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School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the Graduate Project Exhibition or Film Project prepared

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This book brings together writings based on the project *Yours to Discover* created by the author in 2019 - 2020. The visual portion of this projects consists of images and a short video piece, which can be found online on the artist's website or by request. The written portion of this project began as personal explorations and reflections on praxis. They pertain to the aforementioned project but also serve as a guide to the artist's mode of thinking and making.

Yours to Discover

writings by Zinnia Naqvi

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Land Acknowledgement

I have conflicted feelings towards land acknowledgements as there has been much discourse today as to if they are considered an empty gesture for the delivering party to alleviate their own guilt or feel as if they are taking a step towards reconciliation. I choose to include the land acknowledgement because what I like most about them is their meditative potential. The gesture might be empty and futile, but it does also help to shape our minds and constantly remind ourselves of our encroachment and our privileges as settlers. Chelsea Vowel explains,

If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgments discomfit both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence

should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands.¹

The work in this project involves sites that exist on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat,² Anishinaabe³, Huron-Wendat, and Anishinabewaki. Currently I am living and working on the lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal.⁴ These lands have been nurtured by a diverse group of people with distinct customs, languages, beliefs and traditions which have been and continued to be persecuted by the crown and government of so-called Canada.

I am writing this at this moment while peaceful protesters trying to protect Wet'suwet'en lands are being arrested and facing violence from the RCMP. Protesters from the Tyendinaga community have occupied the railway tracks near Belleville, Ontario, and others around this nation have followed suit in solidarity. This occupation has forced the cancellation of commercial and passenger trains in the eastern part of the country, causing economic ramifications and a halt to business

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- 1 Chelsea Vowel, "Beyond Territorial Acknowledgments," *âpihtawikosisân*, January 25, 2017, <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>
- 2 "Land Acknowledgement," City of Toronto (City of Toronto), accessed February 22, 2020, <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/land-acknowledgement/>
- 3 Shelby Knox, "Niagara Regional Council Meetings to Begin with Indigenous Land Acknowledgement," *iHeartRadio* (NewsTalk 610 CKTB, July 27, 2018), <https://www.iheartradio.ca/610cktb/news/niagara-regional-council-meetings-to-begin-with-indigenous-land-acknowledgement-1.4313934>
- 4 "Territorial Acknowledgement," *Territorial acknowledgement* (Concordia University), accessed February 22, 2020, <https://www.concordia.ca/about/indigenous/territorial-acknowledgement.html>

as usual in Canada. I find this kind of active protest hugely moving. These concrete acts of resistance illustrate the linkage between policing, industry and nationalism in this country. These are themes that run deeply through my work and will be explored further in the following essays.

I do not consider myself an activist, but rather an artist who hopes to poke holes and draw lines through my experience as a child of immigrant settlers. In this work, I do not seek to provide answers but simply ask more questions. I hope that pointing to my own position and implication in the colonial project can be a step towards forming new insights and actions. Perhaps it is still very gestural, but as we ask these questions we encourage more people to question, and every little push can make a step towards lasting change.

The Album

The family album could be considered the spine of my practice. I have worked with family images from the very beginning of my career. I often say that I don't remember whether I was drawn to this subject matter on my own, or because I was encouraged by my peers and professors. Although I grew up in a very culturally diverse suburb of Toronto, the environment of art school was relatively homogenous. In fact, before I came to university, I don't think I had truly experienced what it meant to be a minority. Suddenly in a very different environment, one in which I was encouraged to express myself, I felt the need to speak about this in my work.

Despite my accomplishments, there has always been a lingering feeling of resentment towards the idea that I was making the kind of work that an artist of colour is expected to make. I am reluctant to speak about "the immigrant experience" as a two-sided coin—to sort experiences binarily as here and there, then and now. In the beginning of my practice, I did make work that does just this. As I move forward, I aim to make work that

complicates these concepts of belonging, community and familial history. At a certain point, looking back to a time in which I myself was not a part of, begins to feel contrived and redundant. Nonetheless, looking back is also an essential part of understanding how to move forward. How can we find a way to look critically at evidence from the past and produce new means to help us understand our current reality?

With this new project, I wanted to find a way to return to my family album but also speak about my own experience. The archival photos included in this series were taken before I was born, however, the sites where they were taken resonate with me as I visited them many times as a child. The games and props featured in the photos are from my childhood. References to books and research offer a glimpse into my thought process as I asked what these vernacular images were trying to tell me. I look to the past in order to better understand the present.

Gabrielle Moser speaks about Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn's project *the Making of an Archive* in "Porous Sounds: Frequencies of Refusal in Diasporic Family Photographs," a project in which Nuygun has vernacular images of immigrant families across Canada.⁵ Moser writes "Family photography is a productive and forceful genre through which racialized subjects picture themselves as citizens in Canada."⁶ It is a moment in which we preserve our experiences of interacting with the landscape that houses our new reality.

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5 Gabrielle Moser, "Porous Sounds: Frequencies of Refusal in Diasporic Family Photographs." in *The Making of an Archive: Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn* (Vancouver: Grunt Gallery, 2017)) 69–90.

6 Ibid, 71

Moser quotes Dallas Hunt in speaking about these felt archives, "which communicate a shared experience of migration and a common context of settler colonialism," and creating historical evidence that can be felt as well as theorized and analyzed. This helps individuals theorize their own experiences.⁷ "The stories people tell about their family albums are rich and sustaining frameworks that help the viewer to draw connections between subjects and contextualize events."⁸

I'm still not sure what compelled me to work with the family album to begin with, but I know now that I look to it to create a felt archive. I can apply a critical lens to images produced throughout mine and my family's life, and to the experiences that have brought us here. From this point of entry, I infer broader connections to the structures that have brought me to where I am. In this work and in this text, theory and writing serve as architecture for my own intuitive knowledge—what I gain from knowing the people in the photographs, the places they have been, what came before and what came after. This knowledge also gives me the comfort and trust to use and manipulate these images in ways I see fit. Knowing the people in the images allows me to feel confident in their representation. If somehow one of the subjects feels I have misrepresented them, I know that the community will hold me accountable. As I use the archive as a way to look back at the past, it is a key tool in trying to understand my future.

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7 Ibid, 78

8 Ibid, 78

In the Studio

While I was pursuing an undergraduate degree in photography, the studio was intended to be the primary place to shoot photos—a cavernous room filled with backdrops, curtains, large flashes, and expensive equipment. About a dozen partitions called “bays” were sectioned off with heavy, black velvet curtains.

There was no natural light in these spaces, and you could only book a bay for a few hours at a time. The bays were often in high demand, especially at peak times of the academic year. In maybe two or three hours, you were expected to set up your shoot, arrange heavy and expensive lighting equipment, get your work done, and then take it all down. There was very little time for play or experimentation. If not handled properly, the equipment could burn you, crush your hands, or break and cost you hundreds of dollars. I did sustain a few unfortunate injuries in this space. As you tried to shoot, other students’ flashes and strobe lights would go off in the adjacent bays, spilling into yours. A queue of impatient students might be waiting for your spot. This absurd setup made everyone run around at hyper

speed and full of anxiety. One small mistake could lead to a total re-shoot. I hated this space. I found it very intimidating and avoided using it.

A studio like this is the photographer's equivalent to a blank canvas. A neutral space. It's up to you to set up the tools and make something. I've never had much interest in a blank canvas.

Because of this overlap in the lexicon of photography, between the photographer's studio and the artist's studio, I never really understood what one was supposed to do in the latter. At Concordia, the Photography program had to fight for many years to get artists' studios for graduate students. The students had darkrooms, printing facilities and studios for shooting, which was thought to be enough. Subsequently, this was the first institution to give me an actual workspace. I think learning how to conduct oneself in a designated workspace is a critical first step towards developing as a professional artist.

I recently came across this series called *The Artists' Studio* by photographer Joseph Hartman. He travelled across Canada to photograph artists' studios. In an interview with Leah Sandals about the project he talks about the uniqueness and intimacy of each artist's space. He also touches on the fact that many of the artists' spaces he has photographed have ceased to exist, particularly in cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, as a result of gentrification.⁹ Sandals goes on to ask:

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 9 Leah Sandals, "Photographing the Artist's Studio—More Than 100 Times Over," *CanadianArt* (*CanadianArt*, June 13, 2017), <https://canadianart.ca/features/joseph-hartman-the-artists-studio/>

LS: What about art that doesn't fit in a studio practice? Or that is a post-studio practice, done on a laptop or in a community or in a camera? Most of the artists in your project focus on painting and sculpture—traditionally studio-based mediums. But that's not the only kind of art that gets made nowadays.

JH: We are in an age where, because of digital technology, you can make art without a studio, you can have your photographs or 3-D prints or sculptures made off site, and you don't even have to have much of a studio, just a work desk. More and more artists are moving and making that way. The reason I didn't photograph any of those, though, is that I felt that act of making the artwork on site was very important to the photographs. That is why I stuck mainly to painters and sculptors.¹⁰

The irony in this statement is seeping through the pages. Hartman, a photographer himself, has decided that those like him—photographers and other users of digital or non-tactile mediums—and those who simply can't afford a space, were unfit to be included in his series. As a consequence of the current real-estate crisis in Canada, many artists are unable to access affordable workspaces and must instead work from home or their laptop.¹¹ I wish Hartman, or perhaps someone else entirely, would document how artists working without

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 10 Ibid.

11 Raq's Media Collective. "How to Be an Artist by Night," in *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 71-81)

designated spaces are adapting their practices. It is a reality facing too many.

