolent spaces of professional helping. We invite readers to engage with these critical reflections and contribute to the ongoing conversation about the ethics and politics of professional helping in a complex and interconnected world.

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### With Gratitude...

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We appreciate your commitment to *Reflections* and its authors!!

# Decolonizing Narratives: Dichotomy Dance to Indigenous Wholism

Amanda R. Fraser

**Abstract:** This is my personal and professional decolonizing narrative while navigating the duality of my blended Indigenous and European heritage. The process of resisting marginality within colonial thought while reclaiming my Cree identity has been a challenging dichotomy dance. A transformation occurred through decolonization and rediscovering the meaning of difference, inclusion, and equality in Creation. I have changed my narrative by stepping out of colonial thought and into indigeneity, wholism, and Indigegogy. By walking with my indigeneity, I have come to understand who I am in Creation and in relation to my kinships. The purpose of this paper is to take the reader through a chronological journey of decolonization that touches on (1) marginalization of colonial thought; (2) Indigenous wholism; (3) Indigegogy as a formal educational process; and (4) embracing kinships.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, social work, Indigegogy, decolonization, kinship

## Locating My Indigeneity

I identify as a Two Spirit Indigenous woman who is mixed-race with Plains Cree and European ancestry. I am a member of the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation. My indigeneity is grounded within wâhkôhtowin (kinships) and nêhiyawî-itâpîsîniwîwin (my Cree worldview; McLeod, 2007).

In this reflection paper, I honour Indigenous scholars and knowledge carriers from various nations who have contributed to my understanding and worldview. I am not creating a pan-Indigenous perspective; I am standing in my Cree identity while sharing various Indigenous perspectives who have informed my understanding along my learning journey. I am relationally accountable to those who have walked before me and I honour them by lifting up their name, nation, and knowledge.

Cree scholars Stan and Peggy Wilson (1998) from Opaskwayak Cree Nation discuss relational accountability in terms of All Our Relations by sharing that:

Indigenous peoples who follow traditional ways seem to provide the clearest glimpse into the depth of this accountability. In ceremony and in prayer they honor and give homage to all our relations. In various ways this term is used in most Indigenous cultures as a way of expressing one's place in the universe ... The [Cree] language thus provides a structure for a world view in which the individual is related to all living organisms. In addition to being related in a kinship manner to all living organisms, there is the added dimension of respect for and taking care of "all our relations." (p. 157)

The interrelatedness of all life—including humans, animals, plants, and minerals—is taught in many Indigenous cultures. Anishinaabe scholar Gus Hill from Obadjiwaan (Batchawana) First Nation (personal communication, 2021) told me that the water I drink from Mother Earth has

spirit that has the same spirit as the water that my ancestors once drank. The water that flowed through my ancestor's veins is the same water and spirit that I experience and that informs me. All Indigenous nations and ancestral relations are connected through water and land. Both water and land exist in our blood. To honour my ancestors is to apply this knowledge in a way that will allow me to be a good ancestor. Giving thanks, honouring, and offering my respect to All My Relations is being relationally accountable to my ancestors (Hill, personal communication, 2021).

In this article, I will take the reader through decolonizing colonial thought by stepping into indigeneity, wholism, Indigegogy, and kinships. I reflect on Indigenous teachings about water, spirit animals, wholism, kinships, and Creation. This paper is about transformation and not the specific teachings themselves. For further reading on these teachings, I encourage the reader to explore the work of Indigenous scholars, such as Raven Sinclair, Kathy Absolon, Michael Hart, Stan Wilson, Peggy Wilson, Shawn Wilson, Gus Hill, Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bell), Leanne Simpson, Neal McLeod, Freda Ahenakew, Lori Hill, and Blair Stonechild. These are the academic Elders that have paved the way for me to engage in the transformation I share in this paper.

### **Introduction**

Decolonization is a process that has occurred in my life through personal reflection; walking with wholism (Absolon, 2010, 2016; Hart, 1996; Hill, 2014, 2016, 2021; Nabigon, 2006); engaging Indigegogy (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014); and embracing kinships (McLeod, 2007). The dichotomy dance is a representation of my experience with colonial thought. Walking my path between my two cultures has been challenging due to historical, political, and sociocultural differences. The contrast in the values and intentions between my Cree and European ancestors has shaped the landscape of my socialization. I have found my identity within white colonial society to be alienating, oppressive, and stereotypical. By contrast, my identity within Indigenous culture has been inviting, inclusive, and empowering. The dichotomy continued from my youth into my professional experiences as an adult with Land Acknowledgements.

I have made a conscious decision to step out of the colonial thought and into wholism and Indigegogy. Wholism (later defined in section "Walking with Wholism") on the level of self (spirit, heart, body, and mind) has provided me with direction and meaning that is rooted within my Indigenous worldview. Indigegogy has informed my understanding of Indigenous knowing, doing, being, and seeing as pedagogy. Wholistic evaluations within Indigegogy have sparked insights through my spirit, nature, intellect, and character. Practicing self-reflexivity has deepened my understanding of my roles and responsibilities as a helper. I continue to follow the path of my heart, ancestors, Elders, and other Indigenous scholars who have strived to enhance wholistic wellness for the benefit of All of Creation. By embracing my kinships, I have come to understand the interrelatedness of All My Relations (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017). I continue to grow and center Indigenous knowledge, and wholistic practices, to uplift Indigenous wholistic wellness. My wholistic worldview continues to teach me to appreciate and respect the diversity within all walks of life (see Figure 1, p. 20). Transformation occurred through experiencing the liberation of engaging in wholistic Indigenous pedagogy and kinships.

## **Dichotomy Dance**

The dichotomy dance is the art of stepping back from the colonial dichotomy and stepping into the dance of indigeneity. This is a decolonizing dance of embracing indigenization while resisting Eurocentric worldviews, contexts, or constructs. The dichotomy dance is a movement towards Indigenous resurgence and a letting go of colonialism. This is a cultural healing journey due to the detrimental impacts of colonial systems of marginalization, domination, and discrimination. Reconnecting to indigeneity is a healing process from colonial harms. The historical and contemporary relationship between Indigenous and European people is complex. Understanding the waters between Indigenous and colonial worldviews and socialization has been a cultural healing journey for me. I envision my cultural healing journey as moving through the dichotomy dance towards wholistically and wholly being grounded in who I am as an Indigenous person.

In my youth, I learned to strategically position my social location to adapt to the expectations and paradigms of others. My experience has been a dichotomy dance through my Cree and European heritage. As a young person, I protected my Cree identity by insulating myself from dominant white culture. I learned to minimize my culture with family members who distanced themselves from their Cree heritage due to their internalized racism. I learned Cree culture with family members who honoured our traditional ways. The Caucasian side of my family politely ignored my Cree heritage. Learning to dance within the dichotomy of my two cultures has been difficult.

DiAngelo (2018) describes white culture as defensive by using reactionary justifications to maintain the acquired privilege of social status:

When we try to talk openly and honestly about race, white fragility quickly emerges as we are so often met with silence, defensiveness, argumentation, certitude, and other forms of pushback. These are not natural responses; they are social forces that prevent us from attaining the racial knowledge we need to engage more productively, and they function powerfully to hold the racial hierarchy in place. (p. 8)

The racial hierarchy is held in place by social constructionism; the social construct of having to choose a side is deliberately designed by white supremacy (Guess, 2006). The aim is to divide races through the dominant narrative of us versus them; I try to remember that people tend to believe, and act on, the validity of their worldviews and subjectivity. This can create a defensive posture that inhibits the ability to learn about, and be open to, alternate worldviews. The dichotomization of self-proclaimed superiority, and implied inferiority of others, is a detrimental social construct, especially for Indigenous people.

As an adult, I desperately sought to change the social location of my birth by pursuing higher education. This led me to study to achieve a Bachelor of Arts in Economics. In my elective psychology and social science courses, I realized that my experience and values were not represented in the colonial curriculum, content, or pedagogy.

A pivotal movement occurred one day while studying for an economics midterm in the library. I stumbled upon a book that described Two Spirit people. I don't remember what the book said; however, I do remember how I felt. For the first time, I could see myself depicted on the pages and I felt calm, clear, and understood. Until this point, I had not come across any guidance or representation in the literature of what it meant to be Two Spirit. My desire to further understand who I am grew, until I met with an Anishinaabe healer who identified as Two Spirit. She shared with me teachings and helped me to understand the gift of being Two Spirit. This was foreign to me because within colonial thought, I was taught that being Two Spirit was wrong. In the Indigenous worldview to be Two Spirit is a sacred honour with specific roles and responsibilities that can vary depending on the nation or region. I now understand that I walk with a male and female essence that provides me with an ability to understand and unite both sides. My connection to my spirit and self-awareness allows me to take up my place in Creation with my gifts and purpose. Being Two Spirit has helped me realize the significance of walking with diversity and appreciating the beauty of who I am in Creation. This pivotal period in my life led me away from the study of economics. I completed my degree and decided to give up capitalism and work for a social service organization.

I began working within an Indigenous-led organization that provided social support services to Indigenous people. I found working with Indigenous people to be fulfilling, and it provided me with a sense of belonging and purpose. I continued reconnecting to my traditional ways through Elders, knowledge keepers, and healers, who taught me how to be a good helper. I decided to pursue higher education with the intention of becoming an Indigenous wholistic practitioner.

During my Master of Social Work in the Indigenous Field of Study program at Wilfrid Laurier University, I began to further identify my experience in the stories shared by Indigenous academics. Through engaging Indigegogy (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014), I participated in sharing circles with professors, an Elder, Indigenous students, and non-Indigenous students. Some of my colleagues also identified as Two Spirit. Slowly, I began to reframe my conception of difference. I learned to decolonize by shifting my perspective of difference as interrelated, rather than dichotomous. Searching, with kindness, for unity between two sides allows for connections to be found as we are all equally a part of the human race (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). Unity will never be created through the colonial quest for assimilation of Indigenous people or any people. Imposing sameness of one's own values and beliefs onto others is a human rights violation. The effacement of assimilation does not "involve recognition of belonging or being full members of Canadian Society" (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017, p. 62). Unity does not include assimilation or sameness; unity is appreciating and uplifting uniqueness, diversity, and respecting all individuals' and populations' autonomy and sovereignty.

Learning to cope and survive within the control of the dominant white culture has taught me the importance of respecting and validating alternative narratives. According to Anishinaabe scholar Kathy Absolon (2016) from Flying Post First Nation, inclusion is inviting voices to share perspectives openly, which is empowering and promotes healing:

When I was invited to submit an article for this special edition I initially thought maybe they invited the wrong person. Who me? I realized this initial response is an impact of

being excluded and feeling alienated throughout my life ... Now what? Inclusion begins with voice in Creation experiencing and being. I know I belong. Inclusion simply begins with an invitation. (p. 44)

Kathy Absolon graciously shares her experience of exclusion that validates my personal and professional experience. Indigenous practitioners demonstrating strength through kind, honest sharing is inspiring (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017). Indigenous people who have been oppressed, marginalized, and reviled due to systemic racism are demonstrating resilience, and resurgence, by sharing stories, knowledge, and learning with one another.

The history of Canada is dominated and perpetuated by colonial stories and culture that has not included an Indigenous perspective. Contemporary Canadian education still does not include curriculum on Indigenous experiences of the Sixties Scoop; the Millennial Scoop (Sinclair, 2007); Residential Schools; and the loss of land, language, and cultural identity (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] of Canada, 2015). The story has only been partially told, and the curriculum in all educational institutions requires immediate revision to honour and include the truth from an Indigenous perspective (TRC of Canada, 2015).

As an Indigenous social work practitioner, speaking the truth from my heart and honouring my ancestors is a part of both my culture and wholistic practice. “As Elder Jim Dumont explained at the Traditional Knowledge Keepers Forum in June 2014, ‘in Ojibwe thinking, to speak the truth is to actually speak from the heart’” (TRC of Canada, 2015, p. 13). As a social worker, I need to be vulnerable and critically reflect upon both historical and contemporary practices. In the words of George Santayana (1905), “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (p. 284).

### **Dichotomy Dance & Land Acknowledgements**

The dichotomy dance has played a role in a myriad of ways in my professional life. More specifically, I would like to share my experience with Land Acknowledgments. While working in an Indigenous-led social services organization, I engaged with many executive directors, social workers, and coordinators from colonial organizations inquiring about Land Acknowledgements. Some asked if an Indigenous person from the organization would like to perform a Land Acknowledgement and others inquired about information on how they could go about performing a Land Acknowledgement. I felt conflicted about what to tell them, because rarely would Indigenous staff want to perform a Land Acknowledgement or take the call. Frequently, the inquiries were referred to a university website that provided a description of the territories named, and to recognize the original Indigenous people whose lands were invaded and stolen by Europeans.

I would like to share, in a kind, honest, and respectful way, why Indigenous people tend to not feel comfortable performing Land Acknowledgements. Land Acknowledgements can be uncomfortable for Indigenous people who experienced tremendous trauma, grief, and loss when their lands were stolen to form Canada. As I watch Land Acknowledgements occur, I often reflect upon how I would feel if individuals dispossessed my parents’ home and then years later

their relatives stood on the porch and stated that this was once my family's home. According to Blackstock (2009):

It is easier to believe some other society is perpetrating human rights abuses than to believe that your own country and society is—because that frames the accountability on a more personal level to do something or own the responsibility of remaining silent and still. (p. 34)

Social workers are ethically obligated to pursue social justice, so it is important to critically reflect on who Land Acknowledgements are truly serving. Are the acknowledgements a sign of respect for Indigenous people, or do they help colonial society decrease their guilt and grief about the trauma inflicted on Indigenous people to perpetuate white colonial privilege? Land Acknowledgements are for colonial society to process their guilt and grief of the harms done. Asking Indigenous people to do a Land Acknowledgement is avoidance of self-reflexive practice.

Indigenous people acknowledge the land in a different way. I acknowledge the land by offering tobacco and giving thanks to the spirit of Mother Earth. By laying down my tobacco, I am nurturing a reciprocal relationship. Mother Earth provides me with my source of life and ancestral intelligence. The respect my Indigenous ancestors showed Mother Earth exists in the wholistic health and beauty of Creation. By honoring and respecting the balance between myself and my kinships, I am maintaining balance in my relationships. All aspects of Creation are my relatives. Nurturing my kinships, as Mother Earth has nurtured me, has brought about my sense of belonging and desire to live a good life (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, 2018). The sacred connections I experience with Mother Earth, Father Sky, Grandfather Sun, and Grandmother Moon are timeless. What is sacred can never truly be quantified, only qualified within the Great Mystery of the heart. Elders have shared with me that “the Creator has hidden the answers in the last place you will look, your heart” and “the longest journey you will ever take is from your head to your heart.” What is sacred is connected to the wholistic aspects of self: spirit, heart, body, and the mind.

From a colonial worldview, a Land Acknowledgment is often treated as a politically correct checkbox that demonstrates an acknowledgement of unceded Indigenous territories. The concept of land ownership is rooted in a colonial paternalistic and capitalistic worldview. An honest Land Acknowledgement would involve giving land back to Indigenous people. The neoliberal philosophy of extraction and exploitation does not value the Indigenous wholistic approach of relationality and cooperation. Restoring balance between colonial and Indigenous relationships requires a wholistic paradigm of inclusion and integrity. The detrimental impact of colonization on Indigenous people has caused me to experience the dichotomy dance. My work is to step back from the colonial dichotomy and step into the empowering dance of being in a meaningful, wholistic, and reciprocal relationship with myself, Mother Earth, and All My Relations.

## **Walking with Wholism**

According to Gus Hill (2021), a widely used illustration of wholism is represented through the Medicine Wheel (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). The Medicine Wheel is an Indigenous construct that guides understanding of who we are and where we are going (Absolon, 2010, 2016; Hill, 2014, 2016, 2021; Nabigon, 2006). The Medicine Wheel is a means of sharing knowledge and concepts that align with the Indigenous worldview. The Four Directions hold meaning and understanding to assist with self-exploration and self-reflection (please refer to “Engaging Indigegogy”). The cycle of life teachings described by Nabigon (2006) helps us understand that we begin as a baby in the East, youth in the South, adult in the West, and Elder in the North. At the end of our final season of life as Elders, we again enter the spirit world. As Nabigon (2006) stated, “The spiritual interpretation of the native worldview is divided into the Four Sacred Directions. These Directions are used to search for harmony and peace from within” (p. 5). Understanding the meaning of the Four Directions, East, South, West, and North, has helped me become grounded within myself while in relationship with others (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20).

The wholistic approach is based on the understanding that all aspects of the self (spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental) need to be balanced and healthy to maintain wholistic wellness (Hart, 1996; Hill, 2016). Indigenous scholars are striving to uplift Indigenous voices that declare the importance of wholism and traditional healing practices. Some Indigenous knowledge has been lost as planned by colonial policies of cultural genocide. Indigenous resurgence is Indigenous people reclaiming our heritage by supporting one another through cultural continuity and a rekindling of traditional teachings. The Indigenous worldview focuses on the wholistic wellness of all future generations.

As I walk along my cultural healing journey, I continually engage in a relationship with the Four Directions of Mother Earth (East, South, West, and North) and four aspects of myself. My journey of continuing to reach for my Indigeneity led me towards Indigenized higher education where I learned to engage Indigegogy.

