

Who Needs Hybridity?

The Political Limits of Mixed Race Identity

by

Emily Alanna Moorhouse

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Department of Social Justice Education

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Abstract

This thesis examines how non-white, mixed race women with Asian heritage understand, participate in, and resist colonialism, anti-blackness and anti-Indigeneity. The study finds that mixed race identification is contextual and shifts according to the racial make-up of spaces. Participants performed their identities in white spaces differently than in communities of colour. Although all participants could name whiteness, their awareness of the racial and colonial basis of citizenship was situated on a spectrum. The thesis explores how race is understood through multiple axes of identity such as disability, gender, and sexuality. Although the family is often a good space to learn about race, multiracial families sometimes reproduced ableism, queer-phobia, anti-blackness and shadism. Lastly, I focus on how hybridity is a sexualized discourse that contributes to the fetishization of multiraciality. I highlight the sexualized forms of violence that multiracial women encounter.

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Introduction

This thesis blossomed from a number of sources. On one hand, it comes from my lived experience as a mixed race woman of colour, and feeling like my stories and my histories were seldom included in scholarship. On the other hand, I felt like the mainstream media was taking a sudden interest in people that looked like me. For example, advertisers started seeing mixed race people as “exotic” and beautiful because of their racial ambiguity (Beltron and Fojas, 2008) while avoiding critical conversations about anti-racism. There is a growing body of scholarship that focuses on multiraciality across various disciplines, examining topics such as identity formation, belonging, experiences with racism, cultural divides etc. The majority of the literature is focused on the Black/White or Asian/White experience (Root 1990; Jacobs 1992; Johnson 1992; Kich 1992; Saenz, Hwang, Aguirre & Anderson 1996 among others). There has also been a focus on lived experience, understanding multiraciality as an individual experience rather than a racial category that has been produced by colonial structures. There is also a lack of scholarship documenting the stories of darker-skinned mixed race people, who often did not identify as mixed race because they are not consistently racialized as one race, notably the darkest.

Reviewing the literature on mixed race deepened my interest in documenting the stories about a diversity of multiracial people, and, importantly, making space for stories where whiteness wasn't the focal point. Mahtani and Moreno (2001)

reflect on this in their article, questioning what their positions are in the discourse about multiraciality, given that the existing frameworks in critical mixed race studies have focused on particular “biracial” mixes like Black/White or Asian/White (p 71), thus re-biologizing race. I wanted my study to address the gaps in the field, taking up the critiques raised that multiracial studies is inherently anti-black (Sexton 2008) because identifying as “mixed race” allows individuals the freedom from the constraints of racial blackness (p 6). Multiracial studies has also been critiqued for being anti-Indigenous (Mahtani, 2014) because it has failed to address land, intertwining colonial histories and anti-colonial scholarship. Focusing on these issues in my thesis was one way to address the ongoing tensions between anti-racist and anti-colonial movements and multiracial movements.

Historicizing- What is Mixed Race Studies?

Before analyzing my data, it is important to define “mixed race” or multiraciality. In doing so, I highlight the inconsistencies between who gets read or racialized as “mixed” and who choose to identify as mixed race. Mixed race typically refers to individuals who have parents who are differently racialized. This has traditionally meant that the parents were from different racial groups, since individuals with parents from different white ethnic groups would not be considered mixed race. Undoubtedly the focus on race rather than ethnicity signals the assumption that “mixedness” has importance in the context of racial hierarchies. I chose to use a broader definition of mixed race. I include individuals who have

parents from different *ethnic* groups that were non-white, and I did this for a number of reasons.

First, I pay close attention to what Mahtani (2014) calls “cartographies of multiraciality” (p 4), looking at “where are you from?” as opposed to the objectifying “What are you?”. The first question makes it possible to consider the vastly different histories that people with the same phenotype have and that are often erased, or absent from stories about multiraciality. I emphasize the importance of family history by focusing on the historical and social context of the mixed race label (Mahtani 2014, p 46). I attend to the “problem of how to historicize mixedness, or specifically, how to provide the category with a relevance that can be usefully extended and sustained through time into a social or political critique” (Ibrahim 2007, p 162). I also want to create a space for people who might not identify as multiracial because they are not racialized as “mixed”. These people are usually darker skinned, and their racial identities often get reduced to “brown” or “black”. In doing so, I draw attention to historical legacies of anti-blackness in multiracial movements that seek to exclude blackness from the category of “mixed”- something Jared Sexton (2008) has critiqued in depth, that I will discuss through this thesis.

The term “mixed race” has been shaped by the multiracial movements that have focused on multiraciality in the U.S. and Britain (Ifekwunigwe 2004). Although “racial identity is geographically and temporally specific” (Mahtani 2014, p 152), reviewing studies in the U.S. and British context are helpful for analyzing the way

that the mixed race subject has been produced. Looking at a wider variety of studies also allowed me to reflect on what kind of research methods would be important, limited, dangerous, or under-utilized. Though my study is limited to Canada, and in particular to Toronto, reviewing the British and American context is extremely helpful for analyzing the way that the literature on multiraciality has shaped how we think about mixed race people. I begin by examining mixed race status through history, as well as the material and discursive consequences of white-supremacist anxieties about miscegenation (racial mixing). I review some of the critiques made about these studies- mainly that they unwittingly reproduce anti-blackness and anti-Indigeneity. I then examine what mixed race scholar Jayne Ifekwunigwe (2004) considers as the three periods in multiracial studies. The first stage is pathology, where mixed race people are seen as confused about their racial identity, and biologically inferior to mono-racial people. The next stage is what Ifekwunigwe (2004) calls “the age of celebration”, referring to the scholarship from the U.S. and Britain. This includes theories on how identities are constructed, fluid and situational, and how mixed race people often “pass” or cross racial borders (Camper 2004; Da Costa 2007; Knight 2001; Lafond 2009; Mahtani 2014; Street 1996; Williams 1996). The last stage is what Ifekwunigwe (2004) labels the “age of critique” that take a more critical look at multiracial studies that has been anti-black or anti-Indigenous. I then focus on the current status of mixed race in Canada, and its geographical and temporal specificities. I end the chapter with a survey of studies on mixed race and Asian, as well as a rationale for my focus on this group.

Mixed Race Amnesia and Colonial Formations

Although I was provided a good introduction to critical race theory and anti-colonialism through my undergraduate studies, I struggled to connect these theories to the experiences of mixed race people. My first real look at a re-politicized analysis of multiracialism came from Minelle Mahtani's work, specifically her book *Mixed Race Amnesia. Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality* (2014). Mahtani begins with the assertion that the Canadian mixed race identity is "the product of colonial formations, created and reflected through cultural representations and facilitated through certain forms of cultural amnesia or strategic forgetting" (3). Mahtani urges us not to romanticize the colonial histories that produced mixed race subjects (2014, p 244). She argues that there isn't a clear agreement about what constitutes mixed race in a global arena because it cannot be pinned down to a single semantic definition (p 31).

Multiraciality can only be understood by relating its shifting meaning to historically and geographically located processes. This means that mixed race studies is incomplete if it only focuses on personal experiences. In order to be critical and thorough in our analysis, we have to attend to exactly what *produced* the category "mixed race" (p 244). For Mahtani, multiracial studies "continues to enact a form of epistemic violence against Indigenous peoples because of its refusal to carefully and thoroughly dissect the metaphor of mixing" (56). Andrea Smith also reminds us in *Queer Theory and Native Studies* that, "when Indigeneity is not foregrounded, it tends to disappear in order to enable the emergence of the hybrid

subject". (p 57) Mahtani prompts us to think of the ways that racialized and legal categorizations have negatively effected Indigenous populations in Canada by outlining how the Indian Act of 1876 reinforced romanticized notions of "Indianness". It categorized people as Aboriginal, Metis or Inuit in order to withhold legal recognition, access to land, and treaty rights. Craig Womack (1997) also writes about the difficulty for Indigenous peoples to identify with "mixed race" because he wonders whether, "...identifying as mixed blood, rather than as part of a tribal nation, diminishes sovereignty" (p 32). By minimizing the number of registered "Indians" and maximizing land theft, the Indian Act drew divisions between status Indians and other Indigenous peoples and fostered fetishized notions of what an "authentic Indian" was. Individuals who were excluded from the Indian Act also struggled to compete for state funding, and their claims to Indigeneity were often viewed as fraudulent (Amadahy & Lawrence, p 114)

It is also important to contextualize how colonial structures like the *Indian Act* interpreted Indigeneity on racialized *and* gendered lines. Audra Simpson (2014) provides an example of this in the Canadian context. In Kahnawà:ke, a code established in 1984 required community members to have at least 50% Mohawk blood quantum. The code was established in response to the decade long battle with the United Nations Human Rights commission that removed the bias of determining membership in Native bands along patrilineal lines (p 57) that disenfranchised Mohawk women and children. To an outsider, this appears to be a simple issue of gender equity, but to Kahnawà:ke community members, it was both an issue of

accepting that white men could hold land in the community, and an issue of the state setting the rules for who could be an “Indian”. Though taking away the rights of Mohawk women in this instance was about attempting to protect the community from elimination rather than active discrimination, Mohawk women have been the ones paying the legal price “through their disenfranchisement and legal exile from their natal homes, which must have been an enormous cost to the traditional structure of community given the clan-bearing, clan-transmitting, and property-owning status of women” (Simpson 2014, p 60).

In some cases, these women became stigmatized, “as relatives who were “polluted”- who had gone outside the conceptual and legal borders of the reserve, and in doing so, had acquired the stigma of betrayal” (Simpson, p 61) and responsible for cultural loss (Alfred, 1996, p 164). Women are seen as responsible for their own disenfranchisement from their community instead of as victims of a colonial system that created race and gender-based practices of exclusion. In relation to my study, this example is a reminder of the important of attending to the specificities within the category mixed race, as well as to the materiality of particular racialized identities in relation to the nation-state. As Bonita Lawrence states, “Everybody in Canada is intermarrying but nobody else is losing their citizenship as a result” (in S. Rutherford 2010, p 11).

Amadahy and Lawrence’s work (2009) *Indigenous Peoples and Black People in Canada: Settlers or Allies?* provides another complex example of how gender-

based notions of Indian status have divided communities and excluded particular people. The children from off-reserve intermarriages between Black people and Mi'kmaq in the Maritimes, and Black people and Ojibway in Ontario are often not counted as "real Indians" (p 114), particularly when the Native parent is non-status. This intense control often prevents Black people with Native roots from participating in Native communities, and continues the silencing of "Black Indians", which Amadahy & Lawrence say, has yet to be significantly broken (115). Blood-quantum policies and anti-blackness have also been internalized by many Native community members, making it difficult for them to see individuals who are black and Native as legitimate members of the community (125).

When thinking through the barriers that particular individuals face to finding a sense of recognition and belonging in their racial communities, we must remember that colonial power relations are "contingent on constructing categories. Colonial control was predicated on identifying who was 'White', who was 'native', who were legitimate progeny and who were not' (Stoler, 1991, p 53). In turn, the regulation of sexual and racial relations is "central to the development of particular kinds of colonial settlements and to the allocation of economic activity within them (p 57). Stoler outlines the legal recognition given to white European men who had sexual relations with Native women. These racialized, sexual relations were also intrinsically linked with class relations, as government and company authorities feared that workers with families would be a financial burden, and create the

emergence of a European working class, thus threatening the White prestigious class (p 62).

Although my study does not examine stories of people who identify as mixed and Indigenous to Canada, I take into consideration how mixed race studies needs to engage more deeply with anti-colonial scholarship and Indigenous studies. This includes how mixed race participants understand Indigeneity, intertwined histories of (settler) colonialism, and anti-blackness—topics I explore in greater detail throughout the thesis.

Anti-miscegenation in North America for blacks

Mixed race scholarship in North American has had a strong focus on mixed people of black and white descent. This research has been important in accounting for the impact of the transatlantic slavery and anti-miscegenation laws in which mixing between whites and blacks was punishable by death. Many of these unions were between white slave masters and their black slave, although, as Spickard writes, “small numbers of legitimate interracial unions existed alongside a widespread concubinage and forced sex, all under an official ideology that denied any mixing at all” (Spickard, 1989, p 236). According to Stoler (1991), this is because the regulation of sexual relations “was central to the development of particular kinds of colonial settlements and to the regulation of economic activity within them” (p 57). Studies focus on black/white mixture have also been a result of

the one-drop-rule in which an individual was considered to be black if they had any trace of black blood. Da Costa (2007) argues that this is evidence that a fascination with multiracialism has “always been linked to the broader system of racial domination that demarcates white from black” (p 34). As Cheryl Harris (1993) explains, “the origins of whiteness as property in the parallel systems of domination of Black and Native American peoples out of which were created racially contingent forms of property and property rights” (p 1709). Harris examines the relationship between slavery, race, and property, and asserts that both White and Black racial identity became solidified within these systems. Black people were seen as slaves and the property of white people, just as the colonial conquest and extermination of Native life was sanctioned through the acceptance of white settlers as the rightful owners of American land. As whites could not be enslaved, the line between white and black was critical to consider, seeing as it was about being protected from commodification (p 1720). As Harris succinctly puts it,

Because the system of slavery was contingent on and conflated with racial identity, it became crucial to be "White", to be identified as White, to have the property of being White. Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings (p 1721).

The effects of these laws continued throughout the years. For example, a study by Kilson (2000) interviewed fifty mixed race individuals of various mixes and found that many participants chose to self-identity with their ethnicity of colour. Kilson attributes this to the participants growing up in a time where the one-drop rule was strenuously enforced. Kilson’s study is important because it examines some of the historical reasons why some people who fit the textbook definition of

“multiracial” do not identify with the label. The effects of this are still felt today, as individuals who are black and mixed are rarely read as “mixed race” when they have visible markers of blackness. Studies by Twine (1996) as well as Barn and Harman (2006) found that mixed race Asians and Latinos are just as likely to be perceived as Asian or Latino as well as white, while mixed race Black/White children are usually perceived as Black.

The most prominent example of a mixed race person being racialized as Black would be the current President of the United States, Barack Obama—celebrated as the first Black president, not the first “Black and mixed” president. Another example, Dagbovie (2007) and Lafond (2009) examined is Tiger Woods, who is not referred to in the media as “Asian” but as “Black” despite being no more Black than Asian. Dagbovie persuasively argues that identifying as mixed race does very little for black and brown people who cannot pass for white. Instead, the new obsession with mixed race people is about consumption of a more ‘palatable’ form of race that allows whites to maintain the binary between whiteness and black identity (Dagbovie, 2007).

In multiracial studies, the literature on passing (Spickard 1989; Knight 2001; Lafond 2009; Spencer 2011; Dawkins 2012) does not thoroughly examine the way that mixed race brown and black people can themselves be complicit with anti-black racism despite being subjected to anti-black racism and anti-black violence themselves. I pay careful attention to the way that some of my participants and/or

their family members carefully chose when to participate in and through whiteness. This was done by distancing themselves from blackness or staying silent in the face of anti-black racism, something I explore more in Data Chapters 2 and 3. This should not be surprising, because “racial ambiguity, in and of itself, is no guarantee of political progressiveness, [or] racial destabilization” (Spencer 2011, p 3).

Several scholars note the disavowal of Blackness that informs some of the literature on mixed race studies. Makalani (2001) argues that multiracial studies has not adequately engaged with blackness. Makalani observes that the idea of a biracial identity has a “negative political impact on African Americans”. Ibrahim (2011) posits that this is because it offers a chance for mixed and black individuals to opt out of blackness, which situates “blackness as outmoded and multiracial as emergent” (vii). Jared Sexton (2008) also provides an excellent critique of the relationship between white supremacy, anti-blackness and the multiracial figure in the United States. Sexton highlights how the obsession with policing interracial sexuality was due to white supremacist paranoia about the “pollution” or genocide of the white race (p 23). Though anti-miscegenation isn’t the essence of white supremacy or anti-blackness, they are fundamentally relational processes. Knowing this, it is interesting to consider why multiracialism as a movement has failed to challenge this living legacy of white supremacy and sexual racism. Sexton argues that some of the leaders of the multiracial movement in the United States (such as Maria Root and Charles Byrd) have identified black political organization as the barrier to the empowerment of mixed race people and the interracial intimacy they

are thought to symbolize (2008, p 56). Multiracialism can mean understanding racial blackness as the source of social crises, and locating politicized blackness as the barrier to a post-racial future. In short, multiracialism can affirm “mixed-ness” in ways that reinforce or expand notions of racial purity (p 65, 66). For example, Sexton cites Maria Root’s Bill of Rights (1996), which he argues avoids an engagement with ongoing struggles of racial inequality for people who are all black, all the time while seeing the limits in identification for multiracial people as limits imposed by black, not whites. Sexton also points out (p 78) how this was modeled after the U.S. Bill of Rights, which sanctions white supremacy and the institution of chattel slavery.

Sexton also critiqued how multiracial studies have focused too heavily on *heterosexual* relationships, nominating reproductive sex as the principle site that creates racial difference. Sexton argues that concerns about interracial couples are usually concerns about their children, while there is little theorization on interracial couples who do not have children, or queer interracial couples (Ibrahim 2012). This has created what Sexton calls a “de-sexualization of race, and a de-racialization of sexuality” (p 159). Although Sexton’s argument about making space for queer, interracial love is important, Stoler (1991) and Lowe (2015) remind us that colonial powers were obsessed with miscegenation and controlling the flow of desire precisely because of what is produced. Mixed race bodies trouble the process of boundary making because of the way the white colonizer is constituted through the production of the “other” (Said, 1978). Blurring the boundaries with interracial

mixing would highlight that race has been socially constructed to privilege particular groups while economically and politically excluding others. As Frankenberg (1993) reminds us, this led the discourse on miscegenation to focus on children and how they would “fit in”, indirectly re-affirming the idea that communities of race were fixed boundaries. Peoples were mapped as “exotic” and hypersexual in order to mark them as a distinct kind of being altogether. Marking distinctions served as justification for enslavement and exclusion from the political realm.

Psychological Models on Mixed Race: The “Age of Pathology”

While miscegenation was about legal boundaries in colonial regimes, psychologists in the 20th century began viewing multiracial as a “condition”. Mixed race people were pathologized and evaluated on a hierarchy of humans. The dominant view until the late 19th century was that multiracial people were damaged (Ifekwunigwe, 2004). These models came into view in the 20th century, and pathologized mixed race people as genetically inferior, or ‘marginal’ because their identity is always in flux (Stonequist, 1937). Theories on multiraciality were tied to the eugenics movement in the United States. For example, Charles Benedict Davenport (1917) proposed that mixed race individuals had mental health problems and suffered from “intellectual inadequacy” (p 366). These conclusions were linked to myths about white superiority and purity, with some studies

claiming that mixed race individuals who were part white were still superior to people who were “fully” black, brown or Asian (Castle, 1926).

Other models from development psychology focused on the identity formation and development of biracial children. Gibbs and Huang and Associates (1989) also suggested that bi-racial identity can cause issues for children and adolescents in developing a well-integrated sense of self. Poston (1990) created an identity development model with five stages. The first stage, ‘personal identity’ happens at a very young age, where membership in a particular ethnic group becomes salient (153). ‘Choice of group categorization’ is the second stage, in which individuals are pushed to choose an identity, usually of only one ethnic group, which may cause crisis or alienation. Poston argued that it was,

unusual for individuals to choose a multiethnic identity, since this requires some level of knowledge of multiple cultures and a level of cognitive development beyond that which is characteristic of this age group (154).

It is interesting to note that Poston gives no explanation for why knowledge of multiple cultures requires more cognitive development than a child or young adult would possess. He also says nothing of his (supposed) sample size that led him to leap to this theory. The third stage, ‘enmeshment/denial’ is described by Poston as a confusing time in which biracial individuals must choose an identity that does not fully capture their background. Poston claims that this leaves the individuals with feelings of self-hate and guilt, especially when they do not feel accepted by one or more group. Poston claims that the fourth stage is ‘appreciation’, in which biracial

individuals learning to appreciate their multiple identities, and broadening their social groups (154). Here, biracial individuals learn that their different racial and ethnic backgrounds, though Poston argues that they still identify more strongly with one group. The fifth and final stage, integration, is where individuals “experience wholeness” (154) by recognizing the value of their ethnic heritages.

Clinical psychologist Maria Root’s various studies are well known in the field of mixed race studies. Her earlier work (1990) outlined what she called “general resolutions”. I find her work troubling, as her use of the term ‘resolution’ implies that being biracial or mixed race *must* involve facing unusual problems that require different solution. Root’s first resolution ‘acceptance of the identity society assigns’ seems overly simplistic because it assumes that all members of society will ‘assign’ the same identity to the individual over time. I argue throughout this thesis that an individual may be ascribed different identities by different people, and at different times. This is particularly dependent on how identity is performed, and the spatial location in which identity is ascribed.

I also disagree with Root that a person should accept the identity ascribed to them, or that this will be beneficial. For example, an individual might identify as Indigenous I even though many people assume they are white due to light skin colour. Rather than accepting the erasure of Indigenous presence on colonized land, I believe it is essential for Aboriginal people, including those who are mixed race and light-skinned to assert their Indigeneity. This can be by identifying as

Aboriginal/Indigenous, by participating in the collective Indigenous community, and by reclaiming a relationship to land as a core part of Canadian Indigenous survival and resistance (Lawrence and Dua, 2005, p 126)

Root (1990) lists her second resolution as 'identification with both racial groups', but cautions that "This strategy does not change other people's behavior; thus, the biracial person must have constructive strategies for coping with social resistance to their comfort with both groups of their heritage and their claim to privileges of both groups" (p 200). I also disagree with this resolution, as a person is not 'required' to identify with a racial group they feel they do not belong too, or will never see them as a part of the community. For example, if a mixed race individual is half black, feels a sense of belonging within the black community, and is consistently racialized as a black person, there is no need to insist on claiming whiteness for a number of reasons. The individual is unlikely to ever be racialized as anything other than black, and is unlikely to be able to gain access to white privilege, even if they are able to perform whiteness.

The third resolution Root (1990) lists is 'identification with a single racial group'. This involves the individual choosing to identify with particular racial or ethnic groups despite the identity that others assign them. 'Identification as a new racial group' is Root's last strategy. Root claims that individuals no longer feel marginalized because they have a new reference group (presumably 'biracial' or mixed race) to belong to, while having the ability to move between racial groups

while being distinct from them. This fourth resolution is uncritical and oversimplified. The issue at hand is not always how one identifies, particularly because identifying as 'mixed race' does very little to dismantle systemic racism (Mahtani, 2014).

Sociological, Qualitative Studies of Mixed-race: The 1990s and onwards

The 1990's saw the growth of the multiracial movement in the United States, with psychologists like Maria Root writing the "Mixed Race person's Bill of Rights" (1996) that sought to highlight commonalities in multiracial experiences. Ifekwunigwe (2004) calls this period the age of celebration while Spencer (2011) calls this the "period of cheerleading" (p3). The majority of these studies focus on the fluidity of racial identity and emphasize the agency of the multiracial subject to speak back to stereotypes about the tragic mulatto. Using qualitative studies, researchers have provided spaces for mixed race individuals to discuss their experiences with racism, family tensions surrounding race, issues of passing and privilege, and identity formation. For example, Hernandez (1995) provided a detailed examination of the experience of seven Canadian-Caribbean participants in order to understand "how mixed-race people of Caribbean descent make sense of themselves in the racialized discourse of Canada" (p 39). Hernandez compares the discourse on race, and the discourse on racial mixing in Canada to the discourse in the Caribbean. She then describes the racism that exists within the family, the school system, and the media.

Another example of a qualitative study on multiraciality is Ray (1996) who detailed the stories of five mixed race people who were White and South Asian/Asian. The study looked at how racism, race and privilege are understood and negotiated within families, and society at large. Ray's study found that mixed marriages do not make individuals better at understanding the mixed race experience, and that the experience of parents is often very different from that of their mixed children. Ray's study also analyses issues of whiteness and white privilege in mixed families. Her study, discusses how many White mothers are unaware of their White privilege, and thus have difficulty talking about race with their children. This has negative effects later on when children first encounter racism at school.

Mixed Race in Canada

In order to theorize mixed race in Canada with a critical lens, it is important to be clear about the fact that Canada is a white-settler society, viewed as a multicultural democracy for specific political purposes. Mixed race individuals, in turn, are lauded as a sign of progress. For example, *The Globe and Mail* (Mahoney, 2010) predicted that the increase in mixed-race marriage was evidence that, "multiculturalism is working in Canada because mixed unions- and biracial children- break down barriers on perhaps the most personal of levels". It is troubling to see mainstream media narratives argue that we are beginning to live in a 'post-racial era' because of the increasing visibility of mixed race children. This celebratory

narrative about mixed-race and multiculturalism is a tenant of 'color-blindness' that undermines the saliency of race and racism. It thrives on historical amnesia that forgets Canada's colonial past and the neo-colonial forms of violence by both individuals and the state that continue to target racialized bodies. Significantly, Canadian Policy Statement on Multiculturalism stresses the important of national unity, while having *no firm commitment to antiracist politics and objectives*. Instead, Multicultural policy re-entrenches colonial power, emphasizing English and French as Canada's two official language. The framing of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" emphasizes "unity within diversity", feeding nationalist narratives while re-instilling what Sarah Ahmed (2008) describes as the old tropes of the kill-joy feminist and the melancholy migrant, whose duty is "to let go of the pain of racism by letting go of racism as a way of understanding that pain" (p 133). This also applies to the pervasive myth that mixed race people can "choose" to liberate themselves from racism. I want to emphasize again that the mixed race subject is not an effective form of anti-racist resistance in itself. Andrea Smith reminds us in her work *Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy* (2006) that it is false to think that, "if we just *include* more people, then our practices will be less racist. Not true. This model (of multicultural representation) does not address the nuanced structure of white supremacy, such as through the distinctive logics of slavery, genocide, and Orientalism" (p 70).

The narratives and policies of Multiculturalism produce in the Canadian imagination the idea that mixed race bodies have permission to "belong" to the

predominantly white nation. As Glen Coulthard (2014) observes, “the politics of recognition” and accommodation embeds rather than contests the idea that white settlers are legitimate owners of Canada who grant others permission to live on the land, or as we see through anti-miscegenation laws in the United States, the right to exist.

Why Mixed Race and Why now?

Mixed race people are becoming increasingly common, particularly in cities with a large number of racial and ethnic minorities. Statistics Canada predicts that by 2017, one in five Canadians will identify as a visible minority¹ (Bélanger and Caron Malenfant, 2005), and interracial unions increased 35% between 1991 and 2001 (Mahoney and Alphonso, 2000). However, racial mixing does not mean that racism has ended. As activist and scholar Angela Davis reminds us,

Racism is not static. It changes. It mutates. It gets altered by historical circumstances. When we think about new strains of racism, some of them are not so easily identified because we rely on commonsense notions of what counts as racism... If we are unable to identify new contemporary modes of racism, we render those who are its targets even more vulnerable than they may have been previously. (2005, p 99).

Why focus on Asian

My decision to focus on Asian and Asian-ness was both personal and political. I am of course also interested in “Asian-ness” because of my own background and experiences within various Asian communities. I self-identify as mixed: both Asian and white, making my racialized experiences different from of all

¹ The Canadian government defines a visible minority as any non-white person that is not aboriginal. The term is most frequently used by Statistics Canada

my participants. I have a white last name, and white passing privilege in particular spaces, while I am clearly racially marked, “othered” and exoticized in other particular spaces. Politically speaking, it was critically important for me to begin filling a gap in the field by bridging Asian studies with anti-colonial theory and critical mixed race studies.

In this study I focus on individuals whose parents are racialized minorities, one of whom has Asian heritage. (See appendix for the call for participants) I did this purposefully for a few reasons. First, I wanted to see how “Asian” functions as a category, materially and discursively. It was also important for me to produce a critical mixed race study that centers the voices of people of colour. I am also interested in considering how we might be able to build pan-Asian communities. In doing so, I remind myself to be conscious of the internalized racism, shadism and anti-blackness within many Asian communities. It is important to name these things when they arise, so that we may continue to have critical conversations about it.

In looking at “Asian-ness” within the category of mixed race, I also became interested in examining the current barriers that some mixed race individuals face in trying to “fit in” within Asian communities, and spaces marked as “Asian”. For example, some mixed race individuals with Asian heritage may not identify as Asian because they do not feel comfortable within Asian spaces, particularly when they do not speak an Asian language. Spaces of comfort or discomfort often require individuals to perform a particular racial identity in order to prove that one belongs

to the particular community. I am also interested in thinking about the different ways in which the ways in which Asians can work in solidarity with other people of colour, and with decolonization projects both in Canada and across the globe.

Reviewing Studies on “Asian” in Mixed Race Studies

Williams (1992) conducted a study with on 43 Amerasian, 29 Euroasians and 14 Afroasians who had lived at least six years of their adolescent lives in Japan with the goal of examining the challenges of being brought about by different cultural groups (p 280). Williams found that being “raised and socialized in bilingual homes and in multicultural setting, [participants] came to embrace Eastern and Western values, beliefs, and behaviors in all aspects of their lives” (p 282, 283). Because many of these children had fathers who were in the military, they grew up with many other children of mixed heritage, which provided them a unique sense of community. Williams also found that language was something that helped people articulate their identity, since being bilingual allowed them to understand both Japanese and American culture (p 292). However, “due to their physical distinction, social distance, and ability to speak the *other* language, the Japanese, Euro-Americans and African-Americans often categorized Amerasians as outsiders” (p 294).

Hall (1992) interviewed 30 mixed race individuals with Black and Japanese heritage to investigate the different factors affecting ethnic identity choices and attitudes, as well as their life experiences (p 250). Hall’s participants were given two

surveys: one self-administered, and the other done with an interviewer. The study showed that when given the choice to self-identify, more study participants chose to identify as multiracial than monoracial. If forced to choose, 18 participants said they would self-identify as Black, 10 would identify as Black and Japanese, 1 would identify as Japanese, and 1 chose not to racially categorize himself. Hall's study found a variety of factors that affected how participants racially identified, including the race of community members, influence from family, and knowledge of their culture. Participants who knew more about their Black culture were likely to identify as Black.

Saenz, Hwang, Aquirre and Anderson's study (1995) took data from the 1980 U.S. Bureau of the Census of California to look for patterns in ethnic identification in mixed race children. The sample size was limited to 913 mixed race children between the ages of 3 and 17, whose families identified as Asian or white. These researchers found that Asian-Americans had experienced,

“high levels of structural assimilation (and)... are increasingly marrying exogamously. These trends have led some observers to question the extent to which ethnicity will survive among Asian-Americans, particularly in the case of the offspring from intermarriages” (p 188).

The study also found that the 37% of children who maintained an ethnic identity were likely to maintain their ethnic culture. 53% children identified as

“Anglo” or white and tended to be born in the U.S. to Asian mothers, speak English at home, and live in areas with relatively small Asian populations despite the ethnic diversity. The remaining 10% of children chose “other” as an ethnic identity and were likely to be second-generation (or later) immigrants with Asian mothers and well-educated parents.

Decentering Whiteness

In North America, the identity “mixed race” still carries the assumption of white heritage. This is largely due to current media representations of the mixed race person as bi-racial and half white and the white washing of people of colour, including mixed race people in Hollywood (such as the casting of Emma Stone as a Chinese- Hawaiian in *Aloha*). Though miscegenation between “visible minorities”² is not new, it is still under-represented in the Canadian mainstream media for particular political reasons. The focus on mixing with white is one way to further nationalist ideas of Canadian multiculturalism. By celebrating the emergence of the hybrid subject, Canadians are able to soothe their racial anxieties in a “settler move to innocence” (Tuck and Yang, 2012) holding up mixed race people as an indicator that Canada is entering a ‘post-racial era’ while conveniently ignoring the colonial violence that disproportionately targets black and Indigenous bodies.

² A “visible minority” is defined by the Canadian government as “persons other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour”. I realize how problematic this term is, but I use it because of the way it is used primarily as a demographic category by the Canadian government and by Statistics Canada

Conclusion

When reading the introduction of Mahtani's book *Mixed Race Amnesia-Resisting the Romanticization of Multiraciality* (2014), I was struck by one of her questions. She asks, "where do people who identify as mixed race yet do not see themselves as being partly white fit into this picture, and under what circumstances do they claim this racial identification given the historical legacies of the "mixed race" label? *How might we reimagine the place of the nonwhite mixed race subjects?*" (p6)

This led me to reconsider whether "mixed race" was an adequate label to describe non-white, multiracial individuals, particularly when some of them may not even be read as mixed race. I thus purposefully required participants to have both parents be racialized minorities in order to actively decenter whiteness in the understanding of mixed race subjects, "where whiteness as an epistemological space remains privileged" (Mahtani 2014, p 246-7).

Anti-colonialism and Mixed Race: Methodological Considerations

Introduction

As writers, our work is often about topics that are deeply personal to us. I identify as a mixed race woman of colour (my mother is South-East Asian and my father is white). I admit that I have a personal interest in bringing the experiences of multiracial individuals into academic discussions on race, but I also have political goals for my research. My work seeks to build bridges between theories on anti-colonial theory, mixed race studies and Asian studies. I want to think more deeply about oppression and solidarity across communities of colour, including the mixed race community. In order to do so, my questions move from “How do mixed race individuals negotiate across racial boundaries?” to “How are mixed race individuals actively engaged in or resisting the interconnected systems of white supremacy, settler colonialism, anti-Indigeneity, and anti-blackness?”

As there has been very little work in mixed race studies that has attempted to ask these questions, I decided to collect primary data. I chose qualitative, semi-structured interviews as my method of research for a number of reasons. First, most studies on multiraciality have been conducted in the United States or England, and only a limited number of studies have been conducted on what it means to be mixed race in Canada (but see Knight 2001; Lafond 2009; Mahtani 2014). Although the work done in the American context is valuable for a comparative analysis, the histories of racism and discrimination in Canada are distinctly different, and these

histories undoubtedly influence our everyday understanding of ourselves and require further attention. Second, interviews were the best way in which I could analyze the *differences* in experiences that multiracial people have. Although people with different racial background may choose to identify as “mixed”, their histories are not the same, and their distinct racial subjectivities deserve a more detailed analysis. By using participants’ words and experiences as data, I hope to thread their stories together to produce a richer understanding of the diverse experiences multiracial individuals in Canada have, and their relation to the broader field of critical race studies.

Criteria for Inclusion

Though I realized the limitations of what a small study could accomplish, I ambitiously began attending to the critique that Critical Mixed Race Studies was at an impasse. As the previous chapter discussed, a great number of studies focus on what it means to be “mixed” in the present tense, without a thorough historical or cultural analysis of the socially constructed category “mixed race” or “multiracial”. I asked myself questions as I designed, and re-designed my study: What were limitations of the studies I was reviewing? How could I try to work through some of these limitations in my own work? What was missing from the field, and how could we, as academics, take it in the direction it needs to go?

I did not want to repeat a study that had already been done, and I definitely *did not* want to reproduce the narratives that mixed race people are always part white;

that non-white races rarely mixed; or that mixed race people are consistently striving to pass for white or enact whiteness. I thought about the “theory of change” I would use, and the “implications for the way in which a project unfolds... [how] A theory of change helps to operationalize the ethical stance of the project, what are considered data, what constitutes evidence, how a finding is identified, and what is made public and kept private or sacred (Tuck, 2009).” (Tuck 2009b, p 414) With this in mind, I put out a ‘Call for Participants’ asking for individuals that were:

- University or college students (or recent grads), between the ages of 19 and 30, living in the GTA (Greater Toronto Area)
- “Minority mixed race”: individuals whose parents are different ethnic minorities and not white (e.g. Chinese & Black; Indian & Iranian; Korean, Japanese & Chinese; Peruvian & Chinese, Tamil & Thai etc.)
- Have Asian heritage (This includes East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Caribbean Chinese etc.)
- Born in Canada, or moved to Canada before the age of 10

I wanted participants that were University or College students or recent graduates living in/around Toronto between the ages of 19 and 30. I assumed that adults would have had more opportunities than children to engage with discussions of race and racism. Their age would also allow me to see the shifts and transformations in how they self-identified over time. I decided to focus specifically on individuals between the ages of 19 and 30 because it is a specific time in life when individuals are considered “fully adults”, even though they are new to many stages of adult life, and undergoing many changes. This could include, but is not limited to living away from home, entering the work force, post-secondary education at the undergraduate or graduate level; relationships, sex and/or marriage, etc.

I also stated very clearly in my call for participants that I was not interested in interviewing individuals who identified as “part white”. Instead, I wanted participants who could be identified as Asian and as “minority”³ mixed race. Theoretically speaking, I wanted my project to create some of the missing links between critical mixed race studies, anticolonial theory and Asian studies. My practical reasons for doing this was to intentionally center the voices of people of colour within mixed race studies, and to attend to the lack of studies that look at the experiences of individuals with a *variety* of mixed race compositions. I was also intentionally trying to center the voices of mixed people of colour who do not identify with the black/white or Asian/white binary that’s been dominating multiracial studies for the last 15 years. (Mahtani, 2014, p5).

By explicitly listing examples of Asian minorities, I hoped I would attract participants who are often excluded from the category “Asian” (e.g. South Asian or Caribbean Chinese), or marginalized within particular Asian communities (e.g. South Asian, Filipino etc). It was also important for me to contextualize their stories with Asian colonial histories that are often forgotten, while situating their stories within present neo-colonial state structures. Within the interviews and the analysis that followed, I also wanted to create a space to discuss the possibilities and barriers to achieving pan-Asian solidarity and solidarity *across* communities of colour (i.e. immigrants and Indigenous nations; non-black communities of colour in solidarity with black communities etc.)

³ I realize this term is a problematic way of saying “non-white”, but chose it because the term is used primarily as a demographic category by Statistics Canada and related Employment equity policies

In an attempt to remedy these problems, I wanted the parents of my research participants to **both** be racial minorities, and of different ethnicities. Though I wanted to examine “Asian-ness” as a category more broadly, I did not want to focus on specific compositions of bi-raciality, so as not to reproduce the mono-racial paradigms that has dominated much of the existing research (Mahtani and Moreno, 2001). I also wanted to attend to Mahtani’s assertion that, to the best of her knowledge, “few studies have chosen to analyze interviews with individuals of a variety of mixed race compositions (but see Bettez 2012)”, and that most mixed race scholars have not yet developed a critical space in which to explore the experiences of minority racialized mixes who *do not* claim a partially white descent. We have to ask, “Where do people who identify as mixed race yet do not see themselves as being partly white fit in to this picture, and under what circumstances do they claim this racial identification given the historical legacies of the “mixed race” label? *How might we reimagine the place of nonwhite mixed race subjects?*” (Mahtani 2014, p 6).

It is important to note that in the call for participants, I did not use the word “mixed race”, because it would be unfair to assume that all potential participants would identify with the label “mixed race”. For example, one of my participants fit my criteria but does not identify as “mixed race” because she is only ever read as “brown”, “Indian” or “South Asian” despite the fact that her parents are from different South Asian ethnic groups with distinct languages and histories. This is an important point to consider because mixed race cannot be pinned down to a linear, semantic definition. As Mahtani (2014) reminds us, our understanding of mixed race

can only be understood “by relating its shifting meanings and contours to historically and geographically located processes. Transnational colonial histories, including settler colonialism, transatlantic slavery and various diasporic migrant experiences across generations have influenced and altered the production of stories” (p 31) about how we define “mixed race” or who gets to count as mixed race in any specific time and/or place. I was also conscious of the fact that the mixed race label could not adequately capture how racial identities can shift based on spatial location (a topic I explore in Chapter 2). Instead of assuming participants identified with the “mixed race” label, I asked them how they defined themselves racially, when and why. This was something discussed in depth within each of the interviews, that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 1. My study was open to participants of all genders in order to analyze how gender is often performed through race, and race is performed through gender.

I also limited my study to the Canadian context because “racial identity is geographically and temporally specific” (Mahtani, 2014, p 152), and must account for the specific histories and geographies that have affected national discourse on race. Having participants that were born in Canada or have lived here since the age of ten allowed me to analyze how their upbringing and education in Canada influenced understