What Do We Owe To Each Other?
Exploring Settler Identity in the Works of Ayumi Goto and Jin-me Yoon

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Abstract

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This thesis examines socially-engaged art by Japanese-Canadian artist Ayumi Goto and Korean-Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon, whose works consider issues of identity within the settler colonial context of Canada. Using the title question as a point of departure, this thesis examines how Goto and Yoon consider ideas of indebtedness and relationality in their practices. I argue that their works are conduits for the observer to reflect on their own place on Indigenous land. This thesis examines how their artworks and practices reflect their connection to place through their distinct, self-described identities and tackles thorny questions about how racialized settlers inherit legacies of colonialism. Further, I explain how that informs their relationship with Indigenous peoples and lands, and how doing so creates a new understanding of 'multiculturalism' in Canada. Drawing from settler-colonial discourse and decolonial theory, this thesis focuses on Asian-Indigenous relationality as a case study for exploring the complexities of relationality and settler responsibility in the arts in Canada. This thesis is structured in three sections: the first section considers the current state of Canadian nationality, in tune with critiques offered by theorists concerned with possible alternatives to the concept of nationhood. The second section offers background on settler responsibility and discusses gestures of respect and indebtedness. The third section reflects on relational histories and how Asian-Indigenous relationalities affect Goto and Yoon's practices. Ultimately, this thesis will argue that Goto and Yoon's works are conduits for the observer to reflect on their place on Indigenous land and, in doing so, hold the potential for healing relationships through an embodied arts practice.

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Introduction

How does one contemplate one's place on the land we now call Canada? In the context of Canadian art, place has historically been a popular focus. Creating artworks that reflect the experience of living in Canada through the 'rugged' 'northern' landscape was a way for early settler-colonial Canadians to see themselves as independent of the European colonial power.[1] For artists, the Canadian landscape was the unique feature that set it apart. In the early twentieth century, the Group of Seven, who are among Canada's most well-known artists, similarly painted the land but shifted towards a stylistic 'wild' and natural landscape.[2] These depictions were oriented towards a white-settler gaze, focusing on the Canadian landscape as *terra nullius*: empty of human inhabitants and thus available for settlement and ongoing occupation. Nelson Graburn argues that Canada relies on a depiction of Indigenous peoples to define itself:

> For an ex-colonial nation such as Canada, there are special difficulties in establishing a national identity and in promoting the symbols to convey it. To succeed the nation must differentiate itself first from the mother country and, secondly, from any neighbouring countries having a common background. Where the majority of ethnic stocks of such nations are similarly constituted, obvious attributes such as language, dress and artistic tradition do not provide a distinctiveness sufficient for this purpose. Identity and iconic differentiation have to be derived from elsewhere - from nature or from history.[3]

How do we shift away from this canonical depiction of the Canadian landscape, and instead consider depictions that centralize the landscape of the people who live here?

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[1] Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kristy Robertson, "Introduction: Rethinking Relevance: Studying the Visual in Canada," in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, ed. Jessup, Morton, and Robertson (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014): 5.
[2] Ibid, 11.
[3] Nelson Graburn, "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism: Why Eskimos?, Why Canada?," *Inuit Art Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (Fall, 1986): 5.

Contemporary Canadian racialized artists Ayumi Goto and Jin-me Yoon create work that respects and focuses on place in a way that is not glorified, romanticized, or fetishized. They centralize relationality with Indigenous peoples as crucial to their practices, and they do this by thinking through place. More specifically, they ground their practices by forefronting Canada's settler-colonial context.[4] By thinking through relationality, their works allow us to see nuance in layered identities under settler-colonial Canada. They provoke the question, how do the relationships differ between the Indigenous peoples who have always been on this land and these waters, with the various descendants of white settlers, arrivants, and newcomers now all living together in Canada? And in what ways must they be the same?

Goto and Yoon come to these questions from their distinct perspectives: Goto, as a second-generation Japanese Canadian who was born in Surrey, British Columbia, and Yoon as a first-generation Canadian who emigrated from Seoul, Korea to Vancouver in 1968.[5] Their relationship to place is complicated by the history of Asian-Canadian settlement in the country, where they have come from, and their relationships to white-settler society here. As Sino-Vietnamese Scholar Malissa Phung argues, the relationship of Asian-Canadians to Canada is dictated and sustained by settler-colonialism, as "Asian migrant and refugee communities [are] shaped by an enduring sense of gratitude towards the state for being granted a new life on colonized lands."[6] In order to confront this complexity and inherited responsibility in the present,

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[4] My use of the term "settler-colonial" defines the genocidal elimination and territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples by European settlers, more specifically how this structure manifests (and is ongoing) in the Canadian context. I use this definition in reference to Patrick Wolfe's "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," (2006), who suggests that settler-colonialism is a structure rather than a single event that occurred.

[5] Ayumi Goto in discussion with the author, May 24, 2021; Jin-me Yoon in discussion with the author, June 15, 2021.

[6] Malissa Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities: Literary Gestures of Respect and Gratitude," *Canadian Literature*, no. 227 (2015): 57.

both Goto and Yoon create site-specific artworks that connect with their own Asian-Canadian identities while also taking careful consideration of their relationality to Indigenous peoples. In this thesis, I examine how these dynamics and relationships affect the context of their works.

Although their works do not always directly engage with Indigenous topics, it is a deliberate consideration that both Goto and Yoon make, to think relationally in the research and/or production of all their work, choosing to collaborate with Indigenous peers and/or connect with Indigenous communities in the areas where they work. Through these connections, the artists have built a foundation for their practices that are rooted in decoloniality. Racialized settlers like Goto and Yoon have been implementing these practices into their work to decentralize colonial ideas of 'nation,' and exploring these relationships in a way that begs the question: what do we owe to each other?

The question I pose in the title of this thesis is a direct reference to moral philosopher Thomas Scanlan's book *What We Owe to Each Other.*[7] Scanlan uses contractualism to think about morality and responsibility in decision-making. I adopt his phrasing not to suggest there is a contractual relationship between the artists and the Indigenous peoples they work and connect with, but to think through the layers that exist in identity, responsibility, and relationality in the context of land, belonging, and place. In interviews I conducted separately with the artists, both Goto and Yoon suggested that relationality is central to their practices, while also making it clear that their relationships are not contractual but instead open and reciprocal.

Taking my title question as a point of departure, this thesis examines how Goto and Yoon consider ideas of indebtedness and relationality in their practices. In considering the ethical

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[7] T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

responsibility of indebtedness that all settlers have to Indigenous peoples for the occupation of their land, I explore how Goto and Yoon act in resistance to colonial power through the process of creating their artworks. I examine identity politics to consider how complex and tangled identities can be in a "postcolonial" nation.[8] This is further complicated by the discourse of Canada's so-called multicultural society, which continues to alienate and divide through the reinforcement of 'Otherness' while subsuming Indigenous peoples into a 'cultural mosaic' that denies their inherent rights to land.

For Goto and Yoon, the artworks I examine in this thesis act as conduits for the observer to reflect on their place on Indigenous land. This thesis thus examines how their artworks and practices reflect their connection to place through their distinct, self-described identities, and questions how the artists tackle thorny questions about how racialized settlers inherit legacies of colonialism, how that informs their relationship to Indigenous peoples and lands, and how doing so creates a new understanding of actual lived 'multiculturalism' in Canada.[9] I consider the role of past imperialism and nationalism in the formation of a Canadian art historical identity and use settler-colonial and decolonial theory to inform my analysis.

My approach to this research is informed by my whiteness. My family on my mother's side is Italian, and my family on my father's side comes from England. Both sides immigrated to

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[8] I use post-colonial here in reference to Deepika Bahri's use and critique of the term. In this thesis, I will refer to Canada's present coloniality as "neo-colonial" rather than "post-colonial." Deepika Bahri, *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009).