## **Engaging Indigegogy**

The term *Indigegogy* was coined by Cree Elder Stan Wilson and centers Indigenous ways of seeing, being, knowing, and doing within a formal educational process (Wilfrid Laurier University, n.d.). Indigegogy is a placeholder word that describes Indigenous wholistic teaching and learning approaches until a word can be found in a traditional Indigenous language that reflects a collective cultural understanding (Absolon & Dias, 2020; Wilson & Schellhammer, 2021). According to Wilson and Schellhammer (2021), a Cree word for Indigegogy is Kiskinohamatowin:

[This] means “teaching and learning from each other.” It is implied in that concept that not “the teacher” is the center dishing out knowledge. The concept is interactive, each participant is able to share knowledge and initiate discussion rather than only the teacher having and disseminating knowledge. (p. 50)

I experientially learned Indigegogy in circle with Gus Hill at Wilfrid Laurier University in the Master of Social Work program in the Indigenous Field of Study. An aspect of Indigegogy that I internalized was wholistic evaluation. I learned to reflect on my spirit, nature, intellect, and character as a means of reflexive practice. As wholism is interrelated with Indigenous pedagogy, according to Hill and Wilkinson (2014), “one of the goals of Indigegogy is to teach students how to just be at peace, be calm, be quiet in the heart and the mind, and be open and receptive” (p. 187). Meaning from observing the natural world has brought depth to my inner and relational awareness that has strengthened and shaped my understanding of professional practice. I will use my journey with my spirit helper, the buffalo, and my relationship with water to demonstrate my engagement with wholistic evaluation.

## **Spirit**

Stepping into Indigegogy has helped me to understand how spirit can create vision and purpose for my wholistic practice (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). My spirit helper, the buffalo, assists me to reflect on my relationship with Creation. As my family is Plains Cree (Nehiyawak), the buffalo has been my ancestors’ source of survival for thousands of years pre-colonization. I have been taught by Elders that the buffalo is sacred and selfless as they give every part of themselves to help our people and to nourish spirits, hearts, bodies, and minds. When my ancestors used the buffalo, no part would go unused; the buffalo giving its life to feed, clothe, and sustain life was deeply respected as every part of the buffalo had a purpose. Similarly, to connect to identity, sense of self, and belonging, an Indigenous person must sacrifice personal gain by giving all that one is able and gaining only the essentials (Hill, 2021). The buffalo teaches me that being a helper means the spirit of giving is receiving without having expectations of service users.

By entering the space of my heart, I am able to learn from my spirit helper and find compassion beyond what I thought possible. My helper guides me to find the courage to be a compassionate helper in the presence of fear and hardship. An Elder once shared with me that the buffalo will plant their feet in a snowstorm and shift their shoulder into the wind. The buffalo teaches perseverance as they stand strong and shoulder the difficulties individually and collectively as a herd. The buffalo teaches me how to be a good helper through reciprocity, perseverance, and unity. Being present with Creation and spirit reminds me that I am always in community when in Creation and with myself; this brings peace and keeps me grounded as a helper.

## **Nature**

My nature is connected to how I affect, and am affected, by those around me. This can be people, plants, animals, or any element of Creation. Hill and Wilkinson (2014) stated, “We have a general [effect] on others and our involvement in their lives affects the nature of their lives—an [effect] which we hope to be both positive and nurturing” (p. 186). In the natural world, water extends beyond myself to my service users, colleagues, and All of Creation; I need to acknowledge how I affect those I interact with daily as a helper. Relational accountability is described by Wilson (2001) as “answering to all your relations ... fulfilling your relationships with the world around you” (p. 177). I fulfill my relationship with Creation by being a helper who listens to others to be aware of how my actions and behaviours have impacted them. A

teacher once shared with me a sentiment commonly attributed to Maya Angelou that people will not necessarily remember the words I say, but they will remember how I made them feel. It is important that I am aware of what I am sharing within a systemic, historical, and contemporary context in my practice. Education is vital in not perpetuating further harm by unknowingly offending, triggering, or marginalizing service users, colleagues, and community members. The specific needs and cultural worldviews can vary from one Indigenous nation to another. Relational accountability is maintaining relationships with respect, curiosity, and open-mindedness to ask others about their needs, rather than assuming (Wilson, 2001; Wilson & Wilson, 1998).

## **Intellect**

My intellect rationalizes and articulates the presence and meaning of spirit (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). My spirit is expressed through my values, beliefs, and the meaning I derive through my mind. Creation can be meaningful or meaningless, depending on the choice of the individual and the collective. I choose to make meaning from the world around me through the essence of my spirit. This helps me to be a helper as I assist others to understand traditional knowledge, wisdom, and the meaning that has been shared with me.

The intellect is the process by which Indigenous knowledge has been passed down for generations for thousands of years through the oral tradition. Indigenous communities benefit from this traditional process as younger generations have relied on their culture and community for positive socialization. As Gus Hill has told me, not sharing sacred knowledge and wholistic practices that we carry within our bundles may result in illness (personal communication, 2021). Succeeding generations will only be able to learn if those before them are able and willing to share. Listening to the teachings of one Elder is listening to the collective voices of the many Elders who helped shape their conceptual understanding of what constitutes Indigenous knowing, doing, and being (McLeod, 2007).

Indigenous knowledge has been passed down through the oral tradition, as wisdom is passed down through the relational tradition. Through Indigegogy, I have learned how my role as a helper can assist others to form a relationship with water and Creation. In a personal communication in 2021, Anishinaabe Elder Banakonda Kennedy-Kish (Bell) shared with me that water carries the wisdom and the collective memory of our ancestors. She further explained that in a Water Ceremony, the water can help us remember the sacred teachings of our ancestors. I now carry the understanding that the wisdom of our ancestors is not lost. Our ancestral wisdom has been recorded within the memory of water; being in tune with water is being in contact with the ancestral wisdom within my inner and outer nature. The water is a healer, helper, and Ceremony. My ancestors' cultural identity and connection to the land and All of Creation is remembered within the water. The water I drink today may very well be the same water my ancestors drank thousands of years ago (Kennedy-Kish (Bell), personal communication, 2021).

## **Character**

When considering water as a life-giver and memory, I reflect on my character and impact on Creation. My character is my outer representation of myself; it is the integrity that I carry, or do not carry, through my spirit's physical essence (Hill & Wilkinson, 2014). Each time I touch water my presence and spirit will be remembered. Gus Hill (personal communication, 2021) discussed that when an ancestor had stepped into a pond that their footprint forever changed the land and water. He further stated that each time we step in nature, it will never be the same again after our presence has been there. Our collective spirit, emotion, body, and mind is not separate from the water; it is interconnected and imprints upon all life.

Relational accountability is walking with integrity while interacting with every aspect of Creation. While I intentionally walk with the practice of relational accountability, I reflect on the quality of my character. My character is reliant on my self-care, balance, and the values I practice within the four aspects of myself. When my spirit, heart, body, and mind are working in alignment, I feel connected and whole. Balance and wholeness are a form of self-care; the more balanced I am within the four aspects of the self, the deeper the connection I feel to my nature and All of Creation. The greater connection I feel to the land and people, the greater motivation I feel to engage in transformative and community-based practice as a helper. Relational accountability is understanding that I am in an interdependent relationship with Creation. There is a giving and receiving, or an ebb and flow, in order to maintain this reciprocal relationship. Realizing that I am a part of a vast interconnected system of life increases my awareness and sense of responsibility. Each individual aspect of the system needs to be healthy for all to thrive and flourish.

By walking with Indigegogy, I have learned that Mother Earth provides a mirror for self-reflection that allows for deeper connection to the self. When I feel my feelings and observe the interconnection of land, water, sky, trees, birds, and an ecosystem at play, I experience a sense of inclusivity that is all-encompassing and does not comprehend separation. The beauty and wonder that resides in Creation is within each person and all of humanity. What raises us up into our humanity is realizing we are all in this together.

## **Embracing Kinships**

Wâhkôhtowin is “a Cree word meaning kinship or the state of being related ... a fundamental concept for understanding Indigenous culture and traditional beliefs” (Ermine, 2001, as cited in O'Reilly-Sanlon et al., 2004, p. 30). This includes relationships that may or may not be blood-related, as All of Creation is interrelated and follows laws in the natural world. Wâhkôhtowin is central to Cree natural law and teaches how to maintain positive and balanced relationships with all relations. Wâhkôhtowin teaches to respect nature by knowing we are a part of nature (Johnson, 2020; Stonechild, 2016). There is humility in knowing that in the sacred circle of life no individual is above or below anyone else because All of Creation has spirit and is equal in Creation (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20).

The sacredness of my relationship with the spirit of the land and all of life is strong and sacred. All of Creation is sacred through a wholistic worldview. Cree-Métis scholar Vanessa Ambtman-Smith (personal communication, 2022) shared Indigenous knowledge that was passed on to her through the oral tradition:

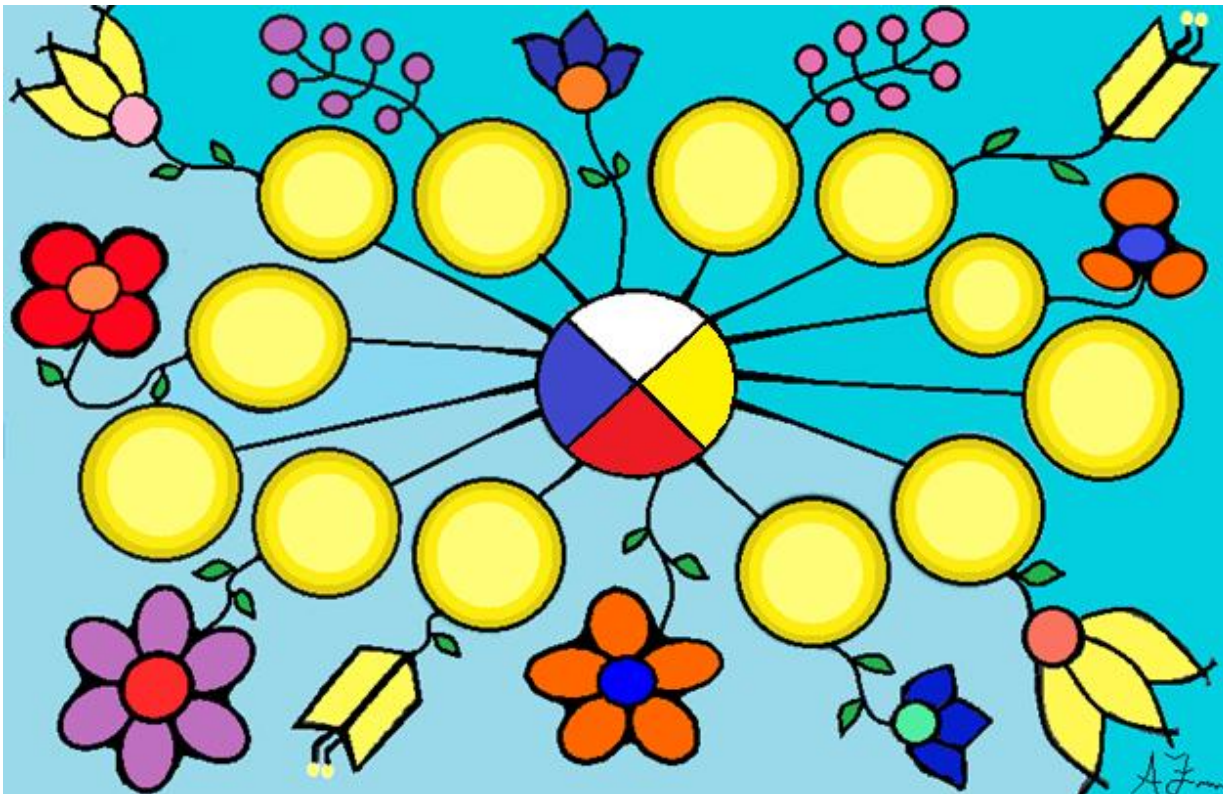
When we stand on our land, under any condition—even in opposition of those that hold the “power”—we need to remember that it is we who stand in that power. Our connection to ancestral lands and territories is sacred and cannot be undone. When you acknowledge your place in this world you are reigniting that connection to ancient knowledge and wisdom embedded in relationships and kinships within your being, with family, community, the ancestors, the land, the cosmos, and All of Creation. Recognize and nurture this sacred power and stand your ground.

I have learned to embrace my place within Creation as all aspects of my being are in a reciprocal relationship with All My Relations (Figure 1, p. 20). By sharing and embracing my spirit, heart, body, and mind, I feel the power of belonging as my kinships are rooted in my identity and worldview. I am reclaiming my identity that resides within the ancestral knowledge and wisdom of both my inner and outer being. I feel balanced when connected to myself, friends, family, community, nation, and Creation. Connecting to my kinships and the land strengthens and revitalizes my connection to spirit.

Being in relationship with land and Creation teaches humanity how to be in good relations with one another. Creation consists of diversity and uniqueness all around us. Having respect and appreciation for diversity only brings prosperity and encouragement for life and spirit to express itself fully; Creation is a Web of Diversity (Figure 1, p. 20). How we choose to engage in relationships as human beings is interdependent with our collective values and intentions. If we choose to value autonomy and sovereignty collectively, we are collectively appreciating diversity. People expressing their individuality allows them to be the truth of who they are; this is liberation.

**Figure 1**

*Creation is a Web of Diversity*



My art piece in Figure 1, “Creation is a Web of Diversity,” represents All My Relations standing together in a web of unity, harmony, and balance. In the Cree worldview there is humility in knowing who we are in Creation. Understanding indigeneity is connected to relationality and knowing that we are a “strand in the web of life” (Lee, 2012, para. 35) and in an interconnected relationship with one another. The medicine wheel in the center represents Asian (yellow), Indigenous (red), African (blue), and Caucasian (white), and each of the four quadrants are equivalent in size to denote that in Creation we are both unique and equal on individual and collective levels. The two shades of blue in the art piece’s background signify balance and healing of the dichotomy, as we are all made up of water and the ability to shift our perceptions. Every human being has the ability to create change and transform. Creation is always in motion, and we are Creation. The circles surrounding the Medicine Wheel represent healing circles that are forming today in communities striving to reverse the harm done. The yellow healing circles are drawn to emulate the sun. The sun rises each morning in the Eastern Direction which represents new beginnings by bringing light and growth to All of Creation. The wavy vines and floral designs signify Indigenous resurgence, revitalization, and wellbeing. Indigenous people are reclaiming our ancestral knowledge and wisdom, and a movement of renewal is occurring. I enjoy being part of this movement and will continue to facilitate healing circles grounded in wholism and Indigenous knowledge. The wholistic approach is not the only way for people to heal; however, I do believe it holds significant value for those on a path of reclaiming their cultural identity and wholistic wellness.

## **Discussion**

My experience of the dichotomy dance led me to wholism and Indigegogy that resulted in some recommendations for social work education. Through traditional teachings, I have received great appreciation and respect for my Two Spirit and mixed-raced identity. Being Two Spirit is honoured and revered, with purposeful roles and responsibilities in community. Being mixed-race is embraced as all ethnicities are equal in Creation (please refer to Figure 1, p. 20). Within the white supremacist construct of sexism and racism, I have experienced dichotomization within my sense of self. My wholistic transformation through my Indigenous culture and indigenized education has helped unify my identity. Experiences of marginalization and othering are very real for many people who enter colonial education. My positionality is unique to me; however, there are diverse positionalities, and each deserves a safe space to unfold, be expressed, be journeyed through, with support and full acknowledgement of the challenges that such journeying represents. Indigegogy has helped me to develop relational awareness through wholistic self-evaluation and relating to other Indigenous academics and colleagues. Wholistic practices have guided my understanding that I have always been whole within All My Relations, despite the hierarchical division of colonial social constructionism. This process is important for all practitioners in social work, regardless of their positionality. Such transformative journeys clear a path for authentic, relational, wellness-based engagement with service users. I have been able to experience transformation due to the safe spaces provided by my Indigenous community, Elders, Indigenous healers, knowledge keepers, Indigegogy, and the Indigenous Field of Study. I call for supportive spaces to be nurtured across schools of social work in Canada.

My transformative journey has sparked insights and recommendations for social work education on the value of wholism and Indigegogy. Non-Indigenous and Indigenous students can greatly benefit from understanding wholism and Indigegogy. Indigenized social work practice is not a central focus for all social workers; it is critical for non-Indigenous social work students to engage in a wholistic self-evaluation to develop the capacity to bear witness to other people's vulnerability and to appreciate diversity. A student acknowledging their vulnerability through wholistic self-reflexive practice, within safe spaces, with the wholistic support of faculty and staff, increases their capacity to provide wholistic support and empathy to service users. Training non-Indigenous social workers how to engage in a relationally accountable and ethical way that is about wellness and not surveillance or social control is crucial. The pedagogy of colonial social work does not reflect the socialization and worldview of Indigenous people, and with the increasing diversity of social work students, it is fair to say that colonial social work pedagogy is antiquated. The foundational knowledge of Indigegogy and wholism is often otherized or excluded from the curriculum. For Indigenous students, colonial social work education needs to decolonize to allow for the exploration of indigeneity and to build knowledgeable Indigenous social work practitioners. To step out of colonial dichotomy and into appreciating diversity requires safe spaces. I call for the field of social work to ask and answer the following question: In what ways can safe spaces be created to allow for transformation to occur within the academy? Social work needs to make safe spaces for people to explore positionality to ensure transformative processes can transpire. Values of love, non-judgment, open-mindedness, respect, and compassion need to be upheld for members of vulnerable populations to feel safe to engage in self-exploration and transformation. As social workers we

all have a responsibility to ensure safe spaces are available. Balancing the relations between Indigenous and colonial social work education must begin with respect, equality, and inclusivity.

### Conclusion

My journey of decolonization has included the dichotomy dance, the dilemma of Land Acknowledgements, wholism, Indigegogy, and kinships. I have found a way to decolonize and overcome the challenges of experiencing the colonial construct of dichotomization. The dichotomy dance is a healing dance of stepping back from the colonial dichotomy and stepping into the dance of indigeneity. While walking with Indigegogy, I learned to center my indigeneity in higher education. I learned to appreciate and respect wholistic self-reflection and self-reflexivity in practice. By engaging in wholistic evaluation with my spirit, nature, intellect, and character, I have fostered a deeper self-awareness as a wholistic practitioner. As Indigenous scholars before me have demonstrated, the more that I can release oppression and stand within my identity, the more I will be able to show others how to do the same. Sharing wholism continuously balances and harmonizes the four aspects of myself. Embracing kinships has helped me to understand that I am in a reciprocal relation with All My Relations. The interrelatedness of all of life is the foundation of “Creation is a Web of Diversity” (Figure 1, p. 20). Understanding that as human beings we are a part of Creation is knowing the value of our humanity. The process of decolonization has had a profound impact on my well-being, identity, and, ultimately, my story.

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# Steps Towards a Relationship between Quechua/Kishwa People and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit People

Brenda Polar Aliaga

**Abstract:** This article examines how Quechua immigrants can collaborate with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations. It analyses their understanding of these fellow Indigenous groups; developing such a collaborative process first requires grasping the pre-existing beliefs the Quechua immigrants living in these lands now known as Canada have of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. The article focuses on an interview with one of the 17 Quechua and Kishwa participants I recruited for my doctoral research. Her interview along with my review of related literature suggest that racialized immigrants, such as Quechua immigrants from South America, often have limited access to information about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures, their struggles, and their resilience, which hinders potential collaboration. At the same time, education is not sufficient to address colonization. A critical analysis of settlers' complicity in colonization is also necessary.

**Keywords:** Quechua, immigrants, First Nations, Métis, Inuit, allyship

## Background

I began to conduct this research in 2019 as part of my doctoral dissertation at York University. I used a snowball technique to locate participants by contacting Latin American and Abya Ayala agencies to recruit participants and key informants who were Latin American living in Tkaronto. The participants I recruited were 18 or older and identified as Quechua<sup>1</sup>/Kishwa<sup>2</sup> or Mestizx (with Quechua roots and European or other roots). They spoke Spanish and have been living in these lands called Canada<sup>3</sup> for a minimum of five years. Before migrating, they lived in their homelands or other countries where Quechua and Kishwa people originate from. I used a theoretical framework based on multiple Indigenous worldviews—however, I focus on Quechua worldviews, and I also draw upon Indigenous worldviews from North America, specifically the “Two Row Wampum Belt.” I chose to use the Two Row Wampum Belt teaching from the Haudenosaunee, a First Nation in Canada and the US, because it teaches about the relations between settlers and Indigenous Peoples (Green, 2016). I also drew upon the Quechua prophecy of the “Eagle and Condor” as it discusses the coming together of Indigenous peoples from the South and the North (Noriega Rivera, 2010). This research also follows Indigenous scholars Tuck and Mackenzie’s (2014) research on “place” and its importance in research. I use Tuck and Mackenzie’s critical place and land inquiry model to interrogate Quechuas’ connection with land and place in Canada. As I speak of Indigenous worldviews from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit and Quechua philosophies, I recognize that as an outsider to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and an immigrant, the knowledge that I provide is incomplete. Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Quechua immigrants are Indigenous Peoples who are originally from Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and, to a lesser degree, Colombia and Argentina (Ministry of Culture, n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Kishwa immigrants are Indigenous people originally sharing roots with Quechua people and that are coming from Ecuador and, to a lesser degree, Peru (Benítez Bastidas et al., 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Although I will later only use the term Canada, I am referring to the lands now known as Canada.

worldviews from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit philosophies come from a review of the literature. Similarly, although I have a mixed heritage, I recognize that part of me is also an outsider to the Quechua culture, as I have not lived in Peru for years. I use a methodology based on Kovach's (2009) and Wilson's (2008) conceptualizations.

## **Introduction**

Understanding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, their cultures, and the process of colonization is one of the first steps towards engaging in anti-colonization projects. This paper is part of a more extensive study that aims to investigate how Quechua/Kishwa immigrants can collaborate with Indigenous people in Canada in anti-colonization practices. In this article, I will address the first of several related questions: What are Quechua people's views and understandings of the Indigeneity of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples? In the more extensive study, I also address three further questions: 1) What are Quechua/Kishwa people's relationships with these communities? 2) How can these understandings and relations facilitate their collaboration on anti-colonization projects with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people? 3) How can their Indigeneity be used as a bridge to facilitate their potential collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in these lands, so-called Canada?

To address these questions, I held discussion sessions with 16 Quechua and one Kishwa immigrant living in Toronto, "Sonia" being one of the Quechua participants. The following summary represents solely Sonia's understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and how it has shaped her relations with Indigenous people and their lands. Sonia focused on the role of the Canadian government in the trauma caused by settler colonialism, discrimination towards Indigenous people, and the role of stereotypes in shaping immigrants' knowledge. As Sonia and I discussed her understanding of Indigenous people, we questioned how she acquired this knowledge and how these understandings shaped her views of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

To begin, I will contextualize our discussion within the nation-state of Canada and how Indigenous people are treated here.

## **Context**

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations are Indigenous people from Canada. They experience settler colonialism, which involves a vast number of colonizers taking over their lands and resources (Wolfe, 2006). The colonizers' access to land has depended on keeping the number of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations as small as possible so that they cannot fight back and reclaim their lands (Wolfe, 2006). Colonizers have attempted to eliminate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations through genocide and strategies of cultural assimilation; Tuck and Yang (2012) call attention to the expropriation of Indigenous people from their lands as a driving force in settler colonization. As well, settler colonial racism has been institutionalized within child welfare, legal justice, education, health care, social welfare, and other systems that operate in subtle ways (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Dion et al., 2010; Kuokkanen, 2015).

Settler colonization is the root cause of oppression of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations. Tuck and Yang (2012) analyze the way settler colonization operates in North America (excluding Mexico). For example, the reproduction of Indigenous people meant more resistance to land appropriation, which threatened the wealth of white settlers. Therefore, the colonial government introduced very “restrictive racial classification” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388) systems that limited who was legally recognized as Indigenous. Settler colonization relied on European domination of the land and people. Although there were places where Indigenous sovereignty was recognized, Europeans held the “ultimate dominion over the territory” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 391) by invoking the designation of *terra nullius* (Wolfe, 2006). The doctrine of *terra nullius* was used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous lands and is based on the principle that if “there’s no people here, it’s ours” (Watson, 2014, p. 509). Although international human rights law has “condemned doctrines of superiority” (Assembly of First Nations, 2018, p. 1), they are still part of Canadian law. Doctrines of superiority/discovery and *terra nullius* have been used to abolish Indigenous rights throughout history (Assembly of First Nations, 2018). These doctrines continue to be used in judicial rulings: “As recently as 2012, the BC Court of Appeal not only validated such destructive acts, but also attempted to extinguish Indigenous rights through judicial ruling” (Assembly of First Nations, 2018, p. 3).

Beliefs that Canada is part of a new nation built by settlers, that dominant settlers are peacemakers, and that Canada helps Indigenous Peoples have served to erase the injustices and atrocities against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations committed during the ongoing colonial project. According to Coulthard (2014), settler colonization has dominated First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations through a process of colonizing of the mind. Settler colonization has relied on mechanisms that make youth believe in the benefits of capitalism and their inferiority to white people, distance themselves from their Indigenous roots, and transform their minds so they can no longer fit into their communities (Coulthard, 2014). Educational institutions such as residential schools and child welfare have tried to destroy Indigenous cultures: One of the first residential schools was the Mohawk Institute, established in 1828 in Brantford, Ontario, on the Six Nations Reserve, and the last one was in Saskatchewan—the Muscowequan Residential School, closed in 1996 (Lavalle & Menzies, 2014). These educational systems reinforced harsh punishments and torture with the purpose of destroying Indigenous cultures and often led to the deaths of Indigenous children (Lavalle & Menzies, 2014). The Sixties Scoop also aimed to destroy Indigenous families and their cultures: During the 1960s, state-run child welfare services took Indigenous children from their homes without their families’ consent, which led to family and community breakdown (Lavalle & Menzies, 2014). Since children were placed in non-Indigenous families, it became more difficult to pass on Indigenous teachings to the newer generations. For these reasons, residential schools are considered a form of genocide (Lavalle & Menzies, 2014).

All these tactics of colonization aim to cause a divide within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures that benefit the hegemony of white national<sup>4</sup> settlers (Coulthard, 2014). The constant

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<sup>4</sup> As Thobani (2007) explains, the *national identity* refers to a type of citizen of European descent that is Christian and is considered “exalted above all others ... the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores” (p. 3). Compared to these standards imposed by the national identity, the values and beliefs of Indigenous people are viewed as inferior to those of “nationals” (Thobani, 2007, p. 87).

attacks on the Indigenous identities of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations have forced some Indigenous people to turn to a “politics of recognition” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 3) to re-establish the value of their identities. Under recognition politics, the state acknowledges Indigenous Peoples and their histories based on their own terms (Coulthard, 2014).

In Coulthard’s (2014) view, a politics of recognition selectively recognizes certain Indigenous people’s histories and supports Indigenous struggles against colonization. Recognizing Indigenous Peoples’ histories and current situations shows an effort on the part of settlers to “reconcile” with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations. However, these actions help support settler disputes with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations over their rights by painting an image of acceptance and collaboration (Coulthard, 2014). Under a politics of recognition, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations end up existing to please and be recognized by others, particularly national settlers, living under terms imposed by settlers (Coulthard, 2014). In this way it reinforces the Canadian nation-state.

In the section below, I will elaborate on my positionality and personal reflections as relevant to this study. I originally come from Peru and am part of what we call the Chola population, one of the largest populations in Peru. The term Chola has various meanings, but I use Chola to refer to people with mixed Indigenous and European heritage. Within Peru, there is much stigma attached to having an Indigenous heritage. Such attitudes have led my family to distance themselves from their Indigenous heritage and embrace their mixed heritage only. I choose the term Chola instead of “Indigenous Latinx” because this term acknowledges my mixed race. In the past, it has been used as a derogatory term to refer to someone’s Indigenous mixed heritage, but it is being reclaimed nowadays, which I endorse and practice.

I am personally invested in learning more about the relations between Quechua and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada. I have a mixed family: My daughters have First Nations heritage, and I witness the barriers they face in accessing proper education and health services. Also, living in Thunder Bay allowed me to work extensively with Indigenous people on the reserves supporting Indigenous health programs. Through these job opportunities, I learned more about Indigenous cultures and resiliency and the impacts of settler colonialism on their communities. I hold an outsider position to their experiences, striving to learn but fully aware that I will never capture their experiences or fully understand their cultures. I hope to learn how Quechua immigrants, including myself, can form respectful and symbiotic relationships with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations. These relations would involve giving back to these cultures and lands based on their demands while supporting the growth of Quechua identities after migration to Canada.

As I share fragments of my conversation with Quechua participant Sonia, I remind myself of my insider/outsider positions based on who I am and how these positions inform my views and interactions with the participant. I am aware of my privileged position as a student, which encourages learning about Indigenous cultures. I recognize that many immigrants are not aware of this information because they may not speak the language, the information may be challenging to find, or they do not know about its existence. At the time of the discussions, Sonia attempted to understand some of these topics for the first time, and I believe her

comments reflect this process. At the same time, I am aware that as a racialized immigrant with mixed Quechua heritage, I may be trying to excuse Quechua immigrants for not knowing this information. I am aware that people may just not want to learn. It is essential to recognize that colonization also benefits racialized immigrants; therefore, immigrants may support colonialization because of its benefits. In order to disrupt colonization, immigrants may need to embark on a journey of self-reflection and awareness that could lead them/me to question their/my understanding and views on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Since these processes ask immigrants to question their/my own values and complicity in colonization as they are/I am asked to engage in collaboration, these discussions are conflicting and unsettling. These are some of the complications that participants and I tried to discuss when we engaged in conversation.

I met Sonia in Tkaronto, where she now lives, and she graciously agreed to participate in my study. She was so kind as to meet with me after her work shift. Sonia speaks Spanish and English. She does not speak Quechua because her parents were not encouraged to learn this language as it was used as a reason to discriminate against Quechuas. Sonia was born in Ayacucho, a city in the Peruvian Andes populated mainly by Indigenous people. Her formative years were marked by a civil war in Peru. Her town was greatly affected by the shining path, an extremist Communist party described as “an organization subversive and terrorist, which in May 1980 triggered an armed conflict against the State and Peruvian society” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru, 2004, p. 13). It punished or killed anyone who protested against their actions (Degregori, 1991). Likewise, in a parallel fashion, the military took cruel measures against any public supporters of this extremist group (Degregori, 1991; Mantilla Falcón, 2006) or people they assumed were supporters. Living in Peru during the shining path period was a challenging experience, and it is very likely that after experiencing the harshness of this civil war, people would be deeply affected. I also lived in Peru during these times, and I recall people wanting to migrate to other countries due to the crisis. Because of the violence that the shining path members (many who were Indigenous from the Andes) were exercising against other civilians, many people in Peru were again those that had more Indigenous heritage and came from the Andes. The shining path had its hub in Ayacucho, therefore there was a strong negative stereotype that Indigenous people from Ayacucho were terrorists. I thought about how living in Ayacucho during these times and having Indigenous heritage may have affected one’s connection with their Indigenous roots. I did not ask Sonia if this case applied to her because there was so much trauma involved with the years of the shining path, particularly for people from Ayacucho. Another aspect of the time period that may have affected Sonia is the financial crisis that occurred in Peru when the shining path was at its peak; this may have influenced her adjustment to life in Canada after she migrated.

Throughout our conversations, Sonia shared that moving from a young age helped her in general to survive and adapt despite any adversities she faced. As a child, Sonia moved from her family home in a small town to Lima, the capital city, to pursue her studies, causing her much suffering. She accepted that moving to a larger city meant adapting to that way of living and leaving her former lifestyle in her home behind. Sonia similarly left Peru and migrated to Canada to seek more employment and educational opportunities.

Sonia no longer practices her traditions but maintains strong ties to her town. Sonia does not feel the need to participate in Indigenous Quechua groups directly but helps Quechua people in Peru. She has adapted to the way of life in Canada. Sonia accepts her Indigenous heritage and feels proud, yet she prefers to identify as Peruvian or Latin American. It is outside the scope of this paper to understand why people change the way they may identify with their Indigenous heritage or no longer state their Indigenous identity. However, it is worth mentioning because it shows how people with Indigenous roots may begin to relate differently after living in Canada for some time. Their ties with their Indigeneity may shift, affecting how they relate to other Indigenous groups. The relations that people have with their Indigeneity are complex and constantly shifting.

Regarding her contact with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations, Sonia has not had many relations and admits that her understanding of their cultures is limited. At times, she shared that she was unsure what to respond when asked about her views on these Nations and issues that they are facing. Sonia has had more contact with Indigenous people through her work in the medical sector, but only professionally. She saw Indigenous people struggling with mental and physical health issues and was able to connect these struggles to trauma and colonization. She saw how Indigenous people in Canada are judged for the effects of trauma in their communities without analyzing why that is the case. Sonia sees the need for immigrants to collaborate with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples but is unsure how because she does not know many. This was also one of the first times that Sonia was thinking about collaborating in anti-colonial projects with Indigenous people from Canada.

This article discusses Sonia's knowledge of Indigenous populations, ranging from comprehensive to very limited, and her views on the challenges they are facing. Sonia learned what she knows about Indigenous people and settler colonialism through her own experiences with colonization, stereotypes she's heard, and the information shared in our conversations. She compared settler colonialism to colonization in her homelands to better understand settler colonialism. Based on these various ways of knowing, Sonia discussed her understanding of settler colonialism.

### **Views on Settler Colonialism**

Sonia shared that she has a limited understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, settler colonialism, and how it impacts these communities. In our conversation, I felt the pressure to provide her with information and believed I was not prepared enough for this task. I became more aware of what I did not know. I only began to feel more comfortable sharing information in my conversations with Sonia and the rest of the participants after acknowledging that we were engaged in an exchange where we were both learners and educators. As I reflect on our conversation, I realize that I need to learn more about the ongoing issues First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations experience in Canada. It is difficult to talk about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations as a settler because of my own implications in colonization. In general, it is unsettling to talk about other ethnic populations and the issues they are going through as someone who is an outsider to those Nations. I understand the need to do so because otherwise it would leave First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples to take on that job to educate immigrants

and this is something that they have criticized many times. I have learned to become more comfortable with being uncomfortable and constantly recognizing that I need to learn more. I realize that this process requires humbleness as I will continue to make mistakes and others hopefully will correct me.

Sonia received her knowledge based on the required citizenship test, which is information that lacks depth around Indigenous Peoples' realities and histories. Sonia pointed to the lack of support from the government to teach newcomers about Indigenous people and their history. When Sonia was asked if she had an opportunity to learn about Indigenous cultures, she stated: "Not directly. I used to visit a national park, and there was always a display in the park about Indigenous people ... Because of my profession, when I worked downtown [in a health care setting], I saw Indigenous people ... When you arrive, you do not know anything. The government does not encourage you to learn about them [Indigenous people]." Sonia explained that she had learned more about Indigenous people through her Indigenous service users than through formal education or training. Sonia is a professional providing essential health care services; some of her service users are Indigenous. Her work setting allows her to have contact with Indigenous people and learn more about them. However, she is getting exposure to Indigenous people when they are experiencing a stressful time. Without their providers having the necessary background to understand them, Indigenous Peoples may be placed in a very vulnerable situation where they are open to judgment.

Sonia's experience is not unique; many of the participants that I interviewed shared similar experiences. I recall coming to Canada and not knowing anything about Indigenous Peoples or their cultures. It took some years after high school to learn more about Indigenous Nations. I reflect on how Indigenous people may feel about immigrants learning much later in their immigration process about Indigenous cultures and how disrespected they may feel by immigrants. It does not come as a surprise to me that Indigenous people may be hesitant to trust and form relationships with immigrants. I am also aware that it is challenging for non-English speaking immigrants to be exposed to information on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples in a format that they can understand unless they seek it. Immigrants would have to come here well-informed that these are Indigenous lands; that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations are the First Peoples in these lands; and that there is an ethical responsibility to learn about these Nations and support them. However, I am doubtful that many immigrants would feel the commitment to do so. In the case that immigrants do not take on these responsibilities there is no system that enforces them to engage in these practices.

Scholars such as Casuncad (2020) have argued that there is a lack of education about Indigenous Peoples in settler-colonial society. As elaborated in the following sections, lack of information contributes to maintaining settler colonialism. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1967) also points to the lack of information on the effects of colonization and, consequently, the arguments that have been used to justify it. Fanon criticizes views that, in subtle ways, blame Indigenous people for being colonized to justify colonization. Fanon critiques scholars, such as Mannoni, who claim Indigenous people were waiting for an outside leader since they were continuously evoking the "awaking master" (as cited in Fanon, 1967, p. 75). In this critique of Mannoni, Fanon exposes how Indigenous people are blamed for being colonized. These

explanations allow colonizers to avoid responsibility towards Indigenous Peoples and minimize their appearance as barbarians in their processes of colonialization.

When I talked to Sonia, she was mostly not aware of the resistance to settler colonialism from Indigenous people. It is unclear whether she is aware or not that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people are blamed for the situation that they are in, but she was aware of some of the ongoing abuses committed by the settler state.

Due to a lack of education that teaches immigrants about Indigenous cultures, immigrants are misinformed or lack knowledge of Indigenous people and their cultures (Casuncad, 2020). However, making changes and improving Indigenous education is not enough for ending colonization. Chatterjee (2018) argues against the “transcendental frame of analysis that seems to claim the pursuit of education as the key condition for reconciliation” (p. 3). Without minimizing the importance of education in ending colonization, Chatterjee (2018) states that lack of information or misinformation is one factor supporting discrimination. However, it cannot be assumed that if racialized immigrants, such as Indigenous immigrants, had the correct information, they would oppose colonialization. It is essential to recognize that colonization also benefits racialized immigrants; therefore, immigrants may support colonialization because of its benefits. The tensions between racialized immigrants and Indigenous people go beyond education (Chatterjee, 2018). Discussions on collaboration need to address what is preventing racialized immigrants from relating to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations, as appears to be the case.

The way colonization has affected the relations amongst Indigenous Peoples in the “Americas” is very particular. The state is built on structures that discriminate against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples (legal system, child welfare, health system) and racialized immigrants (immigration system, labour force, educational system) such as Quechua people. Colonization has created structures that divide Indigenous people from the South and North. For instance, immigration policies that govern the relations between Indigenous people from the North and South are often imposed by Western states with little to no consultation from Indigenous people in the North. Therefore, we have divisions caused by the structures in place and those caused by racialized immigrants, including Indigenous immigrants. Both forms of oppression divide Quechua immigrants and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people.

There are some suggestions that the lack of relations between the two may make it more challenging to engage in collaboration. Scholars have argued that the gap between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations and immigrants, mainly led by the government (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015), has made Indigenous Peoples cautious of the intentions of immigrants (Davis et al., 2007). The Calls to Action that came out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Peru (2004) demanded that settlers address the tensions with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and work towards ending colonization (Nardi, 2021).

As I reflect on the Calls to Action, I go back to Chatterjee’s argument that education is necessary but not enough to stop immigrants from supporting colonization and engage in anti-colonial projects instead. As mentioned earlier, there needs to be more recognition of the

benefits immigrants obtain from colonization and their/our complicit role in colonization. Acquiring this social consciousness and recognizing the sovereignty of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations may be a step towards having immigrants be more accountable to these populations and respond according to the Calls to Action. Besides acknowledging the complicity of immigrants in settler colonization, it is as important to address the government's hegemonic role with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. According to MacDonald and Steenbeek (2015), immigrants must learn how government policies and legislation work to assimilate First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples into dominant cultures. Sonia was unaware of how the government not only attempts to eliminate the autonomy and rights of immigrants but also encourages immigrants to support similar attempts against Indigenous Peoples from Canada. In this way, the assimilation of immigrants into dominant Canadian society contributes to settler colonialism.

In our conversation, Sonia shared her opinions on the state's relationship with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations and critiques the discrimination and biases of the government towards these groups.

### **Understanding of the Government's Role in Settler Colonialism**

Sonia discussed the government's role in settler colonialism by focusing on assimilation. Assimilation is "the process by which a minority population is absorbed into a prevailing dominant culture" (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015, p. 34). Sonia's knowledge of assimilation stems from her internal migration experiences moving from smaller to larger cities in her homeland of Peru. She discussed the pressure Latin American immigrants experience from Western systems to assimilate into Canada and compared it to the pressure to assimilate that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations experience. She has witnessed First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples having to assimilate when they move to Tkaronto.

Throughout colonization, colonizers have worked towards imposing Western cultural beliefs and ways of life on Indigenous Peoples (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). Fanon (1967) discusses assimilation by focusing on a particular Indigenous population, the Malagasy, to explain the psychological effects of colonization. Fanon argues that the identity of Indigenous people, such as the Malagasy people, ends up shifting due to colonization and the discrimination they experienced. Contrary to common belief, Fanon argues that the Malagasy people do not desire whiteness after colonization. Any changes the Malagasy make are due to the suffering and poor treatment at the hands of white people; they believe that the only way that discrimination will stop is if they become somehow white. Being white is the only way they can be seen and considered human. Fanon discusses how Indigenous people learn white ways of being, not necessarily because they want to be white but because they learned that whiteness allowed them to have more rights. In this way, people assimilate for their well-being within a system that values whiteness. This view questions the concept of colonization of the mind because it is a conscious effort people make to survive. By thinking this way, we are also shifting the focus from the mind of the colonized, which can lead to individualizing people's experiences, to the structures of colonization which are the roots of the problem.

If Fanon's explanation of what happens is accurate, then people would not truly assimilate and perhaps they can question the structures in place supporting colonization. However, I wonder if people are able to distinguish their assimilation as a conscious effort to survive as Fanon claims, or if they end up adopting it and assimilating to the culture that they are in.

Sonia shared her experiences with immigration and assimilation from an early age that taught her to adapt and absorb the culture from where she moved. Sonia moved to Lima, where circumstances forced her to adapt to her new residence. She engaged in the assimilation process again when she moved to Canada. Sonia placed aside her Indigenous identity to better fit into her new home. She learned from an early age that if she did not do so, she would not survive. Her story shows the strength behind assimilation and its use as a survival strategy. It is not so much a choice for Sonia to dissociate from her culture.

My position on this topic is somewhat different as I believe that we need to resist assimilation as much as possible. Or if we do not resist it, we may have to give into it while acknowledging that assimilation is a system used to oppress us and other marginalized groups.

Sonia discussed the way Indigenous people in Peru acquiesce to the idea that they cannot hold onto their Indigeneity if they wish to obtain and secure employment in larger cities. She talks about her experience moving from a small city, Ayacucho, to the capital back home: "Going from Ayacucho to Lima so young was very difficult. They throw you into the water, and you learn to swim, or you sink. That has helped me to adapt to here. ... When I went to Lima ... I saw ... that they [classmates] made fun of me." We can see that Sonia did not freely choose whether she assimilated or not. She saw it as a matter of life or death. It is unclear if these assimilation processes are followed consciously or if Sonia is dismissing the point that she is not choosing to assimilate but is doing so because she has no option. As well, she has little option but to put aside the discrimination that she experienced and assimilate to follow her plans to move to the city to study.

Reflecting on Sonia's experience with racism, this is an example of how people try to cope with racism the best they can with little support from institutions or the state. In this way, racism against Indigenous Peoples continues to not be addressed due to the lack of support that its victims experience.

Racialized immigrants in Canada are also pressured to assimilate and fit into dominant society to have a "better life." In the process of trying to fit in, racialized immigrants end up embodying the values of the dominant society (MacDonald & Steenbeek, 2015). Sonia shared her views on the pressures that Quechua immigrants in Canada experience to assimilate to white society as a strategy to have a "better life."

The concept of a "better life" may differ for every person. For some people a better life may mean living in a place where their lives are not at immediate threat, whereas for others it may mean living in a place where they can have luxuries. This concept is very subjective and can lead to judgement. For example, I have heard people judge others for migrating here to live a rich life; however, the question of who should be entitled to come to Canada is a topic outside of

the scope of this paper. Through assimilation, some racialized immigrants, including Indigenous immigrants, may follow, by choice or due to pressure, dominant ways of thinking and regulations that support settler colonialism in order to pursue a better life (Thobani, 2007). Whether participants have a choice, are pressured, or are forced to assimilate is debatable.

Sonia discussed her process of integrating into Canada, stating:

I do not miss it [Ayacucho] much. Yes, I miss the music sometimes, but I do not have that need to go back. Unless it is for the 28th [of July, Independence Day], maybe it has not been a part of me ... that is deeply rooted. I learned to be where I was. If I was in Iquitos [a province in Peru], I was in Iquitos. If I was in Lima, I was in Lima ... if I am in Toronto, I have to be in Toronto. ... I adapt to what is here ... probably also for the kids. To look after them, work. That does not mean you do not want to go there. When I go to carnivals or for Easter, yes, I miss it because my dad was buried there.

Sonia has adapted and absorbed the culture of her place of residence. Often, this approach has helped her support her children and find employment. However, she still discussed her connection with her homeland and culture, even when she takes on the culture of her new place of residence. As Sonia was talking about her experiences adapting to Canada, I thought that she was trying to justify the fact that she was not deeply connected with her Indigenous heritage. I wondered if these responses were connected to how I set up our discussion and what I shared. I may have given the impression that I support the idea of keeping our Indigenous heritage after migration. Since her testimony differs from my stance, I think Sonia may have felt that she needed to highlight parts of her connection to her Indigeneity. Carrying out these discussions showed me the power that I may have as a researcher over participants and how careful I needed to be when discussing my views so that the participants do not feel judged or swayed to support my opinions.

Mesinas and Perez (2016) studied Zapotec immigrant families from Mexico now living in the US. They focused on the connection Zapotec families have to their Indigeneity after migration and how this impacts their children. The families interviewed were involved with Indigenous cultural organizations, newspapers, and radio programs. Consequently, there is an “Indigenous cultural continuity” (Mesinas & Perez, 2016, p. 500) with their children, who also became involved in some of these activities. However, it is unknown if this is possible with Quechua groups in Canada. For example, in Tkaronto, there is no large Quechua community; therefore, there is less space to develop and maintain Indigenous identities. These communities run very few programs. There are Quechua dance programs, but if people are not interested in dancing, it is challenging to find a Quechua community. It is also unknown whether there would be more Indigenous cultural continuity if these groups existed.

Sonia compared the assimilation process of Quechua people to that of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. She knows some forms of assimilation that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples experience and its effects on their lives. She spoke about how Indigenous people from Canada are forced to fit into dominant ways of life to keep their employment. Sonia stated: “If [First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people] leave [the reserves], those who overcome the barriers ... in the

city ... have to assimilate to the people who live [in the city] because otherwise, no [they would not make it].” Sonia shared her views on the assimilation that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people experience as they move to the city. She is aware that Indigenous people experience many barriers if they decide to leave and move to larger cities, including being pressured to assimilate.

As I reflect on Sonia’s views of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, I think she is unaware that even though people may assimilate in their outside worlds, they may still keep their heritage within their closer circles.

In summary, through Sonia, we can see that assimilation does not necessarily mean giving up one’s culture completely. Some people keep their traditional practices generally or privately while assimilating into specific environments. Then, assimilation may also mean performing in specific environments as a response to the barriers of discrimination while keeping one’s traditions. In cases where Quechua immigrants have no other option than to assimilate, making a conscious choice to do so and let go of their cultural beliefs may help some Quechua immigrants continue being close to their Indigenous identity in other settings where it is more accepted.

When talking about Indigenous people from Canada, and their process of assimilation, Sonia interpreted it as forced assimilation. However, when it comes to her experiences of having to assimilate into the dominant society, she did not see assimilation as an attack on her culture. Sonia described it as part of the process of moving. I question if this way of processing assimilation is a way to come to terms with the painful process of assimilation by not seeing oneself as a victim. Placing aside the forced assimilation involved in her migration could be a method of survival. It is vital to take Sonia’s experience with immigration into consideration. Ideally, Indigenous Peoples would be able to integrate into the place they move to without having to distance themselves from their own cultures; however, as Sonia stated, this is not always possible. When understanding Sonia’s migration process, I had a few questions and observations regarding the way she processed her immigration experiences. I was careful not to mention this at the time of our discussions because I thought this may come across as a criticism of her way of understanding her assimilation process. As I reflect on the interview, I am more aware that what we said we would discuss at the beginning of the study might change drastically as the conversation progresses. Therefore, what the participant had agreed to discuss originally may differ from what they may be later asked. I recognize my power in my role of researcher to have participants discuss different topics that they may not necessarily have agreed on when giving their permission to participate in the study.

Sonia used her understanding of the assimilation of immigrants to learn about the assimilation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. This comparison can be helpful to a degree. Aspects of the assimilation of Quechua immigrants resonate with Indigenous Peoples’ experiences. The two groups are being discriminated against by a Western government differently. Experiences of colonization might converge and diverge at some points, but they cannot be equated because of the contextual differences. The scholar Fachinger (2014) claims that “any discussion of intersections between diasporic and Indigenous peoples needs to proceed with an awareness of crucial differences between them, and that more work needs to be done to theorize the

relationships between diaspora studies and Indigenous studies” (p. 76). In comparing the assimilation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and Indigenous immigrants there may be the risk of forgetting that the first are the original Indigenous Peoples from Canada. Consequently, their rights and autonomy are different from immigrants/guests.

I was hesitant to caution Sonia about making these comparisons without keeping in mind the differences that the two groups experience. I thought that Sonia would feel that I was trying to place myself above her by giving her this information, especially since I had already been giving her information throughout our meeting. I was uncertain whether that was what the participant expected from our conversations.

I realized that although I am comfortable taking on an educator role with people from other ethnicities older than me, with people from my own ethnic background, this task became more difficult. I think it may have been because where I am originally from, Peru, older adults are treated in respectful ways partly for the knowledge they carry. Part of me felt that I was being disrespectful towards them by taking on an educator role.

### **Religion as a Tool for Settler Colonialism**

Another way assimilation works to colonize First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples is by indoctrinating them into Christianity. Sonia discussed her understanding of the discrimination Indigenous people experience through the exaltation of Christian values and beliefs embodied in the national identity (defined earlier on; Thobani, 2007). As a consequence of this exaltation of national identity, the discrimination Indigenous people experience becomes justified, more accepted, and normalized.

Sonia shared her opinions about how immigrants, including racialized immigrants, discriminate against First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people based on Christianity. Sonia talked about Christian values and how some immigrants believe that Christian values are superior to all others. Consequently, they try to impose their beliefs on Indigenous people. Sonia explained that being Christian may influence service providers to treat service users better, but still, they are judgmental of them. She stated, “so that [Christianity] is also going to influence the treatment you will give people. Sometimes it could be that you give them good treatment, but at the same time, you are judging them.”

Sonia explained that while Christian values may influence service providers to treat all Indigenous people with respect, people may still judge them negatively when an Indigenous person does not fit into the Christian standards of an acceptable lifestyle. If the Indigenous person fits into this lifestyle, prejudicial attitudes will still distort the situation to categorize them outside the dominant standards. Based on Sonia’s shared experiences, we see the irony of how Christian values lead some service providers to be more empathetic towards people in need. However, these same values discriminate against people who do not fit the lifestyle that Christianity approves of.

Sonia discussed the imposition of Christian values on Indigenous populations by immigrants, stating: “you can believe in loving your neighbour, but at the same time, you are trying to educate them [Indigenous people]. In the end, it may be that the one who has to be educated is you.” Sonia showed the double standard embedded in religion. According to Sonia, while Christianity teaches people to love their neighbour, it also teaches people to believe in their own exaltation based on Christianity. In her opinion, religion encourages “others” to convert to Christianity by creating this superiority. I agree with Sonia’s perspective that being Christian represents goodness and brings exaltation depending on the group to which the person belongs. For instance, the exaltation of Indigenous people and racialized people would never be the same as the nationals, even after converting to Christianity. Historically, in Canada, Christianity has been the foundation for implementing mechanisms of settler colonialism, such as residential schools (Lavalle & Menzies, 2014); Christian beliefs, including the need to evangelize Indigenous people, became the justification for residential schools and the genocides they committed.

Up to now, I have discussed my conversations with Sonia about her understanding of Indigenous people and how she came to know by comparing her experiences as an Indigenous person in her homelands to the experiences of Indigenous people in Canada. Next, I will share her experiences of how she came to know about Indigenous people through misconceptions based on stereotypes.

### **Misconceptions about Indigenous Peoples**

Sonia discussed the misconceptions about Indigenous people and settler colonialism that are often rooted in stereotypes. In our discussions, we talked about these beliefs and challenged them. Sonia had an analysis of these stereotypes and assumptions and connected them to forms of discrimination. She spoke about the stereotypes portrayed in the media about Indigenous people and the influence these have on people’s perceptions. For example, Sonia talked about how Indigenous people were cast as the “bad guys” on TV. Sonia stated:

When I was a girl [watching cowboy movies in Peru] ... there were some Indigenous characters [from North America] who were the ones that helped. However, most of them were the bad guys ... this we watched in Peru. ... [In contrast], you did not see that [negative] portrayal of Indigenous people from Peru.