One of the reasons I decided to move to Montreal was real estate. As the cost of living is significantly lower here than in most cities, studios are plentiful and affordable. Here I was able to take the studio out of the dark and into the light—a room with large bright windows and white walls. A place where I could set things up and leave them there for long periods of time. Look at them for many weeks before I took any photos. Try out various tests and arrangements. I took digital test shots with my phone, looked at them, showed them to friends, posted them on Instagram, before I was ready to shoot the final images.

At first I definitely did not know how to make use of the space. I would say that most of my artmaking happens in my head. While speaking to a friend of mine, we called this the “incubation period”. You incubate on an idea for many weeks, months, years. You think about it a little at a time. You look at other art and that helps you think about your own art. In that sense, going to exhibitions or artist talks is also part of the incubation period.

In Raqs Media Collective’s essay, *How to be an Artist by Night*, they describe the perils of artmaking in a “continually burgeoning culture industry.”¹² Artists who graduate from institutions often have to spend time being “no collar”¹³ workers by day and artists by night. There is continuous pressure to balance this work and that work. Nevermind that it isn’t enough for

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12 Ibid, 73

13 Those who obtain whatever kind of employment necessary in order to fund their artistic practice. This could vary from being a studio assistant, working for a cultural institution, or working in the service industry.

artists to simply create, but they are expected to constantly innovate. “The fear of irrelevance, obsolescence, and marginality haunts many younger practitioners, and the pressure to exhibit as an artist is almost as lethal as the pressure to innovate as a cultural worker or entrepreneur.”¹⁴ “What is missing in this frantic supply-chain is time and care, and the ability to reflect on one’s own practice.”¹⁵

Raqs suggests that a solution to this problem is a self-reflexive artist’s practice. The practice itself becomes a space for the artist to think through ideas and present them to the public. The benefits of this strategy is that “Here, making is thinking, and learning is what occurs at the instance of activity. Praxis is theory.”¹⁶

I do agree with Raq’s overall propositions towards using practice as a space to think, reflect, make comparisons and visual puzzles. Here you can invite the audience to try to understand your thinking work, and a little of what happens in the studio.

However, I also believe there is a line to be tip-toed in this realm. In the essay, the authors go on to name attributes that reflexive work should contain, such as embedded criticality, unintended consequences, and radical incompleteness. This brings to mind trends I have seen in contemporary art right now, for artists to simply display different parts of a project, such as research components and ephemera, and leave it to the audience to make the connections. I find this kind of work can be very demanding and inconsiderate of the audience. Those who come to the gallery space rarely

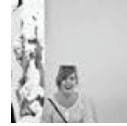
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14 Raq’s Media Collective. “How to Be an Artist by Night,” 74

15 Ibid, 74

16 Ibid, 76

have the time or patience to spend hours with a single work, no matter how much they would like to.

The key is to create a work that both has immediate and lasting impact on an audience, through visual language, while also creating a space for those who wish to dive deeper. This is the power that visual art has, to use various techniques to draw in a large audience while also creating space for intense criticality. I think regularly about how intimidating a space the cultural institution can be for those who do not frequent it. I do not wish to speak to only the no-collar workers, but also the teachers, security guards, administrators, and children who are invited into the gallery. It is a very difficult place to inhabit, but one that I strive to make for my work.



Apr 15, 2019,
11:52 AM

Hannah Strauss <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>

to Lauren, me, Jessica, Lise, ParkEugene

Hi folks! I hope you're all doing well in the midst of your studio/life work. Now that I'm finally done my thesis my brain has space again and is starting to overflow with ideas for collaborative projects, so I decided to just get started connecting with a few people and sharing ideas and see where it goes!

One of the things I thought about a lot this year working on my drawings and books was an un-monumental approach to historical documents and events. I love the humility of works on paper as a reflection of the obscure or marginal in historical record. I also think of marginalia as a kind of speculative intervention into more fixed records. I wonder if there are ways of thinking about the "excess" of production and minor objects in the studio as marginalia which could be really interesting when brought into contact with other objects of the same type. I'm thinking about sketches, maquettes, failed attempts, notes, open tabs.

So I was wondering if any of you would be interested in compiling a collection of small works/images/objects as a type of "marginalia" of your practice, either into an exhibition proposal, a works exchange, or a book form? Or maybe you know of something like this that already exists, which I'd also just be interested to see.

Feel free to pass along to others who might have an affinity for the idea!



Apr 15, 2019,
4:49 PM

Zinnia Naqvi <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>

to Hannah, Lauren, Jessica, Lise, ParkEugene

Hi Hannah,

I love this idea and would like to talk about it more in person. I have been working on a writing piece kind of on the back burner but it might end up making its way into my thesis. It is more about thinking about the studio practice and how working through ideas is supposed to look like. Or how we are supposed to behave in the studio. As a photo and video based artist my formal studio practice is pretty new to me, and until recently I didn't have a lot of physical remnants to depict how I am "working through ideas".

I am reminded of this project by Micah Lexier One Two and More Than Two that was shown at the Power Plant a few years ago (<http://www.thepowerplant.org/exhibitions/2013/fall/micah-lexier.aspx>). He asked over 100 artists to contribute ephemera or remnants from their studio practice and displayed them in long vitrines. As a response artist Basil Alzeri also made the project You Do What You Love Because You Do One Two and More than Two (<http://basilalzeri.com/projects/1321/>) in which he asked another hundred artists to contribute remnants from their day jobs which help fund their studio practice.

Would like to find time to talk about it more soon!

On Format

Still-life is a genre I never imagined I would dabble in. I came to photography through the genre of documentary, and at first I wanted to be a photojournalist. In university I realized that I don't have the temperament to work in photojournalism. I don't like to carry a camera on me at all times or be in the middle of action. I like to work slowly and process my ideas over time.

All of my work has included in some way, performance for the camera, usually with human subjects as the focus. With this project, I wanted to create a similar kind of performance with objects rather than people. The objects are arranged in a precarious and unnatural way, to emphasize the fickleness and spontaneity of the concepts I am merging in the images. These set-ups could not exist in the gallery space—even a light breeze would knock them down. Their positions are preserved for the camera and only that moment.

For this work I drew particular inspiration from the techniques of artist Leslie Hewitt, particularly the *Riffs*

on *Real Time* (2002) and *Still Life* (2013) series.¹⁷ Hewitt is an African American artist who works in photography, sculpture, video, text and assemblage. She was born in 1977 in Saint Albans, New York, and earned a BFA from the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, and an MFA in sculpture from Yale University.¹⁸

When I first came across Hewitt's photos online, I was not overly impressed but rather saw them as a call to minimalism and sculpture. However, when I started examining them more closely, I started to understand and pick up on the political implications of her work.

Many critics draw comparisons between Hewitt's work and Dutch vanitas paintings. What I love about this comparison is that visually, the two works are completely different. I have never been a big fan of European Renaissance painting, and I was skeptical of the comparison between the two genres. I thought predominantly white critics must be fabricating comparisons in order to fit Hewitt's work within the canon of European art history. It surprised me, then, to hear Hewitt's statement, when asked about this parallel in an interview with Julia Wolkoff from 2017: "I began to reread Dutch still life through a sociopolitical lens. This artistic form emerged at the beginning of global capitalism and the intensification of our relationship to displaced objects, things we don't make ourselves."¹⁹ She talks about the loaded nature of these paintings as referencing time, globalization, industry and more. Her contemporary counterpoint for this genre is thinking

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17 Julia Wolkoff, "Leslie Hewitt: In The Studio," *Art in America*, September 2017, pp. 108-115)

18 "Leslie Hewitt," *Guggenheim Collection Online* (2020 Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation), accessed January 2, 2020, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/leslie-hewitt>

19 Julia Wolkoff, pp. 108

about the immateriality of images, as well as creating a space which flattens and distorts the ways in which we collect objects.

She creates instead "visual puzzles"²⁰ that examine how we construct meaning between images and objects, doing so in a way that suggests "many concurrent histories and experiences."²¹ "I select objects and arrange them to suggest different meanings without a directive or a didactic mode of address."²² Hewitt says that the process for creating her works can start out as impulsive or irrational, but then goes through self-imposed stages of logic or structure.

I have very much borrowed this technique from Hewitt in order to create my still lives. I began with the images as a source document, and then chose corresponding objects to illustrate the ideas I am imposing onto the images. I have had to create certain boundaries or rules for each arrangement, which perhaps are only visible to myself. The sites I am dealing with in these images have been photographed by millions of people and exist in many public archives, but I chose to limit myself to only use my own family's images, and only from a few particular years, in order for some limit and consistency in aesthetic. Using my own family's images affords me a certain sense of freedom with regards to how they can be manipulated. Ultimately, my own family's experiences are illustrative of how millions of other people interact with these spaces. They are just specific examples that pertain to my upbringing.

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20 Ibid, 109

21 Ibid, 109

22 Ibid, 115

Hewitt says when asked about her childhood and her parents, “This probably sounds strange to say now, but home was a politicized space.”²³ She talks about how her mother attended the March on Washington in 1963. She and her brothers would spend hours studying a documentary series about the March, trying to spot their mother on the screen. They did not succeed, but Hewitt learned to pay attention to less central stories, not only that of Martin Luther King but of all the people in the crowd. She learned to appreciate how individual stories create a support structure for a central experience. Hewitt states, “The snapshots that I choose to include in my works, for example, don’t always depict my personal family, but they do show manicured lawns or other little hints that complicate the conventional notion of the black experience.”²⁴

This work embraces both the domestic and studio spaces as sites of production, something I find deeply resonant—especially since, for many artists today, they are one in the same.²⁵ While Hewitt does maintain a strategic distance between the inclusion of her body and her work, she says that if there is anything intrinsically feminine about the work, it is the use of the domestic space. She likens the home or the domestic to the womb—a space for incubation, tests, nurturing, and safety. By extension, one can say the same about the home studio.