[9] To clarify, there is a difference between multiculturalism as state policy and multiculturalism as lived diversity. My definition of multiculturalism as state policy comes from Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (2014) and refers to the acknowledgement of the presence of culturally and racially diverse people to enforce racial power relations and constructions of difference, which Simpson argues is just "legalized settler occupation of [the] territory." Alternatively, Multiculturalism as lived diversity refers to the existence and experience of Canada's cultural diversity, in which the structure encourages and values identity labelling, and the suggestion that people are divided into the boxes of "colonizer" and "other." Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

Canada in the early 1900s, two to three generations back. It was only in the last year that I started learning about my heritage and researching my genealogy. I realize that having written records of that genealogy, as well as learning about my family history rather than having it inform my daily life is a privilege offered to me by my whiteness. My family history informs my perspective and is distinct from that of the artists I study. It was therefore critically important to me to be in conversation with both artists in order for them to represent themselves in this work. As such, for this thesis, I conducted interviews with both Goto and Yoon, and I asked them to describe what being represented as a 'settler' means to them, and their thoughts on how the language we use impacts the way in which we move about the world differently. Goto suggested that through self-identification and open communication there is room to shift the power dynamics within cross-cultural relationships. She explains, "I'm not so much interested solely in cultural identification. I'm interested in cultural relationality."[10] Yoon further posits that this "thinking relationally" must be connected to an understanding of the language we use to describe ourselves and each other. She states as an example of this, that terminology such as 'racialized' does not exist without a relation to whiteness.[11] Historian Dr. Henry Yu concurs: "One of the triumphs of a white supremacist colonial history of Canada was the mythical alchemy that made it possible for everyone who arrived from Europe to become a "Canadian," and for all those who were non-white to remain a "visible minority," forever arriving late, or a "native" forever destined to disappear."[12] Multiculturalism's guise of unitedness was a common thread of conversation in my interviews with Goto and Yoon.

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[10] Goto in discussion with the author, May 24, 2021.
[11] Yoon in discussion with the author, June 15, 2021.
[12] Henry Yu, "Nurturing Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver," in *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity,* ed. Mike DeGagné, Jonathan Dewar, and Ashok Mathur (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011): 304.

My methodology consists of an examination and analysis of several artworks by Goto and Yoon, supported by the individual interviews I conducted with each artist about their art practices and creative processes, which became an integral part of my analysis. These interviews, therefore, inform much of my writing, as I seek to foreground their perspectives on their artwork and understand how their histories and connections to their surroundings impact their work.

I did not decide to study the works of these two artists together specifically because they are both Asian-Canadian; their personal and national backgrounds and histories are distinct and cannot be conflated together. Rather, I brought their works into conversation with each other as a case study for exploring the complexities of relationality and settler responsibility in the arts in Canada more broadly, because I am interested in how they both distinctly consider their positionality as racialized artists who are in a relationship with Indigenous peoples and their lands.

So, although one of my key questions is, "How do Goto and Yoon create works that grapple with their own racialized experiences and identities while also considering and acknowledging their place as settlers in relation to Indigenous peoples?" my broader concern is with the possibilities that artistic works such as theirs can contribute to a better understanding of settler identity, and how that is addressed in a neo-colonial world. Using settler-colonial theory[13] and decolonial theory[14] as my methodological orientation, I argue that the work of Asian racialized-settler Canadian artists Goto and Yoon disrupts Canada's so-called multicultural

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[13] Bahri, *Between the Lines*; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409; Robert C. J. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[14] Ruth B. Phillips, *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011); Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

landscape by creating critiques of past imperialism and nationalism.[15] By questioning received views and providing space to re-examine ideologies, my research investigates the many ways that Goto and Yoon's artworks function as acts of allied cultural resistance to colonial power and offer a dynamic creative intervention into cultural identity constructs in Canada. Our conceptions of what we need to discuss must expand to include the important contributions that people like Goto and Yoon are making. Goto and Yoon's works offer alternative ways of being that model possible futures for how settlers and Indigenous peoples can come to better understand each other in neo-colonial Canada, both now and in the future.

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section grounds the context of this research within key terms and histories relevant to my research, including a brief overview of the history of the development of nationhood and nationalism in Canada, including the state focus on advancing a 'multicultural' and 'postcolonial' discourse in the twentieth century, all the while actively participating in neo-colonial actions against Indigenous peoples. Drawing on settler-colonial theory and decolonial theory, I further consider Canadian nationality, in tune with critiques offered by theorists concerned with possible alternatives to the concept of nationhood. I continue by examining the discourse of multiculturalism in Canada. I describe the consequences of the intolerance highlighted by multiculturalism and follow by looking at the weight of ongoing legacies of colonialism on the lives of marginalized peoples in Canada.

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[15] Daryl Chin, "Multiculturalism and Its Masks: The Art of Identity Politics," *Performing Arts Journal* 14, no. 1 (1992): 1-15; Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 222-237; Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kristy Robertson, eds. *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

The second section offers background on settler responsibility and discusses gestures of respect and indebtedness. This section begins with Jin-me Yoon's single-channel video and postcard series *Long View* (2017), which I had the chance to see in person while exhibited at the Nanaimo Art Gallery in 2017. I examine how Yoon's artistic practice questions, reframes, and stimulates discussion about identity and place. *Long View* chronicles stories from Canada and Korea, and two sites, Pacific Rim National Park on Vancouver Island and the Island Jeju-do in Korea.[16] The native inhabitants of Jeju-do are culturally distinct from the South Korean mainland thereby giving Yoon a particular point of comparison between the two lands. Yoon's artistic practice situates her experiences as an immigrant, and questions the terms of inclusion, implicated identities, and land relations from her vantage point.[17] As a racialized settler-artist who immigrated to a settler-state that privileges and assumes whiteness as "Canadian," Yoon questions received views and disrupts the foundational concepts of Canadian identity and state-managed multiculturalism. I then consider performance artist Ayumi Goto's performances *Rinrigaku: Collected Responsibility* (2016) and *geisha gyrl: yakyuu! Let's go!!* (2017), the latter of which was a part of a collaborative exhibition between Goto and Tahltan artist Peter Morin as part of their exhibition *Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: how do you carry the land?* (2017) at the Vancouver Art Gallery. The documentation of *geisha gyrl*: y*akyuu! Let's go!!* was displayed alongside that of Morin's performance *song for our aunty* (2013), which together consider ideas of cultural and historical belonging by contrasting identities. Giving voice to their experiences —

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[16] Jesse Birch, "Spectral Tides," *Nanaimo Art Gallery*, accessed November 17, 2018, http://nanaimogallery.ca/index.php/exhibitions/archive/2017-exhibition-archive/393-jin-me-yoon-spectral-tides.

[17] Nicole E. Neufeld, "Displacing Identity Politics: Relocating Sites of Representation in the Work of Jin-me Yoon" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 2008), 4, https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/002/MR43485.PDF?oclc_number=681019891.

Goto as a Japanese diasporic woman and Morin as a Tahltan Indigenous man — the exhibition navigated the lasting effects of colonialism through their racialized bodies.[18]

The third section reflects on relational histories and how Asian-Indigenous relationalities affect Goto and Yoon's practices. I do this by highlighting the use of language in self-identification. Language has a direct impact on how we interact with each other and the world around us. I argue that using settler-colonial coded terminology has an impact on how we see ourselves, and how personal identity is formed under Canadian multiculturalism. I describe how labels such as 'racialized' and 'settler' have their own imposed identities, and how those imposed identities shift the way we relate to each other. At the same time, both Goto and Yoon made clear their perspectives on the use of identifying terms, which show up in their practices.