Sonia brought attention to media and television’s power in giving rise to discrimination against Indigenous people. In Sonia’s case, the only exposure she had to Indigenous people from North America was through these movies. With the advent of globalized media, stereotypes can be spread worldwide. Nowadays, the portrayals of Indigenous people in media continue to be based on stereotypes, and they are romanticized (Wente, 2018). By the latter, I mean that their Indianness may be based on stereotypes and essentialist portrayals of Indigenous people, far from depicting the diversity they embody. In retrospect, I wish I had highlighted the structures in place that promote and benefit from these stereotypes. I felt the pressure that since this may be one of the only times that participants may have discussions on First Nations, Métis, and

Inuit Nations, I needed to give a comprehensive picture of how settler colonialism was maintained through these stereotypes.

In her comparison between stereotypes of Indigenous people in Peru and Canada, Sonia pointed out that racist stereotypes about Indigenous people from Peru were not so common in their television programs (though other Quechua people may challenge this). In contrast, North American movies portray Indigenous people from the North inappropriately, and these programs are openly accepted internationally.

Sonia is referring to what she witnessed about 30 years ago. However, they still contributed to how she and perhaps other people from South America and worldwide view Indigenous people from North America. These stereotypes have hurt and traumatized Indigenous people and continue to do so as they struggle and resist settler colonialism. In general, stereotypes and misconceptions are tools of oppression that challenge the well-being of Indigenous people. Stereotypes about Indigenous people infiltrate society as part of the apparatus that maintains the status quo and reinforce the trauma that Indigenous people experience. Sonia discussed the oppression of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples as a contributing factor to the trauma they experience. As a health provider, Sonia witnessed how the trauma that Indigenous people from Canada experience has led to their health deterioration.

### **Trauma and its Impact on Indigenous Communities**

Sonia examined the ongoing trauma and its effects on Indigenous people due to settler colonialism. As Sonia and I discussed the impacts of trauma on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, I was aware that she was basing her discussions on the challenges she faces every day as a health service provider working with Indigenous people from Canada. In contrast, I was coming from a different perspective where I examine the structures in place that contribute to the trauma that Indigenous people are experiencing. However, I understood that as a front-line worker, Sonia wanted to focus on how to best serve the needs of her clients on an everyday basis. Still, she connected the trauma that people are experiencing to settler colonization. Ideally, there will be a focus on the individual factors that are affecting the service user combined with efforts to address the structures in place that support settler colonization. However, I did not discuss this approach with Sonia. Again, I felt I was not there to discuss ways to improve her service practices. In retrospect, it could have been helpful to bring up these discussions. My preconceptions on what my role was in these discussions became an obstacle to suggesting these alternatives.

Problematically, trauma caused by colonization has been addressed through individualistic approaches rather than approaches that examine systemic processes of settler colonialism (Nicholas, 2010). Individual approaches to trauma assume that the issue is within the individual and that “there is nothing wrong with the system” (Nicholas, 2010, p. 18). This assumption has marginalized people being blamed for a presumed lack of resilience. Therefore, the effects of the trauma caused by ongoing colonization are used to maintain it (Allan & Smylie, 2015). The outcomes experienced by Indigenous people, such as poor physical and mental health, high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women, poverty, unemployment, under-housing and

homelessness, and overrepresentation in incarceration and the child welfare system are used to justify their colonization and racist beliefs and ideologies about them (Allan & Smylie, 2015). For example, these outcomes justify interventions through intrusive policing, social work, and health care (Allan & Smylie, 2015). In this way, the present trauma that is part of settler colonialism is deeply connected to systemic problems in criminal justice, child welfare, educational, and health care systems.

The impacts of ongoing colonization are often denied or downplayed in society, and Indigenous Peoples are harshly judged when they struggle with trauma. Sonia, who provides emergency services in the health sector, was conscious that service providers' stereotypes may influence how they treat Indigenous communities, thereby becoming barriers to access. Sonia questioned the ill-treatment that some Indigenous people receive when accessing services. She discussed how Indigenous people are stigmatized by the health care professions, who lack understanding of poverty, mental health stresses, and their connection to settler colonialism. She talked about how health providers respond to struggling Indigenous clients: "You judge them, and it is wrong, but that is what happens." Sonia sees that when a non-Indigenous person is in a stressful situation and asks for medical care, there are not the same assumptions about their "race." She recognizes that Indigenous groups are targeted. Sonia wished that the health care setting offered more training to workers; they barely offered training about Indigenous people, their histories, and their current situations. Sonia is still learning about the causes of the hardships that Indigenous people experience. She also knows that part of her knowledge of Indigenous people and settler colonialism is based on misconceptions. However, she believes that settlers must behave as guests on the host's land despite lacking specific information (her reference to guest-host relationships<sup>5</sup> is based on a previous conversation we had on the Two Row-Wampum Belt). In general, there is minimal questioning about the stereotypes of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples by non-Indigenous people, thereby supporting settler colonialism; also, there is minimal focus on the resistance and resilience of Indigenous people (McLaurin, 2012).

As I reflect on my conversations with Sonia, I see there was minimal discussion of the resilience of Indigenous people. I realize that she had not been exposed to the strength of Indigenous people in their fight against oppression and colonization. The information I shared with her was likely the first she had ever heard. I did not expand on it as much as I did colonization and its effects on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations. I was more focused on informing Sonia about the adversities faced by Indigenous Nations from Canada than on the many examples of resilience that they have shown both historically and presently.

This stance may be related to my position as an outsider. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples have critiqued this approach that deprioritizes present-day activism. Many initiatives happening across Canada demonstrate how Indigenous people are working to solve the problems that the state has created in their communities with little help from any government. Resilience takes

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<sup>5</sup> The guest-host relationship refers to that between non-Indigenous (guests) and Indigenous people (hosts). Mohawk scholar Koleszar-Green (2018) defines a *guest* as "someone who is in relationship to the Land in a way that supports stewardship and not ownership. A guest is an individual ... who respects reciprocal engagement" (p. 175). Hosts have responsibilities towards their guests. Reciprocally, being a guest involves taking care of the land and following the regulations set out by the hosts for how to treat the lands being occupied.

various forms: “community-based systems of reciprocal economic and social support such as community food sharing and intergenerational and extended family-child rearing roles” (Castellano, 2002, as cited in Allan & Smylie, 2015, p. 30), to name a few. These forms of resistance are not the public image that the dominant society promotes; portraying Indigenous people as powerful threatens the state and the national identity. Therefore, they rely on stereotypes as the prominent portrayals of Indigenous communities (McLaurin, 2012). Consequently, many non-Indigenous people living in Canada are unaware of the issues that affect First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples or are unconcerned about them.

### **Reflections**

So far, I have presented and analyzed Sonia’s understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Nations and the impact of colonization on these groups. Her views are based on her early stages of thinking about these topics. Knowledge of Indigenous histories and cultures is relatively new to racialized immigrants. Lack of accessible knowledge is one of the challenges to engaging immigrants in collaboration with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Before engaging in these conversations, I was unaware that such a large portion of our discussion sessions would involve my sharing information regarding First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. This experience showed me the urgency of reaching out to more racialized immigrants and making this information accessible.

Going through this learning process was easy with Sonia, who was humble and open to expanding her ideas and assumptions. We shared knowledge: I learned more about Quechua people living in Ayacucho, and Sonia learned more about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and how settler colonialism impacts them. Although Sonia had limited information about these communities, she could see beyond the stereotypes, and together we analyzed the purposes these serve. Sonia’s experience with immigration within Peru and later in Canada gave her an insight into what happens to one’s Indigeneity after migrating to larger cities. Also, as a critical practicing Christian, Sonia could see the connection between Christianity and colonization.

As I provided information to Sonia and the rest of the participants in the study, I was aware that some pieces of this information would be unsettling. When I mentioned that colonization might benefit us racialized immigrants, there was a possibility that participants in the study would disagree, especially if the participant had been severely discriminated against. Sonia recognized both the discrimination that immigrants experience and the benefits of migrating to these lands. Her openness to accepting these two conflicting realities could be because she is a professional in these lands and has therefore experienced some significant benefits from migration. Also, I recognize that the power dynamics may be working in my favour, and my role as a researcher may prevent interviewees in general from disagreeing with me.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have presented and analyzed a Quechua immigrant’s views and understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and settler colonialism in Canada. As discussed above and informed by a literature review, immigrants living in these lands are misinformed about

Indigenous cultures, their struggles, and their resilience. At the same time, there is a benefit, for the most part, that immigrants gain from settler colonialism. Therefore, besides gaining accurate knowledge, immigrants also need to raise social awareness of the fact that, despite the benefits that colonization may bring them, they/we need to oppose it and collaborate with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples.

It is also crucial to understand how settler colonization challenges potential relations between the two groups and to have an open dialogue regarding how this situation could change. Mitigating factors such as education and consciousness-raising could be the first steps to having Quechua people engage in relationship-building. Immigrants would need to take the lead in this process. By learning about Sonia's understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and the impacts of settler colonization on these groups, this study hopes to contribute to how Quechua immigrants can engage in collaborative relations with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people and be allies.

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# Reversing the Gaze onto my Queer Settler-Canadian-ness: A Dialogical Encounter with my Other

Ranjith Kulatilake

**Abstract:** Using critical autoethnography, informed by Critical Race Theory and Marxist theory, as the research methodology, I explore my dual existence both as a disruptor and facilitator of settler-colonialism mediated by neoliberal capitalism. I realize that my racialized and sexualized existence as a settler immigrant, in a land that centralizes whiteness, is implicated in the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples. Even my activist drive to support Indigenous struggles stems from my settler desires to succeed, while my frontline work in queer refugee resettlement leads to homonationalist citizenship. My education in social work only stamps settler-colonialism. This is the story of many settlers, from the marginalized to those who think and act progressively: The market absorbs us to maximize profit. The question that permeated this engagement is: How does capitalism spectacularly put everybody to work, reaping its harvests? I propose that settlers—queer and straight—learn from Indigenous worldviews in working against capitalism.

**Keywords:** Queer/LGBTQ+ refugee resettlement, homonationalism, settler-colonialism, Indigenous Peoples, racism, homophobia, social work

This is my memoir of pain, resilience, and hope. It embodies my everyday existence. Life takes some most unexpected turns and I have captured a tiny part of it in this narrative. I have been called many names: “faggot,” “girly boy,” “a waste of life,” “smart,” “an exception,” “dirty Paki,” “f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy.” Many years have passed since I faced physical and emotional violence in my home country and homophobic violence at an institution of higher education in Canada, but the pain is indelible. Through my body I voice my memory and experiences. Accumulated over time, they are like things in a bag. When the bag becomes your body, its weight wears you down (Ahmed, 2017). Nobody, at times not even you, can notice it.

Like a deer running towards a mirage looking for water, I ran away, from one country to another and landed on a land that claimed to be a “safe haven” for queers. But it was in this land that I understood what it meant to be racialized—second-rated and not fully human—and where came the final blow in the form of homophobia that shattered my dreams of success and made me sick. At a centre that supported teaching, my presentation on homosexuality and inclusiveness was deemed “sensitive,” “controversial,” “inappropriate,” and “immoral.” I have reclaimed these as my “death by four words,” which I will revisit in my narrative analysis. This death and my newly acclaimed status as a “dirty Paki” led to my new birth.

In embracing my agonizing pain at the intersection of racism and homophobia I have questioned my existence as a displaced, racialized gay man from a former British colony, as well as its paradox, being a sexualized and racialized citizen on the stolen and being-stolen land of Indigenous Peoples. It is through this pain that I have realized how I have become the necessary glitter for the homonationalist queer spectacle and how I have ended up being both a disruptor and a facilitator of settler-colonialism. This is where I finally met my Other, the shadow in the

depth of darkness that is hidden, slippery, dubious, and enigmatic. It symbolizes my paradoxical existence that is commodified and fostered by the neoliberal market. Learning from Foucault's approach of "making the familiar visible," (Chambon, 1999, p. 1) this is an attempt to capture my Other, not merely as an individual or individualizing entity, but as an intersecting process and a product of social, political, cultural, and economic forces. I have employed critical autoethnography as my research methodology in this soul-probing endeavour to scan a) my expectations and experiences of Canada as a safe haven, and b) the reinventing of myself through my work with LGBTQ+ newcomers that propagates settler-colonialism, thus dispossessing Indigenous Peoples.

This is the story of the many settlers—the marginalized and made invisible—yet at the forefront of the Hunger Games (Collins, 2008), in a violent market that commodifies their bodies. There are others who perform "diversity dances" in this "land of opportunity." Most of these, vanquished and victors, are unaware that they are uninvited guests on stolen land (Palmater, 2015). This is also the story of a third category, who believe that they act "progressively"—from queer to anti-capitalist—at the grassroots and in social work spaces, taking for granted the fact that their work can add to the legitimization of settler-colonial citizenship. I swing through all these categories, both as a pawn and a benefactor of the insidious operatives of market capitalism.

### **Critical Autoethnography (CA)**

I have used CA as my research methodology because of its allowance for transformative disruptions that are "moments of discomfort and disquiet that provide hidden wisdom or access to complicated truths" (Friedman, 2017, p. 100). I have reflected on such complicated and buried truths through my dialogical encounter with my Other, as I see CA as having the potential to transform personal experiences into universal human experiences (Mendez, 2013). Drawing upon multiple layers of consciousness and identities within the self (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010), CA has helped me look reflexively at myself as a continuum being fed by, as well as feeding, the system. My experiences of racism and homophobia, and of multiple identities and roles, are revisited in the context of my presence on Indigenous land.

### **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

CRT has been relevant to my theorizing of re-queering the refugee other in the settler-colony of Canada, as it positions race as imperative in understanding, theorizing, and deconstructing the discourses of exclusion and oppression in the white supremacist world (Gillborn, 2006). Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality and added gender into race and class analysis. Based on her interview with Crenshaw, Omokha (2021) stressed that race becomes *real* through such social constructions. CRT also allows me to understand whiteness and white supremacy as a dominant social construct, and as a hegemonic discourse, working on racialized bodies to align them for capitalist accumulation. Canadian citizenship as the pinnacle of the queer refugee journey of resettlement is perceived as synonymous with whiteness. Queer refugees are permitted to achieve this feat under a strictly regulated refugee determination process that keeps checking their credibility, identity, and criminal records. I call this process

“re-queering the already queer.” Mulé (2020) named the effect of this re-queering as recolonization, questioning Canada’s claim to be a safe haven. Both this sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE) based refugee process and its end product, the sexual citizenship, are then re-used to legitimize settler-colonialism that recolonizes the re-queered queer other, who are at the same time implicated in colonizing Indigenous Peoples. This is indeed a “Hunger Game” (Collins, 2008) in which I am implicated through my roles as a frontline worker, as a researcher and as an activist.

### **Marxist Theory**

That the exploitation of labour underscores the machinery of Canada’s safe haven branding (Murray, 2016) and its underlying luring of the racialized queer-other into the country makes Marxist theory imperative in this study. Wolf (2009) situated queer oppression as one of modern capitalism’s numerous contradictions. Capitalism, creating material grounds for people to live independent sexual lives, regulates economic, social, and sexual order with heteronormative criteria. Commodified labour is bought and sold for profit. Social relations are determined by the market, which fosters racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and many other social divisions to manipulate the working classes. Marxist theory sheds light on the intrinsic connection between social relations and the means of production. It explains why skyrocketing social and economic disparities are the inevitable result of class privilege and the exploitation of labour.

Carlin (2007) explained that as a social institution, the family has always been utilized to integrate sexuality into classed societies in which rigid sex norms were established. Even though gender and sexuality are fluid phenomena, cis-heteropatriarchal norms make them appear to be fixed and pushed aside as the “deviant other,” with the advent of the morally coded nuclear family. With Marxist theory, I have critiqued the commodification of the refugee-queer-other so they may be unleashed into the market using the regulatory mechanisms of settler-homonationalism.

### **Data Collection and Contextualization**

The data for this research were gathered from my personal records and memories. The data about racism are two disparaging remarks hurled at me by complete strangers. The data about homophobia were derived from a homophobic incident that took place at an institution of higher education. Even though these incidents took place over a decade ago, racism and homophobia are common everyday experiences for myself and the queer refugees I work with. I tried to situate my experiences within the pertinent social, economic and political contexts.

### **The Disappearing Honeymoon**

I had a lot to catch up with on my journey of Canadianization. I remember being pleasantly surprised by the politeness of my new acquaintances. Those I met at the institution of higher education chose their words carefully—they were so politically correct. I had to learn how to speak in a monotone even when I got passionate. Questions about my country of origin often came up: Some were relieved that I was not a “Tamil Tiger,” for during the time of the Sri

Lankan civil war, Tamil people in Toronto organized mass protests against the oppression of Tamils back home. After a brief period of feeling good about such compliments, I questioned them, “does it matter?” adding that I am a Sinhalese who supported the Tamil liberation struggle.

“People of colour” were deployed to celebrate multiculturalism while national holidays and grand celebrations followed the Christian calendar, reminding me of the substructure of Canadian settler-colonial identity. Watching Canada Day celebrations, I learned that Columbus “discovered” North America and that early white settlers were “explorers” and “founding fathers.” I got used to such pomposity as I was integrating into Canadian society. The booklet that I studied for my citizenship test (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005) highlighted that “Canadian values include freedom, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. We are proud of the fact that we are a peaceful nation” (p. 7). I wondered whether there was any commitment to justice for the First Peoples. The erasure of Indigenous history and their enduring presence was evident: “Throughout Canada’s history, millions of immigrants have helped build our country” (p. 8). Such empty rhetoric evaporated as I *discovered* Canada, like judiciously peeling an onion. When did counting history begin? Whose land is this anyway? How can Canada claim to be a peaceful nation while exerting so much violence in dispossessing the Indigenous Peoples who have been the guardians of this land for millennia?

It was shocking to see how some of my new white gay friends portrayed Indigenous Peoples with varied negative stereotyping. I quickly learned how Black people were brutalized and labelled as dangerous, while South Asians were characterized as smelly. I took extra showers, just in case my South Asian-ness had given me some endemic body odors. Advised by Sri Lankan friends, I dared not fry sprats or dried fish, or cook certain curries, fearing that the smells would antagonize my neighbours. At a blood donation event my blood was refused when I said I was gay. By default, my gay blood was deemed dangerous. It was the same for those who were born and lived in any African country, or even married to someone who lived or travelled in Africa. I had to work extra hard and prove myself to be considered on par with Canadian-born, and especially white, colleagues. Uninvited volunteers tried to correct my English pronunciation and accent. Sometimes I received compliments:

“Wow you are smart!”

“We need people like you to come to this country!”

“Your English is very good!”

I beamed with happiness and pride at such compliments, only realizing when re-reading them what they really meant. I was an exception to the people of my kind, who are not as smart as white people, and a burden on White Canada. These compliments were in fact micro-insults, which are forms of microaggression. When I responded they would get angry, accusing me of not being “grateful” and being “too sensitive”: I was expected to correct my “hyper-sensitivity.” These situations led to so many self-doubts, and my seriously questioning who I was, what I was, and why I was here. I had nowhere else to go, but I could not be fully myself here either. What was the mirage I was running after? In subsequent years, battling with depression, I

pondered my eternal in-between-ness. Then my inner voice commanded, “STOP running away!”

### **Racist Attacks**

“You dirty Paki.”

Once a white man almost jabbed me, when I asked him to stop making derogatory remarks against a woman who was perceived to be Asian. She and I, among others, were waiting for a bus. “Go back to China,” he was yelling at her. I shielded her until the bus arrived and his anger turned towards me. I was shocked, scared, and upset, not only by these remarks being aimed first at the woman and next at me, but also by the golden silence of the bystanders.

“You f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy!”

Another white male, screaming, started chasing me at a subway station in Toronto. It was late at night and he appeared to be tipsy. I managed to run quicker than he to save myself. Again, bystanders remained silent as if nothing was happening. Eizadirad (2017) reminded me of the negative racial stereotypes that defined Toronto’s Jane and Finch neighbourhood. Urban planners and policymakers characterized it as a “priority neighbourhood,” a sanitized tag that alerts one to urban geographies of poverty and destitution leading to crime and violence. Jane and Finch is often portrayed as a “diverse” neighbourhood—a leftover spatiality occupied largely by Black and racialized people, including immigrants. Interlocking systems of domination, oppression, and surveillance are stamped and fortified by the uneven geographies of white supremacist violence, while constantly casting the gaze onto its victims.

Some of my Black LGBTQ+ newcomer clients had much worse experiences of racism. A Black gay male client once told me that a white man cursed him while spitting on him three times in the presence of onlookers. Another Black male client ended up in hospital with a broken arm and leg when he was attacked at the shelter where he was staying. A Black female client was asked to leave her shelter within two hours because she was deemed “dangerous to others,” having had a meltdown after being repeatedly abused because of her skin colour and accent.

My self-doubt led to a form of “double consciousness,” which Du Bois (1903/2007, p. xiii) theorized with reference to the racial oppression faced by African American people and the devaluation of their humanity in a white-dominant society. I felt I *am* and yet I am *not*. How hurt I was when my long and “unpronounceable” name brought laughter, even in “progressive” academic spaces! A white gay friend freely renamed me “Randy,” because he could not be bothered to pronounce my name. Only later did I find out that this re-naming also had a sexualized connotation. Racial violence was so pervasive that for my safety, I developed a fortified self and behaviour, while accepting a second-rate life in the multicultural paradise of Canada.

## **Homophobia in the Safe Haven**

While my dreams of the “free life” were being shattered one by one, I still clung to the hope and excitement of living my life legally as a gay man. I no longer had to wear a straight mask. I became gay—inside out. My early visits to the Gay Village in Toronto—to be with kindred spirits—quickly wakened me from my fantasy. At the gay bars I felt and was treated as a stranger. I did not know what to do or how to mix and mingle in the very white gay scene. Some said that they could not understand my English accent. I was also exoticized for and by the gay white gaze, while having racist and patronizing remarks hurled at me, and receiving unfriendly stares at gay bars, restaurants, and queer social events. Still, I enjoyed browsing gay websites and chatting online without the fear I had back home. These little moments in which I could express my desires about sex and intimacy were incredibly important in my self-acceptance as a gay man. There was a lot of internalized homophobia to be undone. Yet, it was not an all-accepting gay scene—at times I was rejected because of my skin colour and South Asian racial identity. My name sounded Indian for some. I was often asked why rice and curries were so spicy, whether Sri Lanka had been part of India, or whether I spoke any Indian languages.

My attempts to connect with my own ethno-racial community became futile as I was laughed at and questioned for being such an “eligible” bachelor. Some even promised to find me a fine bride. In such ghettoized enclaves there was no space to be my gay self. I cut them off completely and opted to live in isolation.

The most horrific homophobic attack happened at the most unlikely place, at the centre for support of teaching at the institution of higher education where I was a PhD student. A presentation on sexuality and inclusiveness, to which I brought my lived experiences using storytelling as a pedagogy, ended with homosexuality being portrayed as

“Sensitive,”  
“Controversial,”  
“Inappropriate,” and  
“Immoral.”

Their justification was forthcoming: A safe and respectful environment had to be ensured, as some of those in that audience may have come from cultures in which homosexuality was taboo. A clause was added to the teaching centre’s website, dictating the steps to be taken to obtain prior approval for presenting such topics. I collapsed, mentally and physically, as my core identity was dehumanized. The subsequent fight for some justice ended with me having to quit my doctoral studies. Agonizing epistemic violence ensued in the subsequent months and years, when trying to access the cis-heteronormative mental health system. My life and career plans were shattered. From once being an acclaimed yet deeply closeted university teacher I became a nobody in this grandiose “safe haven” for queers.

### **The Interstice: The In-Between Niche**

In what I term this *lost world*, with my legality as a gay man as my sole possession, I went searching for social connections through community work. I studied mental health counselling at a college and reinvented myself as a frontline worker with LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers at a community health centre. This program became popular and I became heavily involved in the LGBTQ+ refugee resettlement sector. I organized group and individual resettlement support sessions, providing clients with information and referrals.

The key components of my work included assisting those who were in their refugee claim processes to become convention refugees, and then permanent residents and Canadian citizens. I presented at numerous venues and organized Pride celebrations and Pride marches with my client population. I was recognized for my work. I went back to university to study social work formally and also assisted another social service agency in setting up a new program for LGBTQ+ refugees.

In my new full circle of life, I repositioned myself as an activist and service provider. In activist and academic spaces, I questioned the violence and duplicity in the Canadian queer refugee processes and Canada's safe haven rhetoric. Yet, in my frontline work, I championed the same processes that I kept questioning. I realized that as long as I was in the system as a service provider whose work was funded by the state, I had no escape from living a dual life. My existential crisis stemmed from the realization of how my work, including my desire for justice, only ended up legitimizing settler-colonialism, leading to the genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

Who am I? What am I doing? Where am I going? How does the market swallow my desires for justice, and reproduce them in humanistic-sounding, zombie sequels to maximize profit? As our entire existence is spatial, how can I re-cast my multiple settler-selves—disruptor, promoter, and anywhere in between—in any way that does not harm Indigenous Peoples?

### **Analysis: The Dialogue with My Other**

“You dirty Paki!” How and why have I become particularly “dirty,” or dirtier than a white body? Why was I seen as a “Paki”? How does the white gaze terrorize and consume my brown and male (non-disabled) body in its loud white supremacist devouring and moving to innocence?

Said (1993) helped me unpack some of these questions, also in relation to CRT, writing that both imperialism and colonialism are driven by ideological formations—ideas that certain geographies and their people “*require* and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination” (p. 9). Thus, the English vocabulary included such terms as “‘inferior’ or ‘subject races,’ ‘subordinate peoples,’ ‘dependency,’ ‘expansion,’ and ‘authority’” in re-establishing imperial experiences; in so doing, “notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected” (p. 9). My gut response to the white male's hateful racist violence against the “Asian-looking” female unleashed his anger. When I challenged him over the enjoyment of his privilege, I became dirty and a *Paki*—a derogatory term that originated in

the UK to attack Muslim Pakistani people which has been imported to Canada to attack South Asians (Khan, 2012). In his re-naming of myself and bodies like mine, the white man cleansed himself and his kind with such ease. The dirty whiteness moved to innocence, became invisible, while its pervasive yardstick that ensured its gaze was always cast on the other—Indigenous, Black, and racialized.

In subordinating, othering, re-labelling, and violating me so authoritatively and publicly, the perpetrator reiterated the supremacy of his white race. In succumbing to inferiority, numbness and subordination, I did not (or could not?) think, even in my most daring dreams, of screaming at the “Master”: “you dirty Whitee.” Fanon (1963/2004) aptly reminded me that “confronted with the world configured by the colonizer, the colonized subject is always presumed guilty” (p. 16). Deep down in my psyche I found my internalized white supremacy which I needed to dismantle.

The violence embedded in yet another racist attack, “you f\*\*king Jane ‘n’ Finch guy,” and my response—flight—falls into the same analysis. I chose only to flee and save my “dirty Paki”-ed and ghettoized, “Jane ‘n’ Finch” body from a shaming public exhibition. My constant flight from violence, and my fortified self and behaviour leading to a second-rate life in this (un)civilized, white Canada, sheds lights on the double-consciousness of myself and other Black and racialized bodies. Racial segregation under surveillance, from Jane and Finch to Indigenous reserves and residential schools, are essential spatial denominators of accumulation by dispossession, which Harvey (2003) explained as integral to material, ideological, social, and spiritual denigration. They make racialized bodies both invisible and visible as needed. My dirty Paki self, f\*\*kingly ghettoized in Jane ‘n’ Finch, is thus integral not only to my race and racialization through white supremacy, but also to the capitalist mode of production. While racist police hunt for “dangerous” Black and racialized bodies, strategically positioned multinational corporate outlets prey on their easily disposable labour.

Those racist screams denote the invincible hegemonic power of whiteness, which at the same time becomes invisible or unmarked through the workings of the system. Those who swiftly corrected my accent and renamed me Randy reminded me that I am a dangerous or exotic outsider in their colonial space, thus the urgency to assimilate. The frequent remark, “If you don’t like it here, go back to your home country!” warned me to obey, accept, and adhere to their ways, i.e., join the settler-colonial genocide of Indigenous Peoples in legitimizing the “peaceful” and “peace-loving” white supremacist nation. Those who praised me for being smart are actually telling me that I am not only an exception among the less smart people of my kind, but also on the “right path” to align queer refugees to hunt down Indigenous land as they resettle.

Weaving along the same precincts of Marxist theory and CRT, Dua et al. (2005) shed light on racist violence, such as I have faced. They adopted Canada as a unique site to investigate race, racism, and empire for two reasons. The first is Canada’s history of conquest, genocidal settler-colonialism, and white settlement policies deployed to settle people of colour through racialized immigration policies within free market capitalism. The second is that Canada propagates a national mythology of a nation devoid of racism, under the pretext of multiculturalism and

global peacekeeping, while being a peripheral site within the western hegemony. Bringing in Foucault's concepts of power, identity, and discourse, Dua et al. (2005) explained how locations of race and racism in culture, modernity, and whiteness often concealed kinship of race and racism with capitalism. Canada plays its role in maintaining the global racial order of white dominance, which provides the grounds for the flow of capital and extraction of labour and resources. In the same vein, Bannerji (2005) helped me understand how race and class are interlaced through the embodiment of the racialized other, stating that race represented in whiteness is colonial, racist, and capitalist. Hence, the constant pushing to the margins characterized the necessary venom being injected to make Indigenous, Black, and racialized bodies numb—and stay numb—for the easy extraction of their labour, through colour-coded jobs. Yet, it does not stop there. I will next explain what happens when these bodies disrupt cis-heteropatriarchal genders and sexualities.

### **What is in the Codifying? Theorizing the Homophobic Violence**

“Sensitive.” “Controversial.” “Inappropriate.” “Immoral.” As I revisit these, the most haunting and daunting four words of my life that symbolically killed me, I glance through the necrology Janoff (2005) has provided in his book *Pink Blood: Homophobic Violence in Canada*. “Stabbed 146 times ... Throat slashed ... Strangled/stabbed in the heart with a butcher knife” (p. xii). “Bludgeoned with branches and a baseball bat ... Beaten/thrown off a high rise” (p. xiii). These are some of the ways in which murderers ravaged the 112 queer bodies listed there. Numbers do matter, and yet they do not. These were precious lives. Just one kill is already one too many. Where does this unfathomable rage come from? *Why?*

Providing a Marxist analysis of sexual capitalism, Reynolds (2018) began by remarking that fundamentally social relations are formed, in contemporary capitalist societies, by class struggles in which the flow of capital over labour dominates. Structures and discourses that promote and constrain sexuality and sexual politics situate unequal institutional pedagogies, power, and knowledge dynamics not merely as key drivers, but “as the hegemonizing strategies by which class power is retained, consent is manufactured and new opportunities for capitalist markets are produced” (p. 700). This is simply because “the bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society” (Marx & Engels, 1848/1992, p. 6). The cis-heteropatriarchal family as the basic unit not only of (settler) social relations but also of labour, authenticated by intertwined social, legal, economic, and religious apparatuses, which perpetually dictate socio-sexual and gender-ed behaviours, stemmed from this inherent binding to capital. Hence the “normal”—from social conduct to sexualities—are marketed and should always be marketable. Furthermore, the institutional industrial academic complex in the 21st century “safe haven,” like all other systems at work, must ensure the free flow of the market, barring “sensitive,” “controversial,” “inappropriate” and “immoral” sexualities from even being discussed.

Dee (2010) stressed the need to look at the family as an institution rooted in class societies in order to understand how discourses on sexuality, gender, and sex are constructed and how they impose what is “normal.” For example, colonizers treated two-spirit people among the

Karankawa Nation in Texas with sheer disgust. Gender was coded as male and female, sexualities surveilled to be monogamous and male-centred across colonial empires. Mbembe (2003) coined the term “necropolitics” to explain that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (p. 11). This explains precisely how and why Janoff’s (2005) necrology of *Pink Blood*, and my symbolic *death-by-four-words* are tied to, produced by, and intensify the capitalist market.

### **Violence: From Codifying to Commodified...**

In my much-hyped role as a settlement worker, my reincarnated life does exactly the same—by accelerating the “integration” of the queer refugee-other. I sold my death and reaped profit. I maximized my profit with a pseudo-activist twist. I created new programs, luring Black and racialized LGBTQ+ refugee people from far and wide. My resume swelled, leading to more prospects, not surprisingly, including graduate studies in social work, with a state-funded scholarship. Here I envelop myself in Reynolds’ (2018) exposition of Marxist analysis of sexual capitalism. In my journey of being a closeted sissy-boy-faggot to an out-and-proud ardent promoter of settler-homonationalism, I have reused my sexuality and lived experiences for “commodification and consumption, reification, cultural production and meaning-making that compose contemporary subjectivities” (p. 696) in order to both decode and recode social, political, and legal regulatory apparatuses that legitimize the genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

In this neoliberally capitalist *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1983), the intensity of commodification reaches a point where commodification becomes life itself, hence all our social relations. The spectacle absorbs humanity so that humans, like zombies, are entirely subjugated by the economy. “It is the true reflection of the production of things, and the false objectification of the producers” (Debord, 1983, para. 16). From bottled water to oxygen boosters, to packeted soil, to rainbow flags, to dogs, cats, snakes, crocodiles and tigers, to kidneys, plasma and wombs, to our labour—racialized, re-queered, and re-civilized—all are sucked into this black hole, propelling it ever onwards. This is my work. I am a zombie breeding zombies. This is where I meet and *meat* my other.

### **Situating my Settler-Self on Stolen Land**

“It’s always all about the land,” stated Lowman and Barker (2015, pp. 48–68), explaining that land is at the root of any issue involving Indigenous guardians and settler-thieves. They highlighted that “Canada, as a nation and a state, is dependent on the land taken away from Indigenous nations, land that those nations still contest, and colonialism is all about the need to secure those lands at all costs” (p. 3). This includes the elimination of Indigenous Peoples. Without the long history of treaty-making and the massive land masses the treaties covered, Canadian geographical borders would not have materialized (Morin, 2005).

For settlers, land is a commodity that is personally owned, to be consumed, built on, dismantled, sold on, reduced to individual ownership and properties, while for Indigenous Peoples land is existential and sacred, evoking multiple and profound meanings. Soils, waterways, minerals, trees, animals, sky, moon, sun, humans, connect with Mother Earth in a shared continuum.

Quoting Kimmerer (2017), Borrows (2018) stated that in Potawatomi language the list of inanimate things is much smaller: “Rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate” (p. 52), making the perception of time multi-dimensional, animate, sacred, and *spatial*. On the contrary, for settlers, time is money and is measured in linear segments. As Anishnaabe Elder Fried Kelly expounded, “to take the territorial lands away from a people whose very spirit is so intrinsically connected to Mother Earth was to actually dispossess them of their very soul and being” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 225). The country that I have landed in has been built by ridding the custodians not only of their sacred land, but also of *time*. Only when considering space and time in their intrinsic unity and multi-dimensionality can I begin to realize the collective trauma of this dispossession.

One of my first positioning steps should be to undo my colonial understanding of land as a commodity, which is at once a resistance to capitalism. Giving back land for the guardianship of Indigenous Peoples requires a fight to take back humanity beyond capitalism. Leons (1984) provided a profound worldview that Indigenous Peoples’ responsibility is to see to the welfare of the land and all its life. Once the equality of all the elements of life on this land is recognized and respected, we should not take anything more than is needed for our sustenance.

Cornassel (2008) underscored the importance of the guardianship of land as being integral to *sustainable* self-determination. He warned of the Indigenous rights-based discourse in which global organizations and states including Canada have vigorously contested Indigenous claims to self-determination. The desire for state recognition of political and legal rights, without giving back land, without asserting community-based powers of sustainable self-determination, has only exacerbated the collective trauma of some Indigenous Peoples. Sustainable self-determination restores Indigenous ways of life that include spirituality as the highest pillar of politics and interdependence as the base, responsibilities to the natural world, evolving Indigenous livelihoods, food security, ceremonies of healing, and community governance.

This is primarily working against and beyond capitalism; a struggle from inside out. Wood (1995), referring to the thriving western liberal democracies, exposed how all our actions, even our thinking, are hard-wired to the market. “We cannot think of freedom from the market as a kind of empowerment, a liberation from compulsion, and emancipation from coercion and domination” (p. 235). This is my plight and my fight: How do I liberate myself from being a zombie while creating zombies through my work, in a zombie-breeding nursery? It is only possible by nourishing my zombie-resistant cell in the hope of keeping it alive.

I take into account Coulthard’s (2014) analysis of both Fanon and Marx to explicitly reject the liberal politics of recognition embedded in Indigenous rights discourses in settler-colonial Canada. I now know that dispossession within settler-colonialism and exploitation under capitalism are not isolated factors or events but unending and evolving social relations. Of particular relevance is Coulthard’s (2014) re-reading of Fanon’s analysis of colonial rule and its hegemonic upkeep, not as reproduced merely through force, but also through “the production of the specific modes of colonial thought, desire and behaviour, that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued

domination” (p. 16). Tuck and Yang (2012) urged that any metaphorization of decolonization evasively moves settlers to innocence, reconciles settler guilt and complicity, and salvages settler futurity. This is exactly how the zombie nursery continues to from “‘elimination by elimination’ to ‘elimination by assimilation’ to ‘elimination by recognition’” (Hallenbeck et al., 2016, p. 114).

Coulthard (2014) provided an ethical framework as “grounded normativity,” (p. 60) which has situated Indigenous struggles against capitalist imperialism, not merely for land but also by being profoundly informed by what land teaches us through a plethora of interlaced living relationships. This framework is built upon, and in a way extends, critical theory and Marxist analysis by contextualizing them with Indigenous Peoples’ intrinsic connections to land across time and space. I am inspired by Coulthard’s (2014) famous words, “for Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it” (p. 73). The task is to invite, gather, and nourish as many settlers as possible—including the steadily being re-queered queer-other in the many occupied spaces of exploitation—to actively support weaving the fabric of Indigenous workings against and beyond capitalism.

### **Intercepting Queer Identities**

This study revealed not only multiple queer identities but also the way they are enmeshed in colonial, neo-colonial, and settler-colonial systems. Queer struggles, leading to queer (settler) liberation movements and winning queer (settler) rights have often re-centred queer settlers while seeing two-spirit people as addenda, or others (Morgansen, 2010). Only when meeting my Other reflexively did I realize how, even with my very progressive activisms, similar to queer-settler activisms and scholarship, my actions only legitimize settler-colonialism. The next important point concerns the way in which many scholarship and practices have been entrenched in identity politics. Through a Marxist analysis supplemented by Critical Race Theory, I tried to contextualize how capital permeates every facet of our lives and social relations. I hope that this initial foray will generate further discussion and research.

### **Situating the Settler-Selves, Activisms, and Research on Stolen Land**

This dialogical encounter with my Other convinced me of the need to situate my multiple, interlocking, and contradicting selves on stolen and being-stolen lands as a racialized, gay, immigrant, and uninvited settler: In my activist work as an anti-capitalist, as an advocate for queer refugee resettlement, as a co-conspirator of Indigenous self-determination movements, and as a facilitator of settler-colonialism through my frontline resettlement support work with queer refugee people. Only then can I begin to comprehend how much I, as a system, am implicated in perpetuating the same oppressions that I think I am trying to eradicate. Taking to task such selves of mine revealed my hypocrisies, which in fact stem from the gross contradictions of the settler-colonial, neo-colonial, and imperialist ideologies.

I take from Fortier (2017) who unsettled the progressive settler-led grassroots organizing by asking, “whose land are we on?” He proclaimed that such activist movements must *centre*

Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty, in their commitment to “dismantling the state, heteropatriarchy, capitalism and imperialism by also divesting from the logics of settler colonialism” (p. 50). This is precisely where my desperate soul-searching through my hidden, devious, yet omnipresent Other can add to progressive platforms. Yet the question remains: How or *can* social work provide such a platform?

### **Conclusions as Envisioning ... Abolitionist Futurities**

Social work’s historic and ongoing role in trying to systematically annihilate Indigenous Peoples from their land is well researched and documented (e.g., Cardinal, 1969/1999; Chapman & Withers, 2019; Fortier & Wong, 2018; Shewell, 2004; Sinclair, 2009). Social workers executed the elimination policies, including smallpox blankets, forced sterilizations of Indigenous women and girls, torture, neglect, experimentation on and murder of Indigenous children in residential institutions, forceful removal of Indigenous children from families, policing, and surveillance (Palmater, 2015). As a hegemonic arm, every microfibre of social work reciprocally inflames settler-colonialism. The concepts of individuality, independence, family, nation-state, and governance are settler-colonial constructs that have formed social work. Social work has emerged to mediate and manage poverty in favour of the market over labour.

Neoliberalism has given rise to managerialist business models of social work in which government, instead of the service provider, becomes the manager of its ever-diminishing social capital. Social work agencies become competitors for funding, rebranding their work as business models (Healy, 2014). Client numbers, glossy reports to keep funders happy come what may, and increasing administration work occupy a large segment of social work. My frontline work has championed this model, reporting generous client numbers and documenting “success stories.” In social work spaces, I am entrenched in this regimented structure, which is closely monitored by a top-heavy management. My success is correlated to my skills and ability to resettle, i.e., to unleash LGBTQ+ newcomer clients into an extremely violent market.

Can social work be a catalyst for social change by moving away from its clinging on to capitalism in its mutually beneficial co-habitation? It is this dialectic that I exposed that had been obliterated in my disruptor and facilitator roles. Can social work, with a lineage liberally smeared with the blood of Indigenous Peoples—spilled thanks to traders with the Hudson’s Bay company, Christian missionaries, Indian agents, and past and current social workers with settler-colonial brainwashing—be redeemed? My answer would be “hardly,” because social work does not recognize Indigenous Peoples, as well as Black and racialized bodies, as being fully human. It is inherently racist. It continues to thrive on the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples while at the same time preparing Black and racialized bodies for easy disposal to the market. This study revealed to me that social work provides congenial climates for zombie nurseries, being parasitic of capitalism, no matter what it claims. What implications would this exhuming have on social work practice?

Where does this lead in my ongoing and future engagements with social work? I sense that it will be outside formal and formalized social work spaces. Still, I doubt whether I can ever relinquish the field as it is symptomatic of a larger sick system. Hence, what should I do?

The sci-fi movie trilogy *The Matrix* (Watchowski & Watchowski, 1999) provides me with a classic analogy to envision a possibility. This movie shows a futuristic scenario in which human lives have turned into pre-formulated algorithms that fuel and expand an uncontrollable machine. Neo, the main character, has only one option left—to destroy the machine that produces human-like agents who absorb any remaining human into becoming an agent. During the prolonged final battle, Neo allows the agent-machine to suck him in to the agent himself—the zombie generator—only in order to explode himself to salvage humanity. Envisioning such an abolitionist future by utilizing social work as the medium could be my redemption. Yet, this is not a self-gratifying or an individual end, but a process of self-evaporation, only a means to a collective struggle for a just world beyond capitalism in order to sustain life.

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# *Wo Firi Ha?*—An Exploration of the Facets of Belonging

Scilla Owusu-Amoah and Jess Kumordzie-Gyasensir

**Abstract:** “Wo firi ha?” in the Twi language of the Akan people of Ghana translates to “Are you from here?”—a phrase often uttered with skepticism in an attempt to investigate if one really is who they claim to be. The words might be of Ghanaian origin, but the sentiment is felt both in Ghana and in Canada. This photo essay is a compilation of stories unfolding on both sides of the ocean that highlight the intricacies of continuously redefining citizenship within these contexts. Throughout this paper, we analyze the concept of Blackness as performance, what it means to “help Africa help itself,” the question “where are you *really* from?”—often asked of racialized people—and, finally, our experiences of belonging through rejection. This paper concludes with an intersectional review of the structures and systems that uphold these narratives, including post-colonialism, internalized superiority, and the surveillance of Black bodies.

**Keywords:** citizenship, Ghana, Blackness, white supremacy, white saviourism, community, settler-colonialism, performative allyship

## Introduction

We the authors would like to pay homage to the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Chonnonton peoples who are the first inhabitants of this land that was stolen by Europeans through violent, coercive, and manipulative tactics. This narrative is far too familiar to us as descendants of a once-colonized Ghana. We seek to find belonging on lands that hold deep-seated traumas as a result of these experiences. We recognize our multiplicity of identities as Ghanaians, Canadians, social work professionals, learners, and purveyors of care and control whilst holding marginalized identities. This requires of us to locate our search for belongingness within these historical truths in seeking good relations with Indigenous peoples and the land. We are privileged to live and work here and, for that, we are grateful.

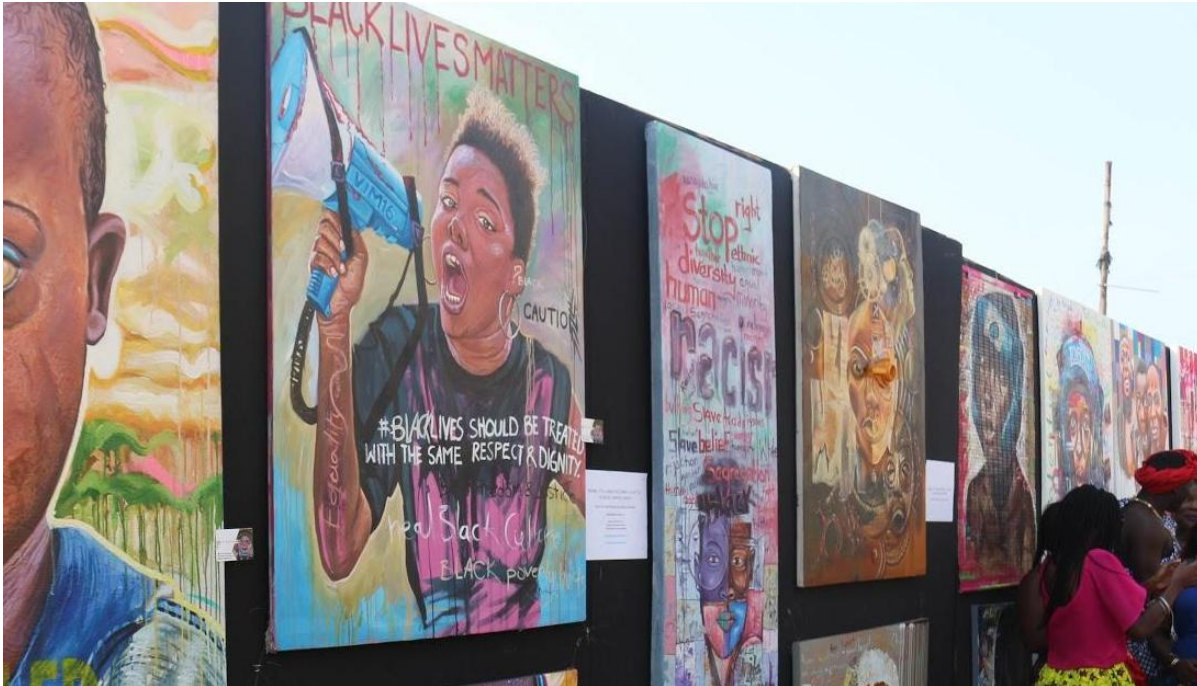
Our ancestors trace their lineage to the Guan and Ewe tribes of Western Africa in what is now known as Ghana. In Accra, Jamestown, and other cities near the seashore, forts line up the coast of the country—remnants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade that we were taught enslaved many of our local people. The Chale Wote Art Festival, a street and performance art festival, is held annually in Jamestown to reclaim some of the colonial-era forts that have been a source of much harm to the people of Jamestown (Das, 2019). We are inspired by the mission of the Chale Wote festival to push boundaries, display unconventional arts, and use public spaces to obtain “freedom to express, explore, exploit and discover their own limitations and possibilities” (Das, 2019, p. 1). The festival displays murals and performance art that challenge notions of masculinity and explore oppression, belongingness, and community building. As we unravel our own experiences of belonging and citizenship, we use visuals from the 2016 Chale Wote festival and personal photos (all taken by author Scilla’s partner Yaw Owusu-Ansah) to stir up conversations that critically analyze the gaps of this duality. We aim to explore identity and

belonging from the perspectives of a Ghanaian-born settler in Canada and a Black-Canadian settler with Ghanaian indigeneity.

### Blackness as Performance

#### Figure 1

*Art Display at the 2016 Chale Wote Art Festival*



*Note.* A woman with a megaphone is featured with phrase “Black Lives Matters.”

At the Chale Wote Festival, this image with the phrase “#BlackLives should be treated with the same respect and dignity” stands out. We reflect on several interactions throughout our lives that reveal quite the opposite, where Black lives are treated as subordinate, considered for entertainment purposes, and viewed like objects on display in a museum. Dignity and respect for Black bodies are far from reach—allow us to elaborate.

Our personal resolve to create contexts for community and connection led us to organize an event in our church celebrating diverse cultures within the congregation. Cheerfully, we gathered our dashikis, found several djembe drums, and combed through our childhood for songs that we fondly remembered singing and dancing to. We felt deep joy for the opportunity to share our food, music, and gifts with our church community.

“That was so exotic!”

“I love all the colours! You have to come perform at my workplace.”

“Can you teach me how to move like that?”

These are just a few of the “well-intended compliments” we received after our “exotic” performance. Comments like these demonstrate how white supremacy covertly functions to objectify and marginalize racialized people. This experience was a poor attempt by white people to create spaces that celebrate diversity as a means of building community and fostering allyship. What truly unfolded was a performative event that otherized and exploited our Blackness. In our attempt to hold spaces of care, Black people are constantly reminded that whiteness is the societal norm, and other identities only exist as the flavour of the day to be licked and disposed of.

### “Helping Africa Help Itself”

#### Figure 2

*Cape Coast Castle, 2019*



*Note.* People standing around cannons overlooking the sea at a slave castle in Cape Coast, Ghana.

The lights go dim and a hush falls over the church auditorium. A large projector screen descends over hundreds of people, and suddenly a reel of images begins to flicker. A malnourished child—face sunken, eyes bulging, belly bloated with flies buzzing across her forehead that nobody bothered to swat away before filming—this poor African child. “And for just \$8 a month or \$96 a year, you can feed a child!”

Our bodies cringe in absolute disbelief and rage at the degrading images of so-called helpless African children. The tagline “helping Africa help itself” emerges across the screen. The same people who enslaved our ancestors; incited inhumane, violent division of thousands of ethnic tribes across nations; and raped our Motherland for its rich resources to attain world dominance

... these same people benefitting from post-colonialism and white supremacy suddenly care about helping Africa become prosperous?! Our eyes dart across the room, searching intensely for connection with someone who will understand, anyone who can share in these sentiments of shock and dismay. “Are they seeing what we are seeing? Does this appalling sight make them uncomfortable, too?” We long for an embrace of solace but in a room full of people, it feels like not a soul is present.

In this moment, we interrogate the ways that charity organizations claim to exist in the Global South—that they are a place of refuge, community, unconditional love, and acceptance, and that they treat people with dignity and honour. There is nothing honourable about the depiction of children from the Motherland as underdeveloped, third-world, second-class citizens. However, many organizations unashamedly thrive in sordid charity work that preserves a narrative of an Africa dependent on their saviourism. The “helping Africa help itself” tagline is a case in point that suggests that the continent of Africa is incapable of helping its own people, and that it lives in a perpetual state of poverty and unrest (Baldwin, 2018). We observe this interplay of generosity and dominance, disguised as charity, that sustains structural racism, prejudice, and oppression.

We cannot emphasize enough how the power of language contributes to how we ascribe meaning to citizenship across local and geopolitical borders. Reducing people’s worth to insignificant dollar values is an example of how the use of dangerous and demeaning language can reinforce cyclical dependency between the colonizer and the colonized. The book *The Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity* discusses how the methods of engaging charitable social work, though profitable, are morally and ethically irresponsible (Maren, 1997). These approaches enable social work and aid organizations to maintain power and control over service users. They are not sustainable and do not empower people in their understanding of their belongingness, capabilities, and contribution (Maren, 1997). We need to be cognizant and actively intentional about changing the ways we speak and cogitate about the African continent.

## Where Are You “Really” From?

**Figure 3**

*A Pencil Drawing, 2019*



*Note.* The hand of an artist making a pencil sketch of author Scilla and her partner.

The picture above is a metaphoric representation of the post-colonial experiences of racialized people. It symbolizes the dominant group’s attempt to define and control our identities through microaggressions, in order to maintain white supremacy. The systematic placement of racialized folks in boxes occur in casual, everyday interactions.

“Where are you from?”

“I’m from Canada.”

“No, but where are you *really* from?”

“Oh wow, you speak really good English!”

“Sorry, I can’t pronounce your name. Do you have a shorter version or a nickname?”

These questions that often arise during interactions with Black, Indigenous, and racialized people support the creation of moulds they are expected to exist within. The social work profession requires respectful engagement with diverse populations from a place of cultural humility, yet these subtle everyday interactions contribute to the maintenance of systemic -isms (Nadal et al., 2019). Statements like these otherize our Blackness and situate whiteness as the status quo.

As African and Black women, we consistently experience many variations of these microaggressions. In a video uploaded to YouTube by Fusion Comedy (2016), microaggressions are described as mosquito bites. Some people get bitten more often than others—and sometimes bites can be life-threatening (Fusion Comedy, 2016). From butchering the pronunciation of “foreign” names to questioning our origins, people who inflict microaggressions prioritize their own comfort and reinforce stereotypes. It is not an inquiry into the identities of who racialized people are to build relationship, but it is rather an assessment of their proximity to whiteness.

Jess’ grade 11 guidance counsellor, Ms. W, encouraged her to steer away from university-level math courses believing that she would fail and deemed them “too difficult” for her ability. Microaggressions have macro-level impacts and ultimately impact how people experience belonging in community and understand their relationality to nationhood. Beverly Tatum (as cited in bell hooks, 2003) refers to this as a “syndrome of not belonging noting that the pressures of trying to fit in, conform, or communicate in the ‘acceptable’ form of the majority culture results in an anxiety that literally interferes with one’s natural abilities and modes of expression” (p. 11).

### Belonging Through Rejection

#### Figure 4

*Floor Art at the 2016 Chale Wote Art Festival*



*Note.* Chalk art of two Black people holding the Ghanaian flag.

“Wo firi ha?” in the Twi language of the Akan people of Ghana translates to “Are you from here?” It is a phrase often uttered with skepticism that seeks to decipher if one is really whom they claim to be. In its most authentic form, it is a critique: “Is this your land, are these your people?” We have been asked this question on several occasions and will now narrate the nuances of belonging across borders.

### **Jess**

My mother’s deteriorating mental and physical health brought me to the Motherland for the first time at the tender age of eight. A lengthy seventeen years elapsed before I would set foot again on the Gold Coast. This time, I was accompanied by my husband and a solid foundation of my cultural identity. I could not wait to return and learn about my family’s native land, the origins of my Ewe and Fante ancestors; to meet my paternal grandmother for the first time; and to bask in my alluring African heritage.

After embarking on a 22-hour flight, I was greeted with a tropical kiss of heat on my skin. As I took my first steps out of the plane, I was immediately overcome with immense emotions. I welled up with uncontrollable tears, thinking to myself, “I’m home at last.”

### **Scilla**

At the age of sixteen, I moved to Canada to start school. I was excited about the opportunity to live in a new country but a big draw for me was the chance to reinvent myself. As a middle child, I had become accustomed to following my older sister’s footsteps while remaining quiet and unassuming. This was my time to shine! I had been trying out a shortened form of my name since I went to boarding school two years prior. This had come as a surprise to my parents because I was never one to request something, much less a name change. I was determined to rediscover myself in Canada, to understand who I was outside of the confines of religion, culture, and family expectations.

In the years that followed, yearly trips back home to Ghana exposed the diverse ways that I was growing and changing. I dressed differently, cut my hair, and abandoned my lifelong dream of becoming a doctor. I increasingly became aware of my privilege, questioned my upbringing, things I had considered “normal,” and interrogated how they aligned with the values I was building and developing. Each year that I returned to Ghana, I was relieved to be home, but I found that each time I had to become the “quiet, unassuming, gentle middle child Scilla” again.

### **Jess**

I was enthralled to explore the busy night streets of Ghana and experience Osu, my husband’s childhood hometown, through his eyes. We stumbled upon a shop with a variety of items for purchase. The vibrant handmade art pieces stood out to me; I asked “*eyɛ sɛn?*”—“How much?” To my surprise, the prices were incredibly inflated. As expected in the markets of Accra, we entered into a haggling match, and in the middle of negotiation, the vendor paused to ask, “Wo firi ha?” I responded, “Yes. My parents are from here, and I was born and live in Canada.” His

judgmental eyes scanned my body up and down, as if he were conducting an assessment to determine the true validity of my Ghanaian identity.

What had just happened? As I began processing the complex layers of that shop interaction, my husband explained that if people believe you are a “foreigner,” it is normal for them to inflate the price of products. He cautioned me as we continued exploring the market to say as few words as possible because my accent would give away that I am not from this land. I felt conflicted inside and thought to myself: “Is it not good enough that my family has its roots here? Is that not enough reasoning for my presence here in the Motherland? Am I not Ghanaian enough?”

### **Scilla**

I tried my best to hold on to Twi while in Canada. It comes in handy for communicating embarrassing things aloud to my husband when in a grocery store. Every time I speak Twi, I feel a sense of pride that I have not lost my mother tongue like many young people in the diaspora do. Ghana was still home, and I knew that anytime I visited, I would feel at home just as much as I did here in Canada.

One evening, after a long day in Accra, I chartered a taxi to take me home. Before I got in, I haggled with the driver as was expected and convinced him to take me at a cost cheaper than the going rate. I sat in the car, proud that I was still able to banter in the local language. I was shocked when he looked at me through the mirror while on our way and asked, “Sister, na wo firi ha?” (Sister, but are you from here?) I was immediately upset. Had I not already proved myself? Was the fact that I had confidently bargained the price down, in Twi for that matter, not enough to prove to him that these are my stomping grounds? I mockingly replied, “Of course, where else would I be from?” To which he nodded slightly and responded, “Oh na I dey think sey maybe you bi from Canada or something” (I thought you were from Canada or America). I was stunned—was there a sign on my forehead that indicated where I spent most of the last year of my life? I felt like I had betrayed and exposed myself somehow. Instead, I replied, “Oh daabi oo, me firi ha” (Oh no, no, I am not from Canada, I am from here). In that moment, I chose to be Ghanaian, and only that.

### **Jess and Scilla**

We recount these disheartening experiences in the Motherland and accept them as a part of the process in discovering and assigning meaning to our identities. Our lives have been shaped by the invigorating sounds of djembe drums, the Ankara cloth that our mothers sewed into dresses, and the sweet taste of Red-Red (fried plantain and beans stew) all year round. On the other side of the world, we reminisce about tobogganing down steep hills as the scintillating sun reflects on freshly fallen snow, exploring various cities and hiking through hidden trails.

In both spaces, we dance through rejection as Black social workers in Canada and rejection as westernized Africans in Ghana. Through these attempts to belong, we have learnt to stand

somewhere in the middle—a place that requires constant unfurling of our identities that permit us to simultaneously exist as Ghanaian enough and Canadian enough.

### Conclusion

Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al. (2017) explain that strength—one of the four foundational principles of Indigenous Traditional Practice—is activated through truth-telling. Throughout this paper, we have endeavoured to uncover the complex truths of our racialized identities across local and global contexts. We dove into this exploration inspired by the artists of the Chale Wote Art Festival. Their relentless strength and courage in reclaiming their ancestral lands through transformative practices paved the way for the people of Jamestown to express themselves freely in unconventional ways. Throughout this paper, we interrogated the concept of performative Blackness, emphasized the power of language in charitable work, and addressed the significant impact of microaggressions on the well-being of racialized folks. Lastly, we narrated our experiences of belonging through rejection. Sharing our truth has required critical reflexivity of our identity formation throughout major life experiences. This process unearthed how the surveillance of Black bodies, internalized superiority, and post-colonialism collude to interfere with the authentic processes of citizenship-making and community-building. We end on this note of gratitude for the truths and learnings uncovered that will inform our processes of decolonizing social work practices.

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# Unpacking Afghan Truths

Saman Farah

**Abstract:** Decades of war, and yet Afghans continue to face adversity anywhere they go. This narrative sheds light on the current struggles of my experience as a Canadian Afghan Muslim woman who has been trying to educate those around me about the power imbalance and unethical divide between international communities and how Afghan women are viewed. This narrative discusses the importance of an intersectional approach while working with marginalized communities, such as Afghans, and practicing cultural humility, ethical reflexivity, truth-telling, and self-awareness.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Taliban, girl, decolonization

Beautiful Afghanistan. To many, this phrase may seem like an oxymoron, but to me, it is a phrase I grew up hearing. I am a Canadian Afghan Muslim woman who was born and raised in Canada. Ironically, even though my family fled a Western occupation, they fled to a Western land. In this narrative, I will provide some background on my upbringing and the difficulty that came with watching my homeland be bombed for decades. I will then highlight the struggle between my Afghan roots and Canadian culture that I constantly faced as a Canadian Afghan Muslim woman in Canada, a struggle many Canadian Afghan women face. This narrative will highlight intersectionality as a framework and the importance of cultural humility and sensitivity.

With gunshots ringing in their ears, and nothing but their clothes on their back, my parents fled war-torn Afghanistan to Canada. Living in a foreign country where they did not speak the language and their education was disregarded, my family persevered.

I often think to myself what my life would be like if my parents did not risk it all to give us the future that we currently have. My mother and father are both educated people that gave up all their dreams to flee their once-haven, Afghanistan. My siblings and I grew up listening to the wholesome stories of Afghanistan, how progressive it was—how much women had a voice, how they could work and go to school, and how they were allowed to dress how they liked. As a matter of fact, all of that was encouraged.

The complex political and economic insurgence has impacted Afghanistan throughout the years so intensely that it has led to the current humanitarian crisis where the Taliban have taken over the whole country, limiting opportunities for all citizens, especially women. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, the country was filled with weapons and terrorists that were educated and supported by Pakistan and the United States (Çetin, 2013). The United States, Canada, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, China, and other neighbouring countries played a crucial role in the war on terror which has led us to the current situation in Afghanistan (Rubin, 2015). The US and Canada going into Afghanistan was not for the wellbeing of the Afghans, nor to build peace on the land; it was for their own political agendas post-9/11 (Laurier Centre for the Study of Canada [LCSC], 2021). The Global North spent billions of dollars, and approximately 90

percent of it went towards the military, not towards the Afghans suffering nor organizations that could help gain some sort of peace and stability (LCSC, 2021). Afghanistan's government, under heavy influence from the US government, accepted a peace deal in February 2020 after intense negotiations to withdraw all NATO and US troops within 14 months—but this had little benefit for Afghans and more advantage for the US, as the Taliban made it known that they would continue using violence throughout the country (Boni, 2021). The Taliban claimed that they would have new and diverse rules for all citizens but did not explain the implications for women (Boni, 2021). Many barriers presented themselves as soon as troops were withdrawn, and Afghanistan is now, more than ever, in dire need of support (Boni, 2021).

Seeing this occur was a mixture of emotions; even though I have never been on Afghan land, I can say that this takeover left my family, loved ones in Afghanistan, and the whole Afghan diaspora in utter shock and disbelief that this was happening in the 21st century. The entire world watched while Afghans continuously suffered and were tortured. The world was silent; I only saw fellow Afghans speak on such matters. Our community did come together—however, what about everyone else? Many “non-Afghan friends” watched and turned a blind eye. Why did it not matter to them? Human beings were dying. Children were dying. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. Perhaps because it was not happening to those friends and their families? Was it because the victims were people of color? Muslim? “Uncivilized”? Why has poverty, abuse, violence, malnutrition, and preventable death become so normalized to watch in Afghanistan? It was clear that human lives that deserve attention are “civilized” white communities; I feel when Ukrainians needed our support, we funded them, raised awareness, and welcomed them into our countries with open arms. As we should have—they needed our support and that is what should be expected of international communities. However, why is it that when Afghan lives, Yemeni lives, Palestinian lives, and Syrian lives are the ones in question, the same support does not seem to be offered? International communities that have caused this war can easily sleep at night, and we must continue to suffer? The harm caused by colonialism, white supremacy, racism, sexism, capitalism, ableism, ageism, and other social relations based on systemic inequalities and greed are continuously growing and we have done nothing for our marginalized communities (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) & Carniol, 2017). The Western world continues to hide behind the war that they raged as a “war on terror.” Instead, this was a war on civilians; Afghanistan is now stained with the blood of not terrorists, but innocent lives. Innocents with hopes, dreams, and fears just like you and I.

Throughout my entire first semester, I was the only person who spoke on the atrocities of Afghan people, especially Afghan women, to social workers. How have these issues not made others reconsider what is wrong with the world? Why can we not open our eyes to see that the world we presently live in has more issues around lack of humanity than we know?

To think that professionals are going out into the world, without the humility or recognition that we are all part of the problem, speaks to the internal issues we must raise our voices about. If we are not as a collective working together, adversity anywhere will never stop. Social workers that are being educated within institutions need to be aware of what is happening in Afghanistan and around the world, and how they can help.

I have had difficulty walking in my female, Muslim, Canadian Afghan identity. Though I know how privileged I am in the positionality I hold, I often find myself feeling extremely guilty to see the Global South fall apart.

I see money being taken away from this country to fuel more violence within it. I see greed, power, and privilege taking over, because they can.

My heart also feels extremely heavy for the many women who have been stripped away from their passion, their education, and their jobs. These women are me; I am these women. I see my mother, my sister, my cousins all reflected within these women. These women once had dreams, dreams of going to school and pursuing further education to break their cycle of poverty, dreams to work meaningful careers, dreams of having food on the table and a safe place to sleep.

These women dream to practice freedom of speech without the worry of their wavering voices being the reason for their death.

Afghan women want to be known for more than their traumas and oppression. The discourse around Afghan women needs to change; the world needs to understand that Afghan women, like all other women, are strong, capable, and worthy.

As a Muslim Canadian-Afghan woman, I feel that many Afghan women have never felt heard or valued, and their truths are never told. Their stories never heard. Their tears never seen. Their cries never felt. The practice of decolonization connects back to our social work Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers, 2021) as the dignity of the people we work with come first, along with social justice which includes economic, social, political, and environmental justice (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) & Carniol, 2017). Further, anti-oppressive ethical practices acknowledge the past and allow space for it through understanding the histories that have led to individuals' intersecting oppressions, which is exactly what needs to happen for communities such as Afghans and Afghan immigrants.

Accepting history, allowing space for it, and decolonizing is an active and ongoing practice that we all must engage in to interrupt the continuing oppressive cycle that we live in. This itself is an ethical response when working with communities with intersecting determinants (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) & Carniol, 2017).

The framework of intersectionality is vital to deconstructing and understanding the ongoing power imbalance, privilege, along with the implicit and explicit violence that such marginalized communities like Afghans have been facing (Bubar et al., 2016). Intersectionality locates an individual's social positionality, including their race, gender, class, sexuality, and how these all interact with one another. Intersectionality connects such factors back to the structures and larger systems responsible for oppressing marginalized identities (Bubar et al., 2016). Bubar and colleagues (2016) note in their article words of Patricia Hill Collins (1990), who in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* stated, "intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (p. 18).

We must avoid the individualistic framework that is pushed on North Americans because we can make a difference and put pressure on international communities to intervene and stop injustices happening worldwide. As Kennedy-Kish (Bell) and Carniol (2017) state, when beliefs created through the -isms are psychologically internalized generation after generation, it further disempowers the already oppressed populations—for example, the Afghans who do make it out of the country—by continuously normalizing the divide of one community having an unethical privilege over the other based on multiple layers of oppression.

Cultural sensitivity and humility play a big role in ethical practice of intersectionality, as understanding, learning, and appreciating other cultures can begin to bring forth new changes within our society. Jisrawi and Arnold (2018) wrote a powerful article on the importance of cultural humility and mental health care among Canadian Muslim communities that highlights the collective impact of individual and institutional accountability. Holding yourself and the institution you work for accountable for creating safe spaces that allow for a culturally sensitive approach to healing is essential to supporting marginalized communities. It allows for a more genuine and stronger therapeutic alliance to form. Jisrawi and Arnold (2018), in paraphrasing Ratts et al. (2015), stated:

The purpose of ongoing introspection is for practitioners to critically analyze their own biases, prejudices, assumptions, and preconceptions, and to identify how their upbringing and cultural conditioning produces a worldview that can be reflected in their work which is sometimes to the detriment of the client. (p. 46)

Graduate students must be exposed to training on cultural humility throughout their education in institutions they work for and from the professors they are learning from (Jisrawi & Arnold, 2018). Jisrawi and Arnold emphasized the importance of cultural humility and—when practiced at an institutional level—the amount of change it can bring forth to practitioners, clients, and communities.

Being culturally aware allows you to understand the marginalized populations in a more effective manner that validates their traumas and history. Actively engaging in decolonizing through practicing cultural sensitivity, cultural humility, active listening, truth-telling, ethical reflexivity and self-awareness will allow us a chance to rebuild relationships and alliances with marginalized communities (Kennedy-Kish (Bell) & Carniol, 2017). Applying this to Afghanistan, we will be able to help Afghan immigrants and refugees understand and process their trauma.

This anti-oppressive social work lens will break the barriers and biases that affect us as social workers in the field. This will allow us as social workers to engage more ethically on micro, mezzo, and macro levels through ethical client interactions and ethical effective policies by welcoming the application of an intersectional framework.

Through this narrative, I have showcased the challenges Afghanistan has consistently faced for decades. To tackle these difficulties, we must critically analyze through an intersectional framework and approach marginalized communities with cultural humility and sensitivity. As

Afghanistan has persevered, my family has too. Through war and violence, Afghans have remained resilient. Through colonizing, Afghans have remained true to their culture. Through decades' of turmoil, Afghans have emerged stronger than ever.

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