One thing that drew me to her work as an inspiration is the perceived quietness of its politics. I mean “quiet” in the sense that the political is not the first thing one would notice about the work. At first glance, these works are sculptural, and draw parallels to minimal-

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23 Ibid,111

24 Ibid, 114

25 Ibid, 115

ism. Closer readings of the work reveal deliberate political and historical allegories. Only those who dare to spend time with her work will be able to read those connections.

Hewitt strategically fills her photographs with political undercurrents that aren’t apparent to the untrained eye, giving her work a marketable edge. She says “I select objects and arrange them to suggest different meanings without a directive or a didactic mode of address.”²⁶ The work could be collected by a private buyer, a gallery or museum. It could just as easily hang in a home or in an educational institution. To me, this is a clever way to draw in a broad public while in a sense, tricking them into buying into your politics.

In comparison to this project, my work centers my political views and ongoing critique of the structures that form my experience of identity. I use a similar strategy, to try to make works that are visually appealing, yet also centre my political beliefs. For the viewer who does not want to engage in that level of the work, they may focus purely on aesthetics, but they would be missing my central position on the way the images have been arranged. Through closely looking at Hewitt’s work I began to understand how to use beauty as a strategy, to engage the viewer in the first glance, and tempt them to engage in my politics if they have the will.

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26 Ibid, 114

A Manifesto, A Strategy

1. The white curator working in a predominantly South Asian suburb, wants you to bring more traffic into the gallery by somehow featuring brown bodies on the side of her building. You are concerned about what putting these bodies on display for the public means for you. Why have *you* been tasked with this responsibility? You consider asking people from the community to participate in your project. But it immediately becomes clear that this would merely be extending the gallery's exploitation of you to a community of people you don't know. The conclusion is that making work about yourself and your family is the simplest and most ethical way to deal with the situation.
2. You are concerned about constantly using your family's archived experience in the work. You are worried this makes you seem obsessed with your own migration story and history. You have worked hard to move away

from this and try new things, but people keep responding to your older work which prominently displays your family's stories and bodies. You are worried these projects seem too nostalgic. People keep responding to the nostalgia. The white curator has asked you to make work that is more like what you made before. You think about an honest way to do this.

3. You realize that trying new things and constantly reinventing yourself in every new project is bad for your personal economy. People respond well to repetition—they like knowing what you have done and what you will do. There is no shame in having an aesthetic and working a certain way. In fact, it is profitable. It is actually a recipe for success, even though for some reason, you always feel guilty about doing similar things.
4. Rather than constantly repeating yourself and doing what you have done before, you decide to search for a strategy to subvert the gaze. You realize using your family archive is really akin to using any public archive, like that of a library or museum. The difference is that you have unlimited access to it and a sense of ownership over it. You feel entitled to this archive because you know who is in it and who took the photos, even if you yourself are not in them. You are not worried that a relative might someday find themselves on the side of a building, because you know who they are. Your migration story is no more unique than someone else's story, other than the fact that you have access to it. White artists use found footage and archives all the time, and they

don't feel bad about it. You should not feel bad about using your own.

5. Now, how to subvert this gaze? How to give the white curator what she wants so that she will happily pay you, while also working to critically subvert her ignorant premise? This is the hard part. So far the way to do this seems to be by using theory and symbolism and metaphors. Making visual puns. You thought composing still lives that are political in content and yet visually playful and intriguing might be the best way to do this. Humour is always a successful strategy for being critical while making it palatable for the white curator and audience.²⁷

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27 This project began as a site-specific installation for a regional gallery in Ontario. Working with this gallery was one of the worst experiences I have had in the art world. While I did my best to maintain distance between the experience from the work itself, the outcome of the project was undeniably influenced by it. I started writing this manifesto when I was first approached by the gallery, and I have completed it as a reminder to myself going forward.

On performance, and including the body of the artist

I frequently question using my family members' bodies and my own in my work. It feels appropriate in the studio setting, but it's a different story when the work goes into a gallery or institution. I pay close attention to how these bodies may change the image of that institution, how they end up performing otherness for visitors to the space in question. Many of the artists I admire, especially artists who are women of colour, have implicated their own likenesses into their work in order to point to larger themes of nationalism and culture.

For inspiration for this project, I turned to the work of photographer Jin Me Yoon, an artist known for pointing to Canada's national icons. Particularly her work *Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise)* stands as an active intervention between the artist and the Canadian landscape. Andrea Kunard recalls Yoon's "unflinching

gaze” in this iconic image.²⁸ She describes the artist’s position as being an act of intervention, intended to make clear the political and cultural values in both the body and the landscape. She asks;

But who stands comfortably in such a landscape? An Asian woman is not necessarily at ease here, an idea the artist highlights by assuming a rigid pose for the camera. Yoon’s awkward stance indicates that certain places are connected with specific types of histories and identities, while others are marginalized or ignored.²⁹

Susette Min highlights the performative acts in this work. “Yoon’s work has always been ‘performative’ in the sense in which Judith Butler describes it: ‘not as singular or deliberate act, but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.’”³⁰ Yoon’s use of performance can be a form of embodying and understanding the ideas that she is putting forward.

But why do these women use themselves in these interventions, rather than inviting other people to appear in their work? I’m sure there are various different reasons in each case. In my experience, using my own body is a way to implicate myself in the work, and also make myself vulnerable to my audience and the critique I am posing.

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28 Andrea Kunard, “Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise) by Jin-Me Yoon” pp. 18

29 Ibid, 18

30 Susette Min, “Nature Calls: Jin Me Yoon’s Unbidden,” in *Unbidden: Jin Me Yoon* (Kamloops, BC: Kamloops Art Gallery, 2004), pp. 25-38)

In “Into Another Skin - Women and Self Portraiture,” Anna Kovler takes a close look at women artists who have chosen to include their own likenesses in their work. She focuses on the work of Carrie Mae Weems, as she was the featured artist for the Contact Photo Festival in 2019. Weems is famously quoted as saying that she started using herself in her images because she did not like directing others.³¹ I think this is very common for many artists who choose self-portraiture. It creates a sense of intimacy between the artist and the camera that does not need to be explained to an outside party. The thought-process can unfold organically. She is also quoted as saying that using herself in her images does not make them about her specifically, but references “something larger”.³² Kovler explains that “This flexibility allows Weems to strategically shape-shift, softening the boundaries of the self, allowing her to seep into other people and allowing others to constitute her.”³³

Kovler describes that the artists who use themselves in their work sometimes worry about “exhibitionism” or seeming self-involved. I can say from experience that this is definitely true. However in this case, I often think of the writer’s proverb of “write what you know,” or in this case, “shoot what you know.” I can’t possibly know anyone else better than I know myself, which is why it makes sense to include my own body in the work, especially when the subject matter is personal. Kovler also states that “Preference for auto-fiction over straight auto-biography, a genre that, by dissolving the boundary between fiction and nonfiction, comes clos-

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31 Anna Kovler, “Into Another Skin - Women and Self Portraiture,” *Border Crossings*, Issue 152. December 2019, pp. 93-100)

32 Ibid, 95

33 Ibid, 99

est to capturing the actual influence of fantasies, stories and constructions upon the ‘real’ world.”³⁴

The only performance piece in my current project is *I’m getting a bit dizzy from the sun and the heat (Another desi with a camera)*—a departure from the format of the other works, but a necessary intervention. It was the first time I’ve performed the role of strangers instead of reperforming images of my family. In this instance, I allowed intuition to drive my choices. It is also the first time including my face in images I have made.

When I saw these images of crowds that my father had taken at Niagara Falls in 1988, the tension between an unknown man and woman immediately caught my eye. Something about them struck me as in need of further exploration. In my piece, I took the woman’s place and asked my partner to step in as the man. I see this woman as someone who is the same generation as my mother. I imagine her feeling of excitement and confusion as she tries to understand a new country and culture. I also imagine her discomfort with the way she is treated by men like the one sitting next to her. She experiences a feeling not of blatant discrimination, but rather tension and discontent. You can tell that the person next to you is on edge and uncomfortable. You begin to question what it is about yourself that could be making them feel this way. This resonates with me as I have been in similar situations in my life.

As I place myself in her shoes I wonder what role desirability has played in my relationships, primarily my relationship with my long-term partner. He looks similar to this man and I look similar to this woman, yet we have been able to foster an intimacy between us, because of time, place, class, education, language,

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and a variety of other factors that have created a commonality between us. This is not the same as this man and woman. Of course I am making a myriad of assumptions based purely on these images, but as I place myself in her shoes, I wonder if the dynamic between myself and my partner would be very different if I had not grown up here in Canada under very different circumstances.

I am reminded as I write this, of Jeff Wall’s famous image *Mimic*, in which he chose to recreate an instance of racism that he witnessed on the streets of Vancouver.³⁵ Wall had actors re-perform the tension and body language that visually compose a scene of discrimination. Though years later, Wall has debunked that the racial tension in his photo was his primary impetus for making this work, perhaps due to his discomfort in addressing the subject matter.

Unlike Wall, I am reading a racial tension into these found images, and choosing to understand them through re-performance, rather in the way that Susette Min describes Yoon’s work.

I’m applying this harsh critical lens to a relationship with someone I love and share my life with. It is important to acknowledge that choosing a partner like this, and positioning myself in close proximity to whiteness, affords me certain privileges. I am very aware of how this choice affects all aspects of my life including my art practice.