In the final section, I consider settler identity and labels specifically relating to how legacies of colonialism are continued through inherited settler identities. I also delve into the Indigenous experience, but only to the extent that it informs the work and relationality of Goto and Yoon to their peers and collaborators; to explore this more deeply is beyond the scope of my thesis. As such, this thesis is deeply informed by Phung's "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities" (2015), whose theories regarding Indigenous and Asian relationality orient my research through an intersectional framework.[19]

Yoon's artworks deal directly with the implications of immigration to settler-colonial states, and the ideas of home and belonging. Goto's works highlight the importance of artistic collaboration and its connection to decolonization, focusing on settler-Indigenous relationships and the impacts of diaspora and globalization. To both Goto and Yoon, understanding and

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[18] Tarah Hogue, "in the betweenness between us or where two rivers meet," in *Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: how do you carry the land?* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2018), 9.
[19] Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," 56-74.

acknowledging the implications of colonial-coded self-identifying language is significant to the creation of artworks, projects, and relationships that have decolonization at their core.

Section I: Nationalism and Multiculturalism in Settler-Colonial Canada

'Nationhood' in 'Neo-Colonial' Canadian Art

By choosing to prioritise relationality and connection in their processes, both Goto and Yoon address their own experiences embodying immigrant and diasporic identities, and by sharing space with those who have different histories than themselves, suggest that we continue to live in a 'neo-colonial' rather than supposed 'post-colonial' era.[20] In her book *Between the Lines: South Asians and Postcoloniality* (2009), scholar Deepika Bahri uses the term neo-colonial to describe the present.[21] Much postcolonial theory has focused on the white settler-Indigenous binary, leaving out the ways that the lives of non-Indigenous marginalized peoples are affected by and perpetuate colonialism. The liminal space between colonizer and colonized is increasingly inhabited by all new arrivants[22] to Canada. Thinking about these relationships as not outside of the colonial present but informed and connected to it. Their presence complicates the white-settler/Indigenous binary, and Goto and Yoon's works ask us to think about place as not only related to Indigenous people, but more broadly, including all new arrivants, immigrants, and diasporic peoples.

In the wake of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*, a diverse range of dialogues, questions, and ways of understanding Canadian identity are

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[20]Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014, 152.
[21] Bahri, *Between the Lines*, 12.
[22] I borrow the term 'arrivant' from Chickasaw Gender & Women's Studies scholar Jodi Byrd, who in their book *The Transit of Empire* suggests "signif[ies] those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe"; Byrd, Jodi A. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011. xix.

emerging, which engage with the entangled history of the residential school system and its ongoing impacts in the present.[23] As white-settler Canadians grapple with the ongoing revelation of more discomforting historical truths — such as the discoveries of mass graves of children on the grounds of former residential school sites across the country — the country is being forced into a reckoning with its founding national myths, as having, for example, then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper claiming that Canada has "no history of colonialism,"[24] just one year after offering an official apology, on behalf of the Government of Canada and Canadians, to Indigenous peoples in Canada for the Indian Residential School system.

As a country, we are now forced to question what has and continues to be purposefully included or excluded from Canada's national history. And perhaps more importantly, what possible alternatives to 'nationhood' and national belonging might there be for us to explore in the future? In the introduction to the edited volume *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada* (2014), art historians Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson note the impacts that official discourses of multiculturalism and other race-based policies have had on self-identity and nationhood in Canada, and the importance of reframing the narrative of inclusion in Canadian art.[25] They argue that the "answer to exclusivity isn't necessarily inclusivity," suggesting that mere inclusion under the colonial framework is not enough.[26] Similarly, scholars Tania Das Gupta, Carl E. James, Chris Andersen, Grace-Edward Galabuzi, Roger C. A. Maaka's book *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings* (2007) asks us to, in the

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[23] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).
[24] David Ljunggren, "Every g20 Nation Wants to Be Canadian, Insists pm," *Reuters*, September 25, 2009, https://www.reuters.com/article/columns-us-g20-canada-advantages-idUSTRE58P05Z20090926.
[25] Jessup, Morton, and Robertson, "Introduction," in *Negotiations,* 5.
[26] Ibid.

context of historical nationalism, question understandings of nation as we know them.[27] Taken together, Das Gupta et al. and Jessup, Morton, and Robertson demonstrate that understanding the past and present narratives of nationhood in Canada can allow us to develop alternative understandings of 'nationhood' that deviate from the colonial definition of nation. What possible alternatives to 'nationhood' could we consider?[28] Canadian political philosopher William Kymlicka describes the idea of nations within nations, adding that "some groups reject the very idea of integrating into the 'common' national culture. These include 'national minorities' like the Quebecois, Catalans, or Flemish, who think of themselves as forming distinct 'nations' within the larger state."[29]

Artwork can address the subjectivities of embodying an immigrant and diasporic identity, and, in so doing, reveal the realities of Canada's current 'neo-colonial' rather than supposed 'post-colonial' era.[30] In this thesis, I chose to use the term 'neo-colonial' rather than 'post-colonial' to express the way that settler-colonialism in Canada has changed over time. This aligns with other contemporary scholars of race who believe that using the term 'postcolonial' leaves room for a misunderstanding that colonization is not ongoing.[31] The context of settler-colonialism in Canada has changed, and so have our perceptions of our colonial past and present. Of course, this is problematic because by suggesting that we live in a post-colonial era, a time beyond or 'without' colonial forces, we undermine and dismiss acts of colonial violence

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[27] Tania Das Gupta et al. eds, *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2007).
[28] Jessup, Morton, and Robertson, "Introduction," in *Negotiations,* 5; Alia Somani, "South Asian Canadian Histories of Exclusion," in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings,* ed. Tania Das Gupta et al. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2007), 291.
[29] William Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002): 330.
[30] Coulthard, *Red Skin*, 16.
[31] Bahri, *Between the Lines*, 70.

that continue in the present day. Yellowknives Dene Indigenous studies scholar and author Glen Coulthard suggests that Canada's colonial relationship with Indigenous peoples has changed from policy-based exclusion and assimilation techniques to one with placatory implementations for accommodation and recognition, or "colonial governmentality."[32] Coulthard explains that colonialism in Canada has transitioned from physically violent force to domination through "colonial governmentality," to which he reveals the 'Mountie' as a symbol for governance and is in fact complicit in ongoing colonization in Canada.[33] Goto and Yoon make work that reflects on their own identity through fostering relationships which attempt to move beyond coloniality and its symbology. Additionally, the artists suggest that these efforts go beyond relationships with people, but also describe relationships to land, to the non-human, and to place or Indigenous nation-state as a way of disrupting the narrative of Canada's colonial history as a thing of the past.

Multiculturalism: A System for United Division

As it exists today, Canada is a culturally diverse society home to people with an amalgamation of cultures, religions, and races. In Canada, it is often the case that the term 'multiculturalism' is used in a positive way to acknowledge a celebration of our diversity and respect for differences within our communities. At the same time, it can be argued that multiculturalism perpetuates ongoing colonialism in Canada. Kymlicka explains in his book *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (2002), that multiculturalism is a system which advertises a

[32] Coulthard, *Red Skin*, 15.
[33] Ibid.

sort of unitedness among cultural diversity, but one that does not account for different forms of marginalization that specific groups experience. He asserts this idea by using the example of racism that affects the Black population being different from racism towards Indigenous peoples. He argues that issues with multiculturalism arise when multicultural policies do not centre on minority experiences, because "unless supplemented and constrained by minority rights, state nation-building is likely to be oppressive and unjust."[34] Similarly, authors Kathy Hogarth and Wendy L. Fletcher emphasize the gravity of acknowledging racial belonging with regard to understanding nationhood under multiculturalism. They explain how contextualizing identity politics is critical for a balanced view of Canadian post-colonial multicultural in their book *A Space for Race: Decoding Racism, Multiculturalism, and Post-Colonialism:*

> "Traditional institutions of racialized research largely ignore the disparate social and political exposures confronting people of color, such as residential and occupational segregation, racial profiling, tokenism, discrimination, racism, and the consequential physiological and psychological effects flowing from the macro and micro effects of such interactions and intersectionalities."[35]

What is important here is the way that multiculturalism in Canada is dependent on the idea of 'whiteness' as an invisible dominant centre, suggesting that all races outside of 'whiteness' are being cast into the margins under the broader label of 'Other.' Canadian Studies scholar Eva Mackey expands on this idea, writing, "Canada is often described as a 'cultural mosaic' to differentiate it from the American cultural 'melting pot.' In the Canadian 'mosaic', it is said, all the hyphenated cultures—French-Canadian, Native-Canadian, and 'multicultural-Canadian'—are celebrated."[36] Referencing Kogila Moodley's 1983 foundational text, *Canadian*

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[34] Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy*, 365.
[35] Kathy Hogarth and Wendy L Fletcher, *A Space for Race : Decoding Racism, Multiculturalism, and Post-Colonialism in the Quest for Belonging in Canada and Beyond* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 64.
[36] Mackey, *The House of Difference, 15.*

Multiculturalism as Ideology, Mackey quotes, "multiculturalism implicitly constructs the idea of a core English-Canadian culture, and that other cultures become 'multicultural' in relation to that unmarked, yet dominant, Anglo-Canadian core culture."[37]

Critical Race and Indigenous Studies scholar Eve Tuck and Ethnic Studies scholar K. Wayne Yang's essay "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" (2012) considers settler moves to innocence, specifically in North American settler-colonial states. Tuck and Yang explain that moves to innocence are what settlers do to try and alleviate settler guilt. What becomes more complicated, is that these moves to innocence are also often made to look like they advance decolonization efforts without actually doing the work of decolonizing. The authors bring up the idea of "colonial equivocation," which is to combine people of colour into the same category, such as describing all anti-imperialism as decolonization, or the often-heard phrase "I don't see colour!"[38] Multiculturalism as a project attempts to do this by simultaneously unifying and erasing individual cultures, which are then divided into 'other' and 'colonizer' within the multicultural unit.[39] Tuck and Yang write, "We are asking them/you to consider how the pursuit of critical consciousness, the pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment, can also be settler moves to innocence - diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege."[40] How do moves to innocence as a concept extend to non-white settlers, or more specifically, how might racialized settlers perform moves to innocence in a different way? Tuck explains, "Settlers are

[37] Ibid, 15.
[38] Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 17.
[39] Ibid, 19.
[40] Ibid, 21.

diverse, not just of white European descent, and include people of colour, even from other colonial contexts."[41]

Mackey asks, if multiculturalism is considered a defining feature of Canadian identity, does this identity of 'difference' enforce exclusion based on difference? If so, how does it do this?[42] Mackey unpacks, complicates, and reveals the fragility of the white Canadian identity, as well as connecting power to constructions of difference. Multiculturalism gives the veil of a reorganization of society through the veneer of progressive politics without addressing the underlying issues of colonialism. Asian Studies professor Sunera Thobani, in her book *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and National in Canada* (2007), considers the insecurity, anxiety, and fragility of whiteness as being connected to multicultural integration. More specifically, Thobani suggests that the insecurity of white identity is tied to the 'othering' of non-white cultures. She argues that whiteness is threatened by a system that allows equality or mobility between races and classes, which she explains as the threat inherent in the question, "Who are we if they can become us?"[43]

Multiculturalism gives the impression that whiteness is tolerant of 'Others' when it marks those outside of whiteness as outsiders of the nation, all the while hiding the ongoing intolerance and racism built into Canada's state policies. Multiculturalism enables white people to remove themselves as the problem under the guise that it has solved issues of inequality, while also absolving the white-settler of guilt or responsibility. As Thobani writes, "If whites were to be accused of racism, genocide, and colonial exploitation, they could now respond in kind by

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[41] Ibid, 7.
[42] Mackey, *The House of Difference,* 31.
[43] Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and National in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 152.

pointing to how much worse immigrants were, with their primitive and backward cultural practices, their corruptions, misogyny, cronyism and violence."[44] By positioning the blame on anything but whiteness, the narrative shifts towards an understanding that multiculturalism is the solution to all of the problems with 'historical' racism and colonialism.

Canadian multiculturalism does not operate through the 'melting pot' analogy associated with American culture, which is where people of colour are meant to assimilate to the dominant white culture. In Canada, we use the language of the cultural mosaic, supposedly an alternative where diversity is seen as distinct parts of a cohesive whole. The cultural mosaic model's emphasis on culture "suppresse[s] public discussion of the racism, both institutional and personal, which [bar] the full participation of people of colour within the economic and socio-political establishment."[45] Further complicating this, Thobani notes that many immigrants to Canada embrace multiculturalism, as a "celebration of their existence in the country."[46] As noted earlier, Graburn argues that in a country that at least partially relies on our historical relationship with Indigenous peoples to define our country and distinguish it from the rest of the world, the multicultural model is a reality and history that confronts all who join Canada.[47]

Multiculturalism offers an alternative depiction of 'Canadianness' that is not reliant on the colony, but rather offered as a celebration of diversity. Whiteness is not known for what it is, but for a clear distinction of what it is not. Similarly, multicultural Canada is defined by creating distinct categories that, under the illusion of inclusion, divide Canadians by creating the category of 'other.'

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[44] Thobani, *Exalted Subjects,* 155.
[45] Ibid, 156
[46] Ibid, 165.
[47] Graburn, "Inuit Art and Canadian Nationalism," 5.

Section II: What Do We Owe To Each Other?

Settler Responsibility and Indebtedness

What responsibility do settlers have towards Indigenous people within Canada? Is it the same for all settlers, regardless of status, race, class and how they arrived here? Artists Goto and Yoon are actively cognizant of their positions within our so-called multicultural society and with the current state of settler-colonialism in the country, and they make use of that knowledge within their artistic practices. I had the opportunity to speak with both Goto and Yoon about their respective art practices and learn how the development of their artworks involves connecting with Indigenous people and communities and exploring various manifestations of responsibility and relationality in their work.

When I spoke with Goto and Yoon, they both referenced the idea of indebtedness as central to their thinking during their art-making processes. Racialized settlers have a different relationship to colonialism than white settlers do. Within a settler-colonial critique, racialized settlers of non-Indigenous descent inherit legacies of colonialism that impact relations with Indigenous peoples. Settlers of any race still benefit from the colonial project which disenfranchises Indigenous peoples from their lands. As Phung explains, "contemporary Asian Canadian settler citizens, migrants, and refugees inherit not only the legacies of white supremacy, global capital, and settler colonialism, but also the historical relations of Sino-Indigenous indebtedness."[48] This history of colonial experiences by non-Indigenous racialized settlers is complex — they bring their own unique experience and understanding of colonialism's impacts

[48] Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," 57.

on their lives. This then becomes a part of their way of seeing and participating in discussions of the benefits and costs of colonialism in a new context.

My conversations with Yoon included the concept of indebtedness between settler-Indigenous communities. Yoon situated indebtedness as central to the way she initiates and follows through with research and establishes connections with the Indigenous communities with which she works. “It's due to a cultural genocide that I'm allowed to be here and, in that way, there are uneven conditions. I also feel I need to own up to that. Not being white doesn't get me off the hook, so to speak.”[49] Yoon explains, “I try to figure out a way that through the community that I can be introduced and see if they are willing to spend time with me to talk to me. I just say, ‘I'm just here, I'm making a project, I want to make sure that I understand history, especially Indigenous histories.’”[50] In her research for *Long View*, she discovered that the Ucluelet and Tofino areas surrounding Pacific Rim National Park have a profound history connected to the internment of Japanese Canadians and made it a point to connect with Japanese Canadians living in the area. Yoon spoke to the colonial heritage and complex history between Japan and Korea, and how the overlapping and liminal histories affected how she navigated working in Pacific Rim National Park. More specifically, this is when Japanese Canadians lost their homes after the Canadian government forcefully appropriated and redistributed them to Indigenous peoples during the internment. “I [also] feel indebted to the Japanese Canadians who had to endure that.”[51] These overlapping histories create a liminal space where not only the histories of Indigenous peoples are relevant, but also to other communities marginalized by the Canadian government and colonization.

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[49] Yoon in discussion with the author, June 15, 2021.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.

Yoon creates artworks that deal directly with the implications of immigration to settler-colonial states, and the ideas of home and belonging. Her artistic practice questions, reframes, and stimulates discussion about identity and place. Yoon explains that situating herself is central to her practice, “It's due to a cultural genocide that I'm allowed to be here and that way, even though that's harsh, there are uneven conditions.”[52] To work through the debt that can never be repaid, Yoon says that she endeavours to get a deep understanding of the colonial context of the land that she works on. She does this through research and by forging relationships with locals to the area and people whose histories relate to the land. “I never want to speak for Indigenous peoples because nobody wants to do that. Nobody should do that. What I'm always talking about is my relationship to land. Whose lands are these, whose ancestral territories, what treaties.”[53] She goes on to explain that indebtedness goes beyond acknowledgement; it needs to involve action and discussion. For her, it means having open communication and connection with Indigenous communities from that place. “I'm not trying to represent them or give them a voice or tell their stories. But when I go to a place, that's a part of my understanding of the place.”[54] She expressed the importance of doing the research to connect to the land she is on and the peoples whose territory it is, through an example of her 2017 exhibition *Spectral Tides* at Nanaimo Art Gallery in Nanaimo, British Columbia. As part of developing works for the exhibition, she explains, “when I go to a place like Pacific Rim National Park reserve,” where the photographic work *Long View* (Fig. 1) was created, “then I have to understand, what does it

[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

mean? What did it mean for the traditional territories here? What histories get enlightened in a touristic kind of gloss?"[55]

She is clear to distinguish that she creates work not for Indigenous people but with the context of settler-colonialism informing her work. Yoon took care to learn about not only the national park itself, but also the neighbouring towns of Tofino and Ucluelet, which are connected by Pacific Rim National Park and then delved into the history of that place related to the internment of Japanese Canadians. She explains this further, "I'm really talking about those overlapping histories. I'm not Japanese-Canadian, but I inherit those histories by the virtue of racialization."[56] In other words, Yoon recognizes the need to connect with the overlapping histories, allowing her to self-locate within the context of the land she works on. She does this from an earnest desire to learn.

Yoon reached out to the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples of the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation. She recounts her experience, making clear that trust is central to her process. "I tread lightly. I do not force myself. It takes time. It takes trust. Why should they talk to me? You know, what's reciprocity? What do I have to offer in asking them to share their stories or talk about their relationship to place? That's an ethical question." She continues, "for me, it's an ethical responsibility of indebtedness to those communities."[57] Yoon offers a token of reciprocation, which she says can come in the form of a small gift or other forms, for their willingness to share. She makes it clear that the connection is not transactional or commercial in any way. Yoon asserts that a central part of her practice is to create relationships with the Indigenous communities where she creates her projects. This involves reaching out to members of the

[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.

community and telling them about her project, providing an earnest and sincere desire to learn and understand the place, and that she does not expect nor request any information that is not offered to her. When we look at the final images and video created in *Long View*, there is no visual indication of the work done 'behind the scenes' but the relationships that she develops over a long period of time are no less important to the final work.

Long View consists of a single channel video and a series of postcards, in the same format as her well-known postcard series *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991) (Fig. 2.) Similarly to *Long View,* in *Souvenirs of the Self* Yoon places her body in the context of the landscape. The postcards depict Yoon standing in front of various iconic tourist sites across Canada. The juxtaposition of her body with the familiar sites is meant to convey a sense of discomfort as if she struggles to fit herself into the constructed tourist landscape. In their master's thesis, Jingjing Zheng wrote about Yoon's work with diaspora and self-locatedness: "Yoon's work represents a hybrid identity developed in Canada," she says, "by placing herself in iconic tourist attractions yet making herself look strange and alien to the surroundings, Yoon questions the authenticity of this "odd-looking" woman's Canadianness."[58] *Souvenirs of the Self* complicates the normative 'white' Canadian tourist landscape that many expect from Canada, and that is upheld by settler colonialism.

The format of the postcard is important here. In *Souvenirs of the Self,* Yoon's focus is on exploring feelings of displacement in the landscape, whereas in *Long View* (Fig. 3), Yoon explores what it means for her to feel settled. She uses the postcard format as both a nod to the tourism industry, and to emphasize the idea of feeling displaced, travelling, or being in transition.

[58] Jingjing Zheng, "Picturing the Asian Diaspora in North America: A Study of Liu Hung, Jin-Me Yoon and Nikki S. Lee," master's thesis, University of Alberta, 2010, 54.

Having *Long View* formatted as a postcard series signifies a transpacific connection between Pacific Rim National Park on Vancouver Island and the Island Jeju-do in Korea.[59] Yoon positions her body front and centre, looking through wideset binoculars (Fig. 4), in a nod to Canadian artist Alex Colville's iconic painting, *To Prince Edward Island* (1965) (Fig. 5). Yoon has appropriated references to Canadian art history in her practice throughout her career as a way of recontextualizing white settler representations of Canadian identity. In this work, Yoon uses the image of binoculars, which in Colville's painting references the dichotomy between the observer and the observed, to instead create a visual link between Korea and Canada. The following image in the *Long View* series shows the ocean as if to suggest that Yoon is looking across the Pacific Ocean toward Korea (Fig. 6). Yoon makes it clear that her presence is shaped by the relationships she has both with the land and the people connected to her.

How Relational Histories Shift the Narrative

Goto's work *Rinrigaku: Collected Responsibility* (2016) (Fig. 7, Fig. 8) also explores this idea of being transient, specifically feeling embodied as a transient occupant on Canadian land. "Rinrigaku (倫理学) means ethics in Japanese," she says, further explaining that the "language of one's cultural background really shapes the way we think about collaboration, how we think about relationships and responsibility."[60] Goto's focus on relationality is what allows her to think contextually. She currently works and lives in Toronto, Ontario. Her works highlight the importance of artistic collaboration and its connection to decolonization, focusing on settler-Indigenous relationships and the impacts of diaspora and globalisation. Her performance

[59] Birch, "Spectral Tides."
[60] Goto in conversation with the author, May 24, 2021.

works often involve themes of cultural heritage, senses of belonging, and land-human-animal relations.

While Yoon uses the development process for her works to engage with overlapping settler-colonial histories, Goto uses her performances as an opportunity to connect with people as the artwork is being performed. This is to say that she both works with Indigenous artists and engages with the public in a way that allows for open dialogue about settler-colonialism and decolonial action. This affects her relationships with the Indigenous peoples that she works with and in vicinity to, asking herself the question, "What is my life in relation to my Indigenous hosts?"[61] As a part of her performance process, Goto acknowledges the past, present, and futures of all of those who are "present" for her performances. She says, "I think that whenever we perform, there are so many different bodies around, some are visible, or some are invisible. Some are human and non-visible. Some are non-human and non-visible. It's an infinite kind of presence."[62] This is not to suggest that her practice is involved with the metaphysical, but that it is an acknowledgment of endless histories in any situation. In our conversation, Goto specifically referenced *how do you carry the land* (2018) (Fig. 9, Fig. 10), a performance project created by Goto and long-time collaborator Peter Morin at the Vancouver Art Gallery, which, for her, describes the idea of multiple present bodies within a performance.

Morin is, according to Goto, one of her closest collaborators and dearest friends. She said that when she performs, the idea of what is and is not a body is played with. "Sometimes it's a separate Peter and Ayumi body, but then sometimes they fuse together. When they come together, that itself becomes a body."[63] Morin and Goto are allied together as they perform, but she

[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.

suggests that even using the terms ‘allied’ or ‘connected’ does not properly capture or describe the richness of the bond they form. Goto and Morin’s first collaboration was at the 2013 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Quebec National Event in Montreal, and since then they have been close collaborators, and have eventually become best friends. Their bond is central to their practice and collaborative work. This is explained beautifully in the catalogue for their 2018 exhibition *how do you carry the land?*: “Together they write a new Canada … beyond any Canada in which a person of Japanese heritage and a person of Tahltan identity work together to address and contribute their voices in the transformation of history, stories forward. Restructuring futures. And in witness to the land.”[64]

In their essay “Apology Dice: Collaboration in Progress,” artists David Garneau and Clement Yeh discuss the importance of settler-Indigenous partnerships and artistic collaborations, and how important connection is in relation to reconciliation and decolonization. Garneau and Yeh examine the ways that Goto and Morin’s collaborative practice questions colonial coded identities, writing, “the Morin/Goto partnership disrupts the Indigenous/Settler binary that assumes the Settler position to only be occupied by European bodies.”[65] Part of their partnership is dictated by the Indigenous/Settler binary and their artistic collaborations, but their friendship is what connects them beyond the artwork and allows them to trust and share together.

As friends and close collaborators, Goto and Morin are in constant dialogue, something necessary to work in such close proximity. Their shared exhibition allowed them to explore these questions together on a larger scale, with public works that engage viewers to reflect on their

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[64] Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin, “Hair,” in *The Land We Are: Artists & Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation,* ed. Sophie McCall and Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015), 184.
[65] David Garneau and Clement Yeh, “Apology Dice: Collaboration in Progress,” in *The Land We Are: Artists & Writers Unsettle the Politics of Reconciliation,* ed. Sophie McCall and Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2015), 75.

place on Canadian land. This closeness lets them explore the idea of performance as a space beyond colonial language. As Métis/Cree artist Cheryl L'Hirondelle notes, "when you say 'how do you carry the land?'—we carry it with language."[66]

[66] Michael Turner, "How Do You Carry the Land?," *Canadian Art*, September 25, 2018. https://canadianart.ca/reviews/how-do-you-carry-the-land/.

Section III: Relationality and the Terms of Inclusion

Defining Settler: The Role of Coded Language

How does the language we use to define ourselves affect our relations with each other? Does the use of coded language in our identifiers affect how we co-exist relationally? Using totalizing terms and separating people into cultural 'groups' through language is pervasive in a multicultural society in Canada, and of course by extension through the arts. While multiculturalism does allow for more acknowledgement of difference – specifically with ethnicity, history, religion, and origin – artist, critic, and curator Daryl Chin explains that these distinctions develop into harsh divides that separate rather than bring people together. Chin argues that labels are limiting and that we have the ability to go further than specificities within race. "It is true that art derives from social and political circumstances, but art should be a way for us to use our minds, and not just our passports and identity cards."[67] With this he asks, how can we relate to each other within the limitations of multiculturalism?

Labels such as 'racialized' and 'settler' have their imposed identities, and I am aware that my use of these terms in this thesis also has its own projected meaning, and shapes how those imposed identities shift the way we relate to each other. I consider settler identity and labels specifically relating to how legacies of colonialism are continued through inherited settler identities. To Goto and Yoon, understanding and acknowledging the implications of colonial coded self-identifying language is significant to the creation of artworks, projects, and

[67] Daryl Chin, "Multiculturalism and Its Masks: The Art of Identity Politics," *Performing Arts Journal* 14, no. 1 (1992): 15.

relationships that have decolonization at their core. Using the term 'settler' as a self-descriptive label for a non-white person in Canada has a different meaning than when a white person uses it. Yoon explains, "I am a settler too, but I don't have the same way through, and that's why it's a totalizing term."[68] Terms like 'settler' don't account for particularities in individual life experiences. Not everyone is equally a 'settler' in that experiences of being 'settled' vary depending on many factors. Hogue considers the impact of language on Goto and Morin's collaborative practice and suggests that using descriptive labels like settler, Indigenous, or racialized, can do more harm than good: "[these] categorizations are neat packages wrapped tightly around bodies, suffocating and obliterating that which is contained, and impeding possibilities for relating otherwise."[69] She suggests that these labels work to divide rather than to unite and that Goto and Morin's collaborative practice moves acknowledgment to a "reorientation of terms."[70] This being said, Phung suggests that acknowledgement of terminology is still central to Asian-Indigenous relationality. She explains that "Asian Canadians must confront and acknowledge their roles and responsibilities in the ongoing structure of settler colonialism, even if they or their ancestors do not benefit from the same privilege systems as many white settlers."[71]

Whereas Yoon uses the term settler to self-describe part of her identity and the way she lives and moves about the world, Goto says that she feels "unsettled." Goto grew up on a Canadian mushroom farm where her parents sponsored refugees and economic migrant workers, which she described as a "multi-Asian, multi-linguistic and multi-directional environment."[72]

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[68] Yoon in discussion with the author, June 15, 2021.
[69] Hogue, "in the betweenness," 11.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," 60.
[72] Goto in conversation with the author, May 24, 2021.

Goto says that her exposure to these different kinds of newcomers to Canada complicated the monolithic definition of 'settler' and in doing so opened possibilities for understanding different presences in Canada. "Not all of them will become intergenerational settlers, not all of them are going to be permanent or demand permanence, even those who are born in Canada."[73]

Goto says that she feels a collective responsibility to be unsettled, and part of that comes from exploring her family history, and through that coming to understand the brutality of Japanese colonization. "I don't identify as a settler," she says. "I'm doing everything in my power to leave Canada because I don't want to be that person. I want to break the cycle of thinking that I am owed landing or that I must be permanently in a place. I feel duty bound to not be settled."[74] Scholars Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, in their 2005 article "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," consider decolonization to be made up of individual choices and commitments. They suggest that the process of decolonization comes from "shifts in thinking and action that emanate from recommitments and reorientations at the level of the self that, over time and through proper organization, manifest as broad social and political movements to challenge state agendas and authorities."[75] Goto's political commitment to not settle reflects a reorientation of the self that contributes to her understanding of her presence in Canada, and how the decisions she makes affect the people around her. This level of understanding she has of herself and her position is what led Goto to prioritize intersectional relationality in her artmaking process.

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[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, "Being Indigenous: Resurgences against Contemporary Colonialism," *Government and Opposition* 40, no. 4 (2005): 611.

Goto believes that the settler-Indigenous binary reduces engagement and relationality and that by "opening up different types of relationships, it also expands our imaginary for what it means to be present in that moment."[76] She argues that interactions foregrounding the intention to form or maintain good relations become scripted by the settler-Indigenous binary. As Goto suggests, using totalizing language to describe a settler identity does not account for the intersectional nature of identities among Canadians. In Canada, we group all non-Indigenous people under the term 'settler' regardless of how they came to be here. Some immigrants to Canada are unsettled from their home countries due to war, colonization, or otherwise. In this circumstance, does the unsettled then become the settler? Carla Taunton explains this phenomenon in her doctoral thesis "Performing Resistance/Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Women's Performance Art in Canada" *(*2011): "People of colour who have settled in Canada, and other settler nations, are also non-Indigenous settlers, however, marked and racialized by their difference and subjectivities have not benefited from the colonial project to the same capacity [as] white populations."[77]

When I spoke with Goto about this idea, she suggested that the settler-Indigenous binary leaves out too many people. "It leaves out people who are so estranged from their Indigenous identity, and people that because of colonization, and/or family breakdowns, don't settle in Canada. They're never spiritually present, even though they are bodily here."[78]

So, how can we navigate the urge to self-define against Canada's colonial past, especially when the colonial present imposes identifiers through multiculturalism? Goto explains that her

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[76] Goto in conversation with the author, May 24, 2021.
[77] Carla Taunton, "Performing Resistance/Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Women's Performance Art in Canada," (doctoral thesis, Queen's University, 2011), 13.
[78] Goto in conversation with the author, August 20, 2021.

performances present an avenue for self-reflection outside of the colonial language boundaries that we use to understand our place in Canada.