It is my first time acknowledging something that I think is very sensitive and affects many, particularly

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35 Walter Benn Michaels, “The Politics of a Good Picture: Race, Class, and Form in Jeff Wall’s *Mimic*,” *Modern Language Association* 125, no. 1 (January 2010): pp. 177-184, <https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2010.125.1.177>

women-identifying artists of colour. How do we carry the legacies of our unique identities forward, when our relationship to them might be frail and thin? I myself, don't participate in most of my cultural traditions and speak my mother tongue as a novice. If I choose to have children, I know their relationship to my heritage will be much further strained. It is difficult to be critical when my own identity is becoming more assimilated into the dominant white culture the older I get. But these too, are questions I feel I must start to bring into my practice as I move forward.

Ontario - *Yours to Discover*

Welcome to the world around you, blue skies and breath-taking Northern vistas, rolling hills, towering forests, 400,000 inland lakes, glorious gorges, thundering falls, and miles and miles of untamed wilds. Welcome to our gentler nature, fields, and pastures, market gardens, vineyards, orchards, winding by-ways and all our smaller, quiet places. Welcome to the celebrations, plays, and playgrounds, Pow Wows, parades, Pioneer Days, pageants and spectacular ceremonials, horse-shows, rodeos, strawberry socials, fairs and festivals, and city lights — a feast of cultures, yours to enjoy, Ontario — yours to discover.³⁶ Quote from a newspaper advertisement published on May 1, 1980.

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36 Jamie Bradburn, “And You’re Gonna Love It: How Ontario Became ‘Yours to Discover,’” *TVO - Current Stories* (TVO, April 5, 2019), <https://www.tvos.org/article/and-youre-gonna-love-it-how-ontario-became-yours-to-discover>

In 2017, I was invited by Toronto-based collective Sad Art Store to create a set of keychains as an artist's multiple, under the theme of "Tourist in your Own Home." According to the mandate on their website, the collective explores "experiences that are shared and expressed through products that harbor nostalgic connection and concepts of consumerism in relation to our cultural identity and the consumption/expression of visual culture."³⁷ For this project, I decided to use photos taken by my family in the late 1980s, when my parents came to visit my mother's sister, who was already living in Canada. During that trip, they visited major tourist sites, mostly in the Greater Toronto Area. At the time, my parents had already thought of applying for Canadian immigration, and shortly afterwards they decided to go through with it. My family immigrated to Canada in February of 1991, and I was born later that year in November.

My father used to say that when he moves to a new place, he likes to try to see it as if he were a tourist. Throughout my childhood, my family continued to visit the same tourist sites over and over again, particularly Niagara Falls, the CN Tower, and Cullen Gardens. We relied on these sites to show relatives when they visited what exactly Canada was like.

As I began to work on this project, I started to question the attractions my family had frequented. I wondered why these specific sites had been pinned as tourist destinations. What exactly were visitors meant to learn about Canada when we visit places like large national parks, giant waterfalls, historical buildings, or amusement parks. Lucy R. Lippard asks this question in *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place*—"When we

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 37 Emmett Phan, "Mandate," *Sad Art Store*, July 28, 2017, <http://www.sadartstore.com/>

are tourists elsewhere seeing the sights, how often do we stop and wonder who chose the sights we are seeing and how they have been constructed for us?"³⁸

Lippard describes the tension of the local, which can be particularly complicated for those who have recently moved to the places they are meant to call home. They have a different sense of responsibility towards these locations. "Tourists may long for warmth, beauty and exoticism whereas locals may long for escape, progress, and improved economy."³⁹ Tourism is essentially the act of looking around—something that is more difficult to do critically in a familiar place. Lippard states "If we spent half the energy looking at our own neighbourhoods, we'd probably learn twice as much."⁴⁰

This concept can prove especially puzzling if you are a diasporic artist who constantly has to question (or is always being asked) where exactly you are "from". You may have spent your entire life in one part of the world, but when you leave that place, people you meet always want to pin you to another place, maybe even someplace you aren't at all familiar with. I was recently contacted by a high school art teacher from the Peel Region who was speaking to a group of students about their image of Canada. She works at a school in Brampton Ontario, a suburb of Toronto that is largely populated by South Asian immigrants. She told me she was shocked that, when asked about what visual markers represent Canada, the students all said things like Mounties, beavers, moose, and the types of things we see in stores leading up to Canada Day. She intended to help them see images of Canada they could recognize

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 38 Lucy R. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999) pp. 12

39 Ibid, 13

40 Ibid, 14

themselves in, without focusing specifically on a singular experience.⁴¹

Lippard quotes Alexander Wilson who writes that artists who make work about tourism should challenge the interstices between the art scene and local audiences. “This can mean demythologizing local legends and constructing anti-myths that will arm residents against those who would transform their places in ways that counter local meaning.”⁴²

In order to understand what could possibly be considered an anti-myth, we must first understand the myths of nationhood. To do this I turn to Stuart Hall’s essay “Narrating the Nation: An Imagined Community”.

National cultures are composed not only of cultural institutions, but of symbols and representations. A national culture is a *discourse* - a way of constructing meanings which influences and organizes both our actions and our conception of ourselves. National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about ‘the nation’ with which we can identify; these are contained in the stories which are told about it. Memories which connect its present with its past, and images which are constructed of it.⁴³

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41 “Greetings from an Art Teacher! / Photography Exhibition w Middle School Art Gallery,” *Greetings from an Art Teacher! / Photography Exhibition w Middle School Art Gallery*, September 8, 2019)

42 Ibid, 14

43 Stuart Hall, “Narrating the Nation: An Imagined Community,” *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies* ed by Stuart Hall et al, London: Blackwell, 1996, 613-615

Hall asks what representational strategies help to construct national identity, or a sense of belonging. He breaks down these strategies into four categories:

The first being the “Narrative of the Nation”—tropes which consist of histories, stories, images, landscapes, and figures that hold certain ideals. “Connecting our everyday lives with a national destiny that pre-existed us and will out-live us.”⁴⁴ Secondly, there is the emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness. He speaks about the nation as being primordial—existing in or persisting from the beginning, like a solar system or universe. Thirdly there is the invention of tradition, “a set of practices which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviours which imply continuity with a historical past.”⁴⁵ Lastly, there is the Foundational Myth which includes the idea of pure, original people or folk;

a story which locates the origin of nation, the people, and their national character so early that they are lost in the mists of, not ‘real’ but ‘mythic’ time. Invented traditions make the confusions and disasters of history intelligible, converting disarray into ‘community’ and disasters into triumphs.⁴⁶

Hall says that it is not enough to simply acknowledge these myths, but it is integral that we see ourselves as part of the story. Hall’s ideas that tie mythmaking and nationhood provide a framework to create the anti-myths that Wilson suggests. This is a way to disprove the illusions of community in nationhood.

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44 Ibid, 613

45 Ibid, 614

46 Ibid, 614

There are arguable benefits to foundational myths as they can create a sense of belonging, but these same myths are being dispelled in today's hostile political climate. We need to acknowledge our own positions in these narratives if we want to move toward reconciliation and mutual understanding. Just as the intended outcome of sharing or believing in these stories is unity, the dispelling of the same stories has the potential to bring people together. In trying to uncover the anti-myth in my understanding of Canadian nationhood, I look specifically at where I grew up.

This project is titled *Yours to Discover*, named after the Ontario tourism slogan that adorns the province's license plates. It seemed a fitting title as the work looks closely at the place I call home, and the symbols that have come to inform my understanding of my identity.

An article about the history of the slogan states, "In the late '70s, Ontario tourism was in a slump. But one landmark campaign put the province's attractions on the map — and a new slogan on its license plates."⁴⁷ Apparently the Ontario Tourism Board took a cue from the "I Love New York" campaign when they needed a new strategy to encourage Ontarians to enjoy the amenities of home⁴⁸. The aim for the campaign was not foreign or even interprovincial tourists, but rather for those already residing in Ontario to be encouraged to explore their home.

Prior to 1980, license plates in Ontario read "Keep It Beautiful."⁴⁹In 1982, the conservative government of

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47 Jamie Bradburn, "And You're Gonna Love It: How Ontario Became 'Yours to Discover,'" *TVO - Current Stories* (TVO, April 5, 2019), <https://www.tvo.org/article/and-youre-gonna-love-it-how-ontario-became-yours-to-discover>

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

Bill Davis changed it to "Yours to Discover", hoping to drive economic progress through tourism. In 2019, the conservative premier Doug Ford revealed a plan to change the slogan to "A Place To Grow" for license plates, and "Open For Business" on commercial vehicles.⁵⁰ The new slogan "comes from the song 'A Place to Stand', which has been an unofficial anthem for Ontario since its use in a film that played at the province's pavilion at Expo 67."⁵¹ The "Open for Business" proposal has been criticized by many for being part of Ford's campaign platform. While I was creating this project, I didn't know about these recent developments of the change, but it seemed to illustrate the pressing nature of this work. The political agenda had suddenly shifted from Ontario as a place to wander and explore, to a place to plant roots and grow.

Niagara Falls, the CN Tower, and Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village each have become major tourist destinations and markers of identity, specifically of Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area. Of course, there are many other sites across the country that function similarly, but I focus on these three because they stand out in my memory of childhood.

In his book *Imagining Niagara: The Meaning and Making of Niagara Falls* by Patrick V. McGreevy, the author focuses on aspects of the falls that contribute to its legendary status as a natural wonder. One of the main aspects that contributed to the mythology of the falls was its geographical remoteness. Although Niagara Falls was known to European travelers as early as the seventeenth century, it remained inaccessible to them

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50 "Ontario's New Licence Plate Slogan Will Be 'A Place To Grow'," *CBC News* (CBC, April 9, 2019), <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-licence-plate-slogan-place-to-grow-yours-discover-1.5090614>

51 Ibid.

until the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825.⁵² “During this long period, there developed an image of the falls as an overwhelming spectacle.”⁵³ European audiences attributed to the falls all the greatness and wonderment of the “New World” in general, along with its wild and natural might. Early European settlers would have stumbled upon the falls in the midst of the forest, and heard its rumble before actually seeing it.⁵⁴

This is obviously no longer the case. An entire city has been formed around the falls and the area surrounding it is cleared for parking lots and viewing stations. It is known informally as a kind of Las Vegas of the North—a place for honeymooners, gamblers, bachelor parties and more. The site receives over 30 million tourists every year.⁵⁵ If you remove the falls from its cliché surroundings, the water itself does still hold some of the wonderment that McGreevy describes, because of its sheer size and force. I recall my aunt describing that on her first visit to the site, the force of the water moved her to tears and to prayer.

Another theme that McGreevy focuses on is the brink of death, as stumbling upon the falls in the 19th Century felt as if standing at the edge of the world. I experienced a similar feeling when I rode on the Maid of the Mist, a boat cruise that takes passengers as close as possible to the base of the falls. It is popular with fami-

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52 Patrick V. McGreevy, *Imagining Niagara: The Meaning and Making of Niagara Falls* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), https://books.google.ca/books?id=AYCtIYG-75QC&lpg=PP1&dq=NiagaraFalls&pg=PP1&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=true

53 Ibid, 13

54 Ibid, 14

55 “NIAGARA FALLS TOP 10 FACTS,” Niagara Falls Blog (Marriott on the Falls, August 13, 2014), <https://www.marriottonthefalls.com/blog/2014/08/13/niagara-falls-top-10-facts/>

lies because of the rollercoaster-like experience—the choppy waters, overwhelming noise, and being soaked by the mist. When family members visited from outside of Canada, we would always take them to Niagara Falls and of course, this included a ride on Maid of the Mist. Tickets were expensive, so my parents would send me to accompany our guests on the water. While on the boat, I heard the captain talk about all the people who had jumped over the falls as a stunt. One story that stuck with me was about a schoolteacher named Annie Edson Taylor who in 1901, went over the falls in a barrel and made it out alive.⁵⁶ I never understood why someone would do this, but the idea that thrill-seekers had gone to such extremes still fascinated me.

In my mind, Niagara Falls fits into one of the largest myths about Canada that has been perpetuated throughout the world, which is the idea of the untamable landscape. Even today, settlers have commodified the experience of testing the limitations of this natural wonder and phenomena in a way that is perfectly safe and marketable to families.

The CN Tower’s distinctive spire stands out in Toronto’s skyline and has become a marker of the city. Again for this spectacle, since children’s tickets were cheaper, my family would send me with whatever guest happened to be visiting. We joked that I had been there so many times that I could be a professional tour guide.

The CN Tower was built in 1976 by Canadian National (CN) railway who wanted to demonstrate the might of Canadian industry. At the time, the tower was the tallest in the world and stayed that way until 2007. In 1995, the CN Tower became a public company and ownership of the Tower was transferred to Canada Lands

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56 McGreevy, *Imagining Niagara*, 15.

Company, a federal Crown corporation responsible for real estate development.⁵⁷ Toronto as a city, has become a sprawling metropolis, the largest city in Canada and home to an incredibly diverse population of people from all over the world. Today, the city is in the middle of an affordable housing crisis. This is in part caused by the policy of “vacancy decontrol”⁵⁸ introduced by the Mike Harris’ government of the 1990s, which allowed landlords ability to evict renters and increase market prices. Toronto as a city does not hold the same importance to architectural monuments like other cities like Montreal, for example. The CN Tower, as it sits along the shores of Lake Ontario, is visible from all corners of the city. The buildings around it have doubled and tripled in the years since its erection, but it has maintained, in some ways foreshadowing what the city would become.

My research into the CN Tower led me to think more about the history of the Canadian National Railway itself, and its role as a symbol of confederation. Building a trans-Canada railway was the “National Dream” of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald.⁵⁹ As an incentive for joining the Canadian Confederation, he promised each province a railway link. Construction of the railway promised work for hundreds of thousands of people, in addition to establishing Canada’s reputation abroad and encouraging more widespread colonization. The exploitation of natural resources, agriculture and the efficient transportation of goods and passen-

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57 “Canada’s Wonder of the World,” *CN Tower: Canada’s Wonder of the World (CN Tower)*, accessed January 3, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070723015815/http://www.cntower.ca/portal/GetPage.aspx?at=848>

58 Liam Barrington-Bush, “Toronto’s Many Faces of Gentrification,” *NOW Toronto* (NOW, October 17, 2018), <https://nowtoronto.com/news/gentrification-toronto-pakdale/>

59 Ibid.

gers transformed the new country of Canada into a competitive economic force.⁶⁰

The railway intended to unify people across this giant land mass. It did so at the expense of Indigenous communities, lands, and treaties. In addition, Asian labourers were exploited during the construction of the Canada Pacific Railway, put under treacherous conditions for minimal compensation. “The workers, segregated from their European counterparts, also experienced the greatest number of fatalities in constructing the railroad, a history at odds with the heroic narratives of nationhood that surround its building.”⁶¹

As I am writing this, we are waiting for the current Liberal government led by Justin Trudeau to respond to the situation in Wet’suwet’en British Columbia, and national protests and blockades of CN railways in Eastern Canada. This has caused economic ramifications around the country that have outraged many. It has also garnered support and solidarity from many others. The Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter released a statement of solidarity stating:

As Chinese settlers of this land, we recognize that the long and complex history of Indigenous-Chinese relations is one of complicity in displacement and colonization, but also one of solidarity. Chinese railway workers, who were themselves exploited, helped construct the Canadian Pacific Railway, which played a crucial role in the displacement

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60 Marie-Claude Reid, “Railways: The Road to Confederation,” *Railway Witnesses, Memory of a Nation* (Canadian Heritage), accessed January 3, 2020, http://histoire.railhistory.ca/confederation_en.html

61 Andrea Kunard, “Giving Context: Souvenirs of the Self (Lake Louise) by Jin-Me Yoon,” *BlackFlash*, 2011, pp. 18-20

and colonization of Indigenous peoples. Yet injured Chinese workers who were left to die by their employers were often taken in, cared for, and sheltered by Indigenous nations.⁶²

There is something to be said about trying to build unity of a large mass of land through a railways system, and almost one hundred years later that same company using their funds to erect a giant salute to economic power, modernism, and technological advancement. After unifying a country over a giant hurdle of land, their next sight was to reach to the sky. They did succeed as the CN Tower was the highest freestanding structure for 32 years.⁶³

Where I actually grew up is in the suburbs of Toronto, in a city called Pickering, Ontario. It is 40 kilometers outside of Toronto and a proper suburb, in the sense that it is a primarily residential area where the majority of occupants live but commute into the city for work. The only major industry in this city is the nuclear power plant placed along the shores of Lake Ontario. I grew up in a typical suburban complex of homes that are all identical. While the city is not large it felt large as a child, as it would take hours to escape the sprawling concrete vortex of the housing complex before you encountered any real nature or commercial businesses.

Cullen Gardens and Miniature Village is probably the least known of the three sites, due to its short-lived

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62 "Statement of Solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en People," *Chinese Canadian National Council Toronto Chapter*, accessed February 24, 2020, https://ccnctoronto.ca/2020/02/15/statement-of-solidarity-with-the-wetsuweten-people/?fbclid=IwAR0VxIhEbLrmE5fkey8i_Rxiq_m45n22vGo0IV55ws8xL6MlcsT9tiBZVn4

63 "Canada's Wonder of the World,"

existence and relative remoteness. It was built in 1980 and closed around 2006 in Whitby, Ontario, near where I grew up.⁶⁴ Miniature villages were very popular in North America in the 80s and 90s. This one had model communities showing suburban housing developments, farming communities, theme parks, as well as elaborate manicured Gardens featuring topiary or large hedges cut into the shapes of animals. Miniature trains rolled along the grounds' perimeter, and boats powered by radio sailed through artificial ponds. As a site, it was the pinnacle of family fun.

This site stands out to me because it is like a museum of everyday North American culture—both the ideal and the mundane. They had model houses with two-car garages and white picket fences. In the images of my family, it looks like they are shopping for a perfect new house. The site gave them a glimpse into the quintessential North American neighbourhood. It is curious that my parents chose a community like the ones visible in these photos of Cullen Gardens to live in with their family. Perhaps, while trying to leave the hustle and chaos of an over-crowded city like Karachi, some things about the order of the suburbs appealed to them.

I know one thing that was lacking from my family's life in Karachi was having a sense of law and order in the city. One of the biggest factors to them deciding to immigrate was that their sense of safety was under threat in Karachi. They wanted to be able to live in a place where police are respected and their children would feel safe.

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64 "Cullen Gardens," MarkCullen.com (Mark Cullen, December 2, 2005), https://web.archive.org/web/20070122012941/http://www.markcullen.com/news_events/cullen_gardens.htm

One of the most curious photos I have included in this project is one that I came upon of Cullen Gardens, is a photo that one of my family members, likely my father, must have taken, of a police car in a suburban housing complex stopping a red sports car. A miniature policeman is stepped out of the car, presumably to talk to the driver. Although you cannot see the face of the officer, nor the driver, you have an idea of the demographic they may fit into. Behind them is a set of large white houses, a pickup truck, and a young family.

I thought it was very curious that Cullen Gardens thought it necessary to include this aspect of policing within the framework of the model community and more so that someone, likely my father, chose to take this image of this aspect of the community, as he was likely struck by it as well.

In an article from 2019 on *BlogTo*, they announced the opening of “Little Canada,” a new indoor miniature model of Canada is meant to open in 2020, very close to Dundas Square in Toronto⁶⁵. The attraction is set to include six Canadian destinations; Little Niagara, Little Toronto, Little Ottawa, Petit Quebec, Little North and Little Golden Horseshoe.⁶⁶ The article describes the sites that visitors will be able to experience, however it also includes another tidbit of information regarding entrance into “Little Canada.” It states:

Upon arrival, guests will be handed a Little Canada passport to take on their journey through the miniature versions of the best of what Canada has to offer. There will even

65 Mira Miller, “A Miniature Version of Canada Is Being Built in Downtown Toronto,” *BlogTo* (FreshDaily Inc., October 2019), <http://www.blogto.com/arts/2019/09/little-canada-downtown-toronto/>

66 Ibid.

be customs agents at the start of the attraction, but they'll supposedly be far friendlier than the ones at the real borders.⁶⁷

I am interested here in the ties between the creation of a nation-state, and the defense of the state via border patrol and policing. Even in miniature form, these boundaries must be visible and protected.

In “Toys as discourse: children’s war toys and the war on terror,” David Machin and Theo Van Leeuwen focus on the history of children’s war toys, stemming from the early nineteenth century until today. They state that toy soldiers “allowed children to play out colonial battles, naturalizing both the activities of empire and the relatively newly established nation states.”⁶⁸

In many cultures, children’s toys are miniature versions of the objects the child will handle as an adult. As the child grows up, the functionality of the toys increases.⁶⁹ They claim that toys are a way for children to understand how conflicts are resolved in the world, and why. They offer a way for these values to be re-enacted through play.⁷⁰

I think the same can be said of police toys, which are aggressively marketed to young children, especially boys. They are taught to idealize the police figure as a marker of good and maintaining that good. Seeing their image in aspects of play is common. In this case, we can see how monitoring even the fictional ideal of

67 Ibid.

68 David Machin, and Theo Van Leeuwen. "Toys as Discourse: Children's War Toys and the War on Terror." *Critical Discourse Studies* 6, no. 1 (2009): 51-63. doi:10.1080/17405900802560082.

69 Ibid, 53

70 Ibid, 58

the miniature community is necessary in order to preserve the ideals of the nation-state. In understanding this, a child learns how to mimic and maintain these behaviours in the real world. Though perhaps for my parents, as immigrants coming from a country that has been plagued with civil unrest for its entire history, this acknowledgement of policing, even in a fictional community like Cullen Gardens, was a comfort for them in knowing that their home and family would be protected by law-makers who protected the rights of settlers.

These three sites demonstrate the ideas of “Canadian values” particularly as transcended to new immigrants in the 1990s. There are the aspects of the foundational myth, of raw untamable landscape, that has then found a way to be tamed and converted into a site for pleasure and consumption. There is the CN Tower, a site that showed the economic power of the nation. Perhaps a foreshadow to the sprawling metropolis that Toronto has become. And finally, the orderly suburb. A place where those hoping to find a prescribed and orderly existence can purchase a home with a white-picket fence, and have a yard for their children to play in. Where the police would protect you and keep dangerous figures off the streets.

On play

Closely tied to the idea of myth making is also the concept of play. For the project, *Yours to Discover*, I wanted to be able to illustrate some of the strategies that my family and other immigrants to Canada have used in order to make their ways as settlers in this country. The way I chose to illustrate this is through the use of board games. I use particular games in this series as a way to demonstrate the values that we learn from tourist sites, and paired them with games that had similar values. In “The Smooth Spaces of Play: Deleuze and the Emancipative Potential of Games,” Tael Harper states that, contrary to many socialist theorists such as Marx who regarded play as a distraction, play can have the ability to lead to emancipation.⁷¹ He says that “Play can be conducive to positive political outcomes; as long as the right games are played in the wrong way.”⁷²

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71 Tael Harper, “The Smooth Spaces of Play: Deleuze and the Emancipative Potential of Games,” *symploke* 17, no. 1-2 (2009): pp. 129-142, 10.1353/sym.2009.0004)

72 *Ibid*, 129

Harper speaks about the “magic circle” of the game board, the space around which the players sit and participate in the game as a space to be wary of.⁷³ However, when the dictations of the game escape the magic circle and draw parallels into reality, that is when we can start to appreciate the objectives of the game. “It is precisely at the points where the playing escapes the ‘magic circle’ of the game when the act of play precipitates emancipation.”⁷⁴ Rarely does this happen while actually playing the game, but in the moments afterwards of considering the function of these board games.

You could say that in the way I have chosen to focus on these games themselves I am hoping to disrupt the magic circle of the game by inserting my own family within the logic and narrative. I am making myself and my family expressly implicated in the values of the game, and highlighting the survivalist strategies for being able to cope in a new country. “Games not only help change and define a society, but they serve as a record of what the society valued.”⁷⁵ In this way, I am also using the games to illustrate the strategies that my family, and other new immigrants have used in order to survive in North America.

I think that coming to Canada in the 90s, was for my parents an image of a kind of utopia. They were coming from a place with extreme poverty, class distinction, pollution, lack of security and law enforcement, as well as discrimination and racism between marginal subgroups. Here they could live freely and start a new life, send their children to free public schools where

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73 Ibid, 129

74 Ibid, 134

75 Bruce Whitehill “American Games: A historical perspective,” *BOARD GAMES STUDIES* 2, (1999): pp. 116-141, <http://citeeex.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.511.9339>

they attended with other children of all backgrounds. Free to practice or not practice their own religion and live life as they saw fit. This was the narrative I was told in school and at home. This is the reality I have enjoyed for most of my life. However it was only upon coming into adulthood and university education that I started to fully understand the fantasy in this narrative. That all of these privileges have been afforded to me by the silencing and subjugation of Indigenous people in this land. This place is not a utopia, but rather a place in which land has been taken from its original keepers and certain voices silenced in order for new voices to find freedom.

My parents immigrated to Canada in 1991. They were able to apply for immigration under Business Skillscategory,⁷⁶ now known as the Federal Skilled Worker Program,⁷⁷ in which applicants with specific professional skills which are in need in the Canadian economy can apply and fill gaps in the labour market. At the time, accountants were in demand and my family was able to receive immigration status on these grounds. The other main class of immigrants was the Investor class, which was terminated in 2014.

At the time of termination, qualified investors needed to have at least two (2) years of business management experience; have a minimum net worth of CAD\$1,600,000 (legally obtained); alone or with their ac-

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76 Alan B Simmons, “Canadian Immigration Policy in the Early 1990s: A Commentary on Veugelers and Klassen’s Analysis of the Breakdown in the Unemployment-Immigration Linkage,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 19, no. 4 (1994): pp. 525-534, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3341151>

77 “Federal Skilled Worker Program Eligible Occupations,” Immigration.ca (CCIRC Inc.), accessed January 3, 2020, <https://www.immigration.ca/fast-track-high-demand-occupations#Occupation>

companying spouse, make an investment of CAD\$800,000; and meet certain health and security requirements.⁷⁸

The influence of employment trends on immigration policy comes from “a correct reading of the trends in unemployment and in the views of labour and capital by the state immigration policy branch, and finally a desire by the state to respond to these concerns on an annual basis.”⁷⁹

My father grew up of humble means in Pakistan, and was very politically active in his youth. He was involved in a lot of radical leftist organizing, and according to my uncle, used to hold political rallies or meetings on the roof of my grandparents house. He wanted to be a lawyer but was discouraged by his siblings because of the tumultuous law and order situation in Pakistan. Instead he decided to study accounting. This led him to London, England to study for a few years. There he was enthused to be able to go to meetings of the Communist Party of Britain, because communists in Pakistan at the time were not able to openly meet. When my mother and father first got married, he was living close to High Gate Cemetery in London, where Karl Marx is buried. Apparently this was the first tourist site that my mother got to see, and is to this day a popular date spot. My father never ended up getting into a position of politics, but these roots did transcend into the way he raised my sisters and I.

Very quickly after moving here, my parents were able to purchase a house. A few years later they were able

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78 “Immigrant Investor Program,” *Immigration and Citizenship* (Government of Canada, August 23, 2018), <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/investors.html>

79 Simmons, “Canadian Immigration Policy”. pp 526.

to purchase another home and keep the first one as an income property. For all of my life, my father has been a landlord. After watching him take on this additional role, it has turned me off of ever wanting to do the same. It is an incredible amount of labour to own and take care of property. I’ve seen my father deal with rude tenants, needy tenants, pest control, plumbing problems, police at the door at night, and even taking tenants to court.

In today’s climate and in cities like Toronto and Montreal that are rapidly gentrifying, the role of landlord has a negative connotation. We hear about “slumlords,” and those trying to “reno-vict,” or throw people out of their homes in order to make as much income as possible. However, I can say from experience that if you are trying to be a good landlord and genuinely care for your property and your tenants, it is an incredibly demanding position.

Monopoly, originally called “the Landlord’s Game” is one of the most popular games in the world. Although most of us know it as a long durational board game that is about acquiring property and monopolizing the game board, in order to make the most profit. It’s early history was recently uncovered, and in fact the original version of the game was made in 1906 by a woman named Lizzie Magie.⁸⁰ She was a radical feminist of her time and a fierce anti-monopolist. She was following in the political lines of her father as well, and made the game to illustrate Henry George’s single tax theory.

His theory supported the principle “that individuals should own 100 percent of what they made or cre-

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80 Bruce Whitehill. “American Games: A historical perspective,” *BOARD GAMES STUDIES* 2, (1999): pp. 116-141, <http://citeseeerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/summary?doi=10.1.1.511.9339>

ated, but that everything found in nature, particularly land, should belong to everyone.”⁸¹ The idea of the theory was to tax land, not individual occupants, which shifted the financial burden to the landlords. “His message resonated with many Americans in the late 1800s, when poverty and squalor were on full display in the country’s urban centers.”⁸²

Bruce Whitehill explains in “American Games: A historical perspective.”

She created two sets of rules for her game: an anti-monopolist set in which all were rewarded when wealth was created, and a monopolist set in which the goal was to create monopolies and crush opponents. Her dualistic approach was a teaching tool meant to demonstrate that the first set of rules was morally superior. And yet it was the monopolist version of the game that caught on, with Darrow claiming a version of it as his own and selling it to Parker Brothers.⁸³

Tael Harper goes on to explain, “In games such as Monopoly, it’s often the case that transgressing the magic circle (stealing from the banker, forming alliances, and doing ‘under the table’ deals) is the only activity which generates any enjoyment.”⁸⁴

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81 Ibid, 124

82 Ibid, 124

83 Ibid, 124

84 Tael Harper, “The Smooth Spaces of Play”, pp. 140

Similarly, *Settlers of Catan* has been said by some to be the *Monopoly* of the 21st Century.⁸⁵ *Catan* is not a game I have played as much as *Monopoly*, but upon thinking through the ideas of this project it became an obvious metaphor for the concepts of surviving as a settler. I was first brought to the attention of its objectives by artist Golboo Amani and their project *Unsettling Settlers: Intervention Game*.⁸⁶ The artist has created an intervention game and expansion onto the original game, in “aims to interrupt the colonial narrative of *Settlers of Catan* to employ strategies that strengthen players ability to imagine critical alternatives and practice counter hegemonic narratives of settlement on the landscape.”⁸⁷

In this board game, players gather natural resources available in the land they have encountered, and use these materials to establish railroads and settlements, as well as expand community. Players are placed against one another, whereas the intervention “allows players to work through strategies of allyship by trading and collecting renewable resources, blocking expansion and development, building treaties and reclaiming land on a virtual landscape.”⁸⁸

Settlers of Catan was created by Klaus Teuber in 1995 in Germany, and is now available in over thirty differ-

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85 Blake Eskin, “Like Monopoly in the Depression, *Settlers of Catan* Is the Board Game of Our Time.” *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 21 Nov. 2010, www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/24/AR2010112404140.html?referrer=emailarticle.

86 Golboo Amani, “Unsettling Settlers: Intervention Game,” Golboo Amani, accessed January 6, 2020, <http://golbooomani.com/Unsettling-Settlers-Intervention-Game>

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

ent languages.⁸⁹ It has been called the “Monopoly of our time” by the Washington Post and the “Monopoly Killer” by Wired.⁹⁰ “Thanks to the Internet, Settlers has spread from Stuttgart to Seoul to Silicon Valley, where it has become a necessary social skill among entrepreneurs and venture capitalists (one tech chief executive calls it ‘the new golf’).”⁹¹

Lorenzo Veracini explains why *Catan* could be considered “the board game of our time.”⁹² He explains that we live in a world that the age of settlement has created, and provides many of the values we currently live by. We are now facing “the age of unsettlement”⁹³ in reference to mass immigration and globalization. People all over the world are being displaced by war, climate change, and political uprising. It makes sense that a game about starting over somewhere new while using the available resources is the most popular of our era. However in real life, the places that people are aiming to start again in, are not barren uninhabited lands.

Veracini points out that “[t]he game is about establishing self-supporting colonies, but the game does not begin from the dawn of civilization - Settlers arrive with ready-made skills and technologies.”⁹⁴ Teuber also points out that in the game, there are no Indigenous people, but there are the characters of “robbers.”⁹⁵

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89 Adrienne Raphel, “The Man Who Built Catan.” *The New Yorker*, The New Yorker, February 12, 2014, www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-man-who-built-catan.

90 Ibid.

91 Eskin, “Like Monopoly in the Depression”

92 Lorenzo Veracini. “Settlers of Catan.” *Settler Colonial Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2013, pp. 131–133., doi:10.1080/18380743.2013.761941.

93 Ibid, 132

94 Ibid, 133

95 Ibid, 133

The robbers role is to disrupt settlement by preventing the efficient extraction of resources. The are moved-on through military means towards the periphery of settlement; like Indigeous peoples in exclusivist settler frontiers, they are inherently incompatible with settlement and development. Their role primarily is to disappear.

In creating this game, Teuber is consciously mimicking the values that early settlers and invaders had when coming to the Americas. He is creating a space for contemporary players to repeat this history on a micro-scale. In this project, I implicate my own family in this settler history by including their photographs within the magic circle of the game board. Whether they intended to or not, we as settlers are implicated in this history. If it were not for the laws created by the settler colonial state, we would not be able to survive in this land.

The most recent game that I have used in this project is *Jenga*, a game that is attributed to a British Woman named Leslie Scott.⁹⁶ Scott was born in Tanganyika and grew up in Ghana. She launched the game at the London Toy Fair in 1983, and in 1985 the rights were acquired to bring the game to the US and Canada. An article called “Teaching About Oppression Through Jenga: A Game-Based Learning Example for Social Work Educators” shows how the game can be used to

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96 "Victoria & Albert Museum." A Personal View from Leslie Scott, the Inventor of Jenga | Victoria and Albert Museum. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120306051211/http://www.vam.ac.uk/things-to-do/blogs/british-toy-making-blog/personal-view-leslie-scott-inventor-jenga>

demonstrate structural oppression to students.⁹⁷ *Jenga* is a simple game in which wooden blocks are stacked in sets of threes, in opposing directions to create a tall tower. Usually played by 2-4 people, each player takes a turn in pulling a block from the middle of the tower, and placing it back on top, building a taller tower with holes in the framework. The idea is to build the tower as tall as possible while taking care not to knock it over. The player who makes the tower fall is the loser. In this article, the author suggests how the class must be divided into teams, and how certain handicaps are instilled to create restrictions in the game.

Through the introduction of game rules that dictate new conditions under which the players must construct the tower, the instructor amplifies the game's dynamics of oppression and privilege. Examples of such rules are a requirement that players use only their left hand, an imposition of a 10-second time limit, and the institution of game qualifiers (e.g., only students wearing athletic shoes can play).⁹⁸

There is also a judge appointed to enforce the rules of the game, but this judge is also instructed to exhibit biases in their rulings.⁹⁹ After the game, students are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and observation about the game, particularly in understanding how rules can be used to advantage certain people and disadvantage others.

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97 Sara Lichtenwalter and Parris Baker. "Teaching Note: Teaching About Oppression Through Jenga: A Game-Based Learning Example For Social Work Educators." *Journal of Social Work Education* 46, no. 2 (2010): 305-13. doi:10.5175/jswe.2010.200800080.

98 Ibid, 307

99 Ibid, 310

One student is quoted as saying; "I never thought about the impact of rules. Rules are supposed to guarantee fairness. It never occurred to me that the rules were creating the oppression and privilege."¹⁰⁰

I use *Jenga* mostly simply as a metaphor is following the rules. The piece in which I am playing the game by myself, is a symbol is trying desperately to follow a set of rules that have been prescribed both by my family and by society in order to achieve success. It is perhaps a nod towards the idea of the model minority¹⁰¹ and trying desperately to break the glass ceiling.¹⁰² If you follow the rules they could lead you somewhere, but energy must be taken out from other places in order to achieve this success. Your structure starts to lose stability. If you continue to just try to build under capitalist notions of success, other parts of your life will start to suffer. You will no longer be whole, until you reach your limit or your breaking point.

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100 Ibid, 312

101 The idea that certain classes of immigrants, especially from Asian countries tend to keep their heads down and follow the rules in order to achieve economic success

102 An invisible barrier used to cap the potential of women in the workplace, but also applicable to other minority groups

Assimilating (Too Much)

In a recent episode of this *American Life*, writer Saa-chi Kohl speaks to her parents about the fact that she is as an adult living in New York City, paying to take Hindi classes.¹⁰³ She asks her parents why they did not make an effort to teach her her mother tongue, and if they are proud that she is trying to learn now. They say that their hopes for moving to a new country were for their children to become part of this new culture, and that learning English and French were the priority. They had hoped that learning Hindi would come naturally to them, but when it did not, they did not want to force it. Kohl asks her mother if she thinks her and her brother assimilated “too much,” to which her mother responds “maybe.”¹⁰⁴

I relate very much to Kohl’s experience of not being able to speak fluently in her mother tongue. When my

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103 Scaachi Koul, “This American Life,” *This American Life* (blog) (WBEZ Chicago, December 27, 2019), <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/690/too-close-to-home>

104 Ibid.

parents immigrated here, they became fiercely determined to adopt “Canadian” values and looked down on other new immigrants who did not. I point to this excerpt of Kohl’s because I am preoccupied with this idea of assimilating “too much.” While assimilating for migrants is a survival tactic that is seen as necessary, it is also self-imposed. Not imposed on us forcibly by the state, but encouraged through society. We have had the option, but to choose not to assimilate would be to make our lives very difficult.

When my parents came to Canada, it was on the wave of the multiculturalism movement. In 1971 Pierre Trudeau announced that Canada would be the first country in the world to take on the official policy of multiculturalism.¹⁰⁵ This was meant to preserve the rights and freedoms of ethnic groups from diverse cultural backgrounds. The government was meant to support multiculturalism by providing support to cultural groups in their development and growth, helping to overcome barriers in participating in Canadian society, promoting exchanges between cultural groups, and helping ethnic minorities learn English and French.¹⁰⁶

We know that throughout the twentieth century, the Canadian government also had a policy of cultural genocide that implemented the opposite for Indigenous peoples. The Indian Act, residential schooling, the 60’s scoop, and other painful policies resulted in Indigenous peoples being forcibly removed from their homes, unable to speak their language and practice

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105 Jan Raska, "Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21," *Canadian Multiculturalism Policy*, 1971 | Pier 21, 2017, accessed April 04, 2018, <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/canadian-multiculturalism-policy-1971>.

106 Ibid.

their traditions.¹⁰⁷ These same policies of preservation were not extended to the first people of Turtle Island. It was strange for me to realize later in my adulthood, that these two kinds of policies from the Canadian government were implemented at the same moment in time.

When I think of the way multiculturalism in Canada was explained to me as a child, it was always with pride. I remember specifically in the first grade, one of our first assignments was to make presentations on the countries that we were “from.” I remember looking around in celebration as all the children reported on the countries their parents and grandparents came from, and spoke about their traditional food, clothing and languages. The narrative we were told, was that we all came from other countries and yet we had all come to this promised land called Canada in order to live in harmony. Yet the history of who was here before we came to this barren land, was nowhere on the table.

In the paper “Decolonizing Anti-racism,” Bonita Lawrence speaks about how her mother, who was Mi’kmaq and Acadian, was made to feel inferior and marginalized by Anglo and Francophone Canadians in Eastern Canada in the 1960s. At this time, her mother considered immigrants of colour as allies and friends. She says her mother “[s]aw our struggle for survival and adaption to the dominant culture in common.”¹⁰⁸ Lawrence then speaks about how in the years since then pressures of assimilation and urbanization has resulted in many Indigenous people losing vital parts of their

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107 J.R. Miller, "Residential Schools," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 10, 2012, , accessed April 04, 2018, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/>.

108 Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Anti-Racism,” in *Cultivating Canada : Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation; Canadian First edition, 2011), pp. 235-261)

identity and culture, while at the same time the country mandated its multiculturalism policy, inviting large scale immigration. Indigenous theorists have largely been silent on issues such as multiculturalism, which affords rights and cultural preservation to new groups while rendering their struggles invisible.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, when non-Aboriginal people of colour are invoked in public discourse, it is often within the multicultural frame, which ignores the historic diversity of Canada and the profound power imbalances that shaped it. Multiculturalism is a liberal social contract of tolerance for cultural difference between a nation. But tolerance is not anti-racism and it will not end racism.¹¹⁰

This text goes on to critique the way postcolonial scholars have excluded Indigenous peoples in their writing and scholarship, and in a way condoning the genocide or vision of Aboriginal people as a myth of the past. She says:

These practices of exclusion and segregation reflect the contradictory ways in which people of colour are situated within the nation-state. On the one hand, they are marginalized by a white settler nationalist projects, and yet on the other hand, as citizens, they are invited to take part in ongoing colonialism. Because of this, people of colour have a complex relationship to Indigeneity.¹¹¹

109 Ibid, 253

110 Ibid, 266

111 Ibid, 254

Often new immigrants are ignorant to the history of exploitation of Indigenous people, as this is not a history that is readily accessible at tourist sites, or on their mandatory citizenship test. By the time they learn about the history, feelings can be mixed. Sherene Razack explains how the experiences of migrant people of colour intersect and change when they come to a new land. She explains “Think of the migrant woman of colour, who, once in Canada becomes ‘temporary foreign worker,’ ‘underemployed,’ ‘minority,’ ‘marginal’ and ‘settler’ all at once.” This alters her sense of self in ways that both empower and exploit.¹¹²

Richard Fung in *13 Conversations About Art and Cultural Race Politics*, written in 2002 says,

I sense a move to position Aboriginal people as just another ethnic minority within the multicultural patchwork (a pesky, unreasonably demanding one at that)... I fear that immigrant people who are not aware of the historical context, and are fed a narrow diet of Aboriginal stereotypes in the media, can become a tool in delegitimizing Aboriginal rights. So culture and curriculum are important sites, not just for Aboriginal people’s sense of self, but for the potential to provide a more complex and accurate understanding for non-Aboriginal people as well.¹¹³

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112 Robinder Kaur Sehdev, “People of Colour in Treaty,” in *Cultivating Canada : Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation; Canadian First edition, 2011), pp. 265-273)

113 Monika Kin Gagnon and Richard Fung, *13 Conversations about Art and Cultural Race Politics* (Montréal: Artextes editions, 2002), pp. 86)

Once we do learn about this problematic history and erasure, what is to be done? Can we as settler migrants of colour still make work about our experiences of disenfranchisement, while also talking about the history of genocide of Indigenous people on this continent?

Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang write about common strategies that settlers use in order to “move to innocence” in their seminal essay “Decolonization is not a Metaphor”. When it comes to other colonized settler migrants, things become a little more complicated, in a tactic Tuck and Wang call “colonial equivocation.”¹¹⁴ They say that the problem with labeling all struggles against imperialism as decolonizing work, is that it makes ambiguous the difference between decolonizing and social justice work especially among queer groups, people of colour, and others who are marginalized by the settler nation-state.¹¹⁵ The authors point to the fact that certain migrant groups are seen as more model minorities or known to assimilate more easily into the dominant culture. For these minority groups becoming a white settler is an impossible feat that breaks the myth of the democratic nation-state.

Tuck and Wang’s main criticism is that anti-colonial critique is not the same as decolonizing framework. Anti-colonial critique only empowers post-colonial subjects by trying to remake and subvert colonial tactics. In this way they are perpetuating settler colonial history and reclaiming Native land. “Seeking stolen resources is entangled with settler colonialism because those resources were nature/Native first, then enlisted into the service of settlement and thus almost impossible

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114 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (2012). 16.

115 Ibid, 17

to reclaim without re-occupying Native land.”¹¹⁶ The act of avoiding the conversation of settler colonialism in relation to new migrant groups, and lack of commitment to Indigenous sovereignty, is a tactic that post-colonial marginalized groups use to absolve themselves of settler guilt. “The reality is that ongoing settlement of Indigenous lands, whether by white people or people of colour, is still part of Canada’s nation-building project, and is still premised on the displacement of Indigenous peoples.”¹¹⁷

Robinder Kaur Sehdev asks people of colour to rethink the meaning and purpose of treaties, and consider them a living document and a means to move forward. He says:

We belong here not because Canada opened its doors, but because Aboriginal nations permitted settler governance on their lands. Finally, we must identify as treaty citizens and so refuse the liberal strategies of tolerance and inclusion of difference at the expense of the more difficult task of formative change. After all, treaty is the space where power is negotiated.¹¹⁸

I look towards these photographs as markers of my parents journey and my future. I make this work in hopes of understanding where we have come from, but more importantly where we are now and how I am complicit in the cultural fabric of this place, so-called “Canada.” The story of migrants in this nation is not about us vs. them, here vs. there, east vs. west. It is not a binary, and to present it as such is to ignore the complex and

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116 Ibid, 17

117 Robinder Kaur Sehdev, “People of Colour in Treaty”, pp. 270

118 Ibid, 273

emotional history of this land, and us as people. In this project I attempt to touch on many of the factors and systems that have brought me to where I am, which is ultimately a place of extreme privilege, that I owe to my parents and the systems that brought us here. But those same systems have been violent to so many and continue to cause harm. It is important to remember these interactions as we move forward and understand how this mosaic or puzzle forms who we are and how we fit into or resist the cultural fabric of “Canada.”

We are at a point in which the intersectionality of our experiences must be addressed. I believe this is done by continuing to ask questions, poke holes, and provoke dialogue. It can be a slippery place to inhabit, and you might find yourself, like I do in this text, talking about many things all at once. This is a critique I have sometimes heard about my work, that I am trying to talk about too many things at the same time. But does this mean that these topics are not related? That these connections are not sound? Or simply that it is too much for the audience to grasp? I do not expect everyone who views my work to understand all of its layers, however it is also my responsibility as an artist to make clear that I am thinking about the correlation of all these states of being, as they are also who make me who I am, and the work what it is.

I would like to close with this quote by filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin, as she describes the path forward towards healing from past traumas. She speaks about finding healing very close to the spot in which you have pain. I believe this can also translate to looking closely at ourselves and the paths that have brought us to where we are. Only by looking closely at where we have been can we find the steps to bring us forward.

In closing, I don't want to give the impression that I'm against anyone. This was the way the country was taken-against Aboriginal people, against the culture, against the spiritual way of life. It was always against. Which is why we are where we are now. One day a man told me something that I will never forget, and the more I see how life is, the more I think it is truthful. He said, sometimes you're walking in the bush, and you touch a plant, and it gives you a sickness on your skin, or you could have pain. This happens all the time. But he told me that whatever gave you the pain, if you look hard enough you're going to find, very close to it, a plant that's going to cure you.¹¹⁹

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Zinnia Naqvi is a visual artist based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal and Tkaronto/Toronto. Her work uses a combination of photography, video, writing, archival footage and installation. Naqvi's practice questions the relationship between authenticity and narrative, while dealing with larger themes of colonialism, cultural translation, language, and gender. Her projects often invite the viewer to question her process and working methods.

Naqvi's works have been shown across Canada and internationally. She received an honorable mention at the 2017 Karachi Biennale in Pakistan and was an Artist in Residence at the Art Gallery of Ontario as part of EMILIA-AMALIA Working Group. She is a recipient of the 2019 New Generation Photography Award organized by the Canadian Photography Institute of the National Gallery of Canada in partnership with Scotiabank. She has a BFA in Photography Studies from Ryerson University and is an MFA Candidate in Studio Arts at Concordia University.