Goto asserts that much of her work aims to get her audience to rethink the binary of margin and centre. This binary, like the settler-Indigenous binary, Goto argues, is divisive and does not account for particularities within lived experiences. By offering an alternative to these structures, Goto allows her audience to perceive their own presence in Canada outside of the established categories while still reflecting on the importance of witnessing and listening to each other. She says, "I think we've internalized racism, and now we're building these acronyms that actually equally divide these groups based on race. And I find that disturbing."[79]

In both Goto and Yoon's works, I see a sense of the artist wanting to meet people where they already are and start the conversation on race from there. This means that there is less pressure on all parties to have to maintain a certain level of knowledge before relating to each other. Instead, these conversations create a relational shift that is mediated by the performance space, the performance, and the bodies present. Performances are good at enlivening the space in a way that makes people who would usually not go into galleries feel more connected.

Postcolonial Literature scholar Alia Somani investigates race-based exclusion and erasure in her article *South Asian Canadian Histories of Exclusion (2018).* She considers how racial discrimination and the privileging of whiteness change the way Canadian histories are written. She argues, "to marginalize such histories or erase them from the narrative of the nation is not only symbolically to write out the presence of minority communities for which these histories are of particular importance but also to recast Canada as a white nation."[80] Somani's

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Somani, Alia. "South Asian Canadian Histories of Exclusion" in Das Gupta, Tania, ed. Race and Racialization: Essential Readings. Second edition. Canadian Scholars' Press, 2018. 291.

understanding of multinational space can be connected to Goto's rejection of colonial terminology used for settlers. Without accounting for particularities in 'nation,' as is in Goto's case, we are at risk of missing layers of complexities within our relationship with each other. This is not to say that these labels need not exist, but Goto suggests the terms should not be the first thing brought to the conversation. Similarly, Chin in his 1992 article "Multiculturalism and Its Masks: The Art of Identity Politics," suggests that cultural identity labels are limiting and reinforce difference, especially under a system which preaches diversity and inclusion as multiculturalism does.[81] He makes the argument that racialized artists who chose not to focus their art on their racialized experience or identity are being marginalized even further by multiculturalism, for not fitting into a specific label.[82]

In her article, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities: Literary Gestures of Respect and Gratitude," Phung's examination of future-oriented relation building between Asian and Indigenous communities considers the different relationships that Indigenous communities and racialized migrant communities have with colonialism. She further argues that relation-building offers a point of contact between these perspectives, writing, "this process of relation-building inaugurates an ongoing, future-oriented relation of social return, requiring a continual maintenance of intercommunity relations and a constant renewal of trust and solidarity."[83] For Mohawk philologist Gage Karahkwí:io Diabo, the key feeling necessary for relation building is

[81] Chin, "Multiculturalism and Its Masks," 9.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," 65.

"respect,"[84] while Phung focuses on a sense of "gratitude" in the face of "ongoing historical indebtedness."[85]

In "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," Phung considers the differences in the relationship between Asian Canadians and colonialism, and Indigenous communities and colonialism.[86] Phung draws from Iyko Day's *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (2016), in which Day argues that Asian Canadians inherit legacies of white supremacy and settler colonialism while also being subject to marginalization under multiculturalism. Day asks, how do Asian-Canadians willingly or unwillingly take part in the colonial state structure, and how does this affect Asian-Indigenous relations?[87] She argues that focusing on open Asian-Indigenous relationships based on trust offer a future-oriented point of connection.

Process as Practice

Goto's *geisha gyrl*: *yakyuu! Let's go!!* (Fig. 11), performed at Vancouver's Oppenheimer Park in 2018, is an example of how she prioritizes adaptation and improvisation in her work. *geisha gyrl: yakyuu! Let's go!!* was one of several individual and collaborative performances by Goto and Morin as part of *how do you carry the land?*. Oppenheimer Park is a significant place for both Indigenous and Japanese people. In the early 1900's, the space was named Japantown,

[84] Gage Karahkwí:io Diabo, "Bad Feelings, Feeling Bad: The Affects of Asian-Indigenous Coalition," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2019): 259.
[85] Phung, "Asian-Indigenous Relationalities," 68.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 78-79.

home to a large population of Japanese Canadians.[88] With Japanese internment in the 1940s, the surrounding populations were displaced and the park was renamed to Oppenheimer Park.[89] Further, the park is also an Indigenous memorial site, marked by the totem pole raised in 1998 to honour those who have died in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, an area of long-withstanding poverty that disproportionately affects Indigenous peoples.[90] Its politicised history is relevant to Goto and Morin's performance; Goto being Japanese and Morin being Tahltan, their histories intertwine not only through their shared performance but through a shared history of the space. Goto and Morin's performances were described as presenting a "dialogue between two artists."[91]

With the significance of Oppenheimer Park in mind, Goto began her solo performance, *geisha gyrl.* Viewers were presented with Goto dressed in traditional Geisha attire, including a kimono belonging to her mother. The *geisha gyrl* performance consisted of a traditional Japanese tea ceremony where Goto washed the base of the totem pole in the park, in what she describes as "a form of ceremonial tea washing."[92] Historically, traditional Japanese tea ceremonies are performed as a way for a host to honour and connect with guests. In this respect, Goto's act of washing the totem pole was her way of sharing her culture, connecting and "honouring one's ancestors."[93] The act of serving and receiving, giving space, and sharing in a cultural activity allowed Goto to connect to the histories of the place where she was performing.

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[88] Joshua Azizi, "Protests, Memorials, and Baseball: Oppenheimer Park Often a Focal Point in Vancouver History," *The Georgia Straight*, August 29, 2019, https://www.straight.com/news/1292936/protests-memorials-and-baseball-oppenheimer-park-often-focal-point-vancouver-history.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Hogue, "in the betweenness," 12.
[92] Goto in discussion with the author, May 24, 2021.
[93] Ibid.

While performing, Goto was interrupted by an Indigenous audience member who began to ask her questions. This was not an undesirable interruption as the audience member respectfully wanted to understand part of her process. Goto explained they shared an interest in respecting their ancestors. Allowing such an encounter to happen organically allowed them to share a profound memory. She elaborates, “It was really magical, because it had nothing to do with all the things that separated us. It had to do with how we are both interested in doing this act of respecting your ancestors.”[94] When we spoke about this during our interview, Goto made clear that it was a welcomed encounter and that she encourages any kind of interaction with her and her performances. “I'll just stop and explain, and then keep going. It makes me remember that performance in such a different way. And maybe it makes them have an encounter that they remember.”[95] Goto explained that unrehearsed moments and improvisation are part of why her performances speak to so many people. She welcomes unplanned encounters with respect and gratitude, which allows her to connect with people she may not have outside of the performance. “Scripting our responses doesn't necessarily lead to real and really deep relationship building. In fact, when it's unscripted and you're clumsier, I think that's more honest.”[96] While Goto values unscripted, spontaneous collaborative work in her artistic practice, she does not approach a performance unprepared. Goto says that training and practice are required for her type of performance.

Métis/French Canadian scholar and curator Tarah Hogue, who curated *Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin: how do you carry the land?,* describes Goto’s performance and interaction with the audience member: “Goto humbly served her, and the woman thanked her for sharing her culture.

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[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.

It was a deeply profound moment of exchange that brought the performance and the park together suddenly, viscerally, with all the layered histories congealing in the lived present."[97] What is significant here is twofold. First, Goto's performance offered an opportunity for conversation to become active, allowing unexpected multi-cultural relationalities to form. Second, her awareness of self-locatedness and openness to witnessing and connecting with others allowed both Goto and the woman to connect through a shared history. As Hogue says, "Goto's donning of this persona honoured the geisha by placing her in conversation with the complex history and current circumstances layered in Oppenheimer Park."[98]

Goto makes clear the time she takes to connect and grow with artistic collaborator Morin is what allows her to create the work that she does.[99] In *how do you carry the land?,* photographic documentation of *geisha gyrl* was displayed alongside documentation of Morin's *a song for our aunty* from the Cultural Graffiti in London series (2013) (Fig. 12). Similarly to *geisha gyrl,* Morin was dressed in traditional Tahltan clothing. Morin's performance consisted of him singing Tahltan songs in front of and while connecting with different monuments in London, England. In the same way that Goto was interested in sharing a cultural connection through her performance, Morin's performance was a way for him to share his reflections on the British colonization of Canada and the impact that has had on Indigenous peoples.

On a similar note, Yoon also spoke about the importance of self-locatedness to her arts practice. When I interviewed Yoon, she was very intentional in making sure that I was aware of the relationality between the two of us, and how the context in which I asked her questions was

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[97] Tarah Hogue, "But Here We Are Amazingly Alive, *"* vivomediarts, accessed March 21, 2022, https://thirstdays.vivomediaarts.com/post/149763308742/but-here-we-are-amazingly-alive.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

defined by constructed terms of living in a settler-colonial state. I use the term 'racialized' to define Goto and Yoon in my questions and proposals and I am aware that that term does not exist without a relation to whiteness.

Scholar Gayatri Gopinath describes the relationship between diaspora and Indigeneity as often proposed as in opposition to one another. Gopinath argues that diaspora is typically connected to mobility and displacement, whereas Indigeneity is often associated with what she calls "rootedness."[100] Gopinath remarks that "many scholars have rendered in rich historical and ethnographic detail the lived experience of indigeneity that evinces the fluid exchanges between the Indigenous and the diasporic," suggesting that exchanges within these groups have significant connections that are significant to relationality.[101]

[100] Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 346.
[101] Ibid, 361.

Conclusion: Entangled Histories, Decolonial Futures

"Relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality."[102]

Recent works by Goto and Yoon demonstrate how racialized settlers adopt legacies of colonialism, and how that shapes their relationship with Indigenous peoples. Who is allowed to decide who is a 'settler' and who is not? How does using these terms change our relationships with one another, and how can these boundaries be met or challenged? The 'settler-Indigenous' binary is problematic for leaving out large communities of people and can be called reductive. How do we shape our identities because of, or in response to, colonialism?

During our conversations, both Goto and Yoon asked me an important question about my position in relation to my Indigenous hosts. I believe they did so in order to underscore that we all must be cognizant of the longstanding history of the land we live on and to investigate the impact our presence has with relation to Indigenous communities. Their works do this too: being confronted with artwork that requires self-reflection can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary to understand the ways that settler presence continues to harm Indigenous peoples.

Goto and Yoon do not make art *for* Indigenous people, but their works emphasize and reference the importance of acknowledging their place on Canadian soil, building authentic relationships, and how that is dictated by settler-colonial terms. Yoon's approach is to reach out and connect to the communities where she works and offer what she can as a form of mutual respect and knowledge sharing. Her sincerity, earnest desire to learn, and insistence on self-locating are crucial to the connections she makes with Indigenous communities. Goto works

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[102] Sean Wilson, *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods,* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008): 7.

with Indigenous peers and collaborators and emphasizes the fullness of her relationships, which she worries will be flattened by colonial language. She explains, “We have to just take care of each other, look out for each other and get to know one another with the understanding that we're passing each other.”[103] Her relationships are central to her practice, so central that they are often involved in the creation and performance itself.

Individually, Goto and Yoon’s artworks and practices reflect their connection to place through their self-described identities. Both Goto and Yoon use their art practices to question and understand Canada’s colonial past and how it lives on in our neo-colonial present. Their works question the terms of inclusion, implicated identities, and land relations. Their experience with relation building, both with people and with land, offers a dynamic creative intervention into cultural identity constructs in Canada. Moreover, Goto and Yoon suggest that a relationship to place or nation-state that is grounded in Indigenous methodology is a way of disrupting the narrative that Canada’s colonial history is a thing of the past. Under a framework of multiculturalism, Canada conceals our colonial past and ongoing acts of neo-colonialism in the present and turns the focus to a manufactured union of cultures. Goto and Yoon’s work to reject the terminology upheld by multiculturalism offers an alternative to these ideals.

Having access to artwork that can makes us critically reflect on our place on Indigenous land, especially as a reference point to better understand how multiculturalism and settler-colonialism have shaped our identities, is particularly important to decolonization. Scholar Henry Yu, in his article “Nurturing Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities in Vancouver,” (2011) calls for a future that is not dictated by our divisions: “We are left with the task of trying to understand what we have in common, what we

[103] Goto in conversation with the author, May 24, 2021.

can take from our broken past, upon which we can build a shared future. Do we need a shared past in order to have a common future?"[104]

Goto and Yoon complexify understandings of the impacts of settler colonialism in Canada by highlighting the layered, overlapping histories that are implicated by colonialism in their work. They point out that settler-colonialism is not something that migrants and new marginalized Canadians simply find in Canada, but rather it is a system that they experience, are implicated by, and are subject to perpetuating. Further, they bring their own experiences of racialized identities and histories that impact them. These histories of colonialism are thus entangled with local histories of white settlers, Indigenous peoples, and historical communities of colour in Canada. Through their practices, Goto and Yoon call for ongoing, challenging, evolving and important conversations about what settler colonialism means for these communities.

What does it mean for me to live here? This is the question I asked myself when I first visited Yoon's exhibition *Spectral Tides* in Nanaimo, BC in 2017. I sat down to view her single-channel video *Long View* and watched as Yoon inserts herself into the landscape, quite literally, by digging a hole in the sand in Pacific Rim National Park large enough to contain her body. If Yoon had taken the time to consider the effect of her self-locatedness in Canada, then I could too. Her work is informed by a relationship to Indigenous peoples and land and is an invitation for others to question 'multiculturalism' in Canada and consider their relation to indebtedness to Indigenous communities. Goto and Yoon's practices offer a creative intervention to depictions of life and relationships in settler-colonial Canada, and in doing so suggest a possible reorientation towards a decolonial future — one where inhabitants of this land

[104] Yu, "Nurturing Dialogues," 307.

understand that indebtedness is a given, our responsibilities are clear, and relationships are attended to and practiced with care.

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Figures

Figure 1. Jin-me Yoon, *Long View*, 2017, 6 framed chromogenic prints, 83.8 x 141 cm each. Nanaimo Art Gallery. Photographed by the author.

Figure 2. Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self,* 1991-2000, postcards, each 15.2 x 10.1 cm. Nanaimo Art Gallery. Photographed by the author.

Figure 3. Jin-me Yoon, *Long View*, 2017, postcards, 10.1 x 15.2 cm each. Courtesy of Jin-me Yoon.

Figure 4. Jin-me Yoon, *Long View*, 2017, film still. Courtesy of Jin-me Yoon.

Figure 5. Alex Colville, *To Prince Edward Island,* 1965, acrylic emulsion on Masonite, 61.9 x 92.5 cm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/to-prince-edward-island.

Figure 6. Jin-me Yoon, *Long View*, 2017, film still. Courtesy of Jin-me Yoon.

Figure 7. Ayumi Goto, *Rinrigaku: Collected Responsibility*, 2016, performance documentation. Photo by Yuula Benivolski.

Figure 8. Ayumi Goto, *Rinrigaku: Collected Responsibility*, 2016, performance documentation. Photo by Yuula Benivolski.

Figure 9. Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin, *how do you carry the land?*, 2018, performance documentation. Vancouver Art Gallery.

Figure 10. Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin, *how do you carry the land?*, 2018, performance documentation. Vancouver Art Gallery.

Figure 11. Ayumi Goto, *geisha gyrl: yakyuu! Let's go!!,* 2017, performance documentation. Photograph by Brendan Yandt.

Figure 12. Peter Morin, a *song for our aunty,* 2013, Cultural Graffiti in London series, performance documentation. Courtesy of the Vancouver Art Gallery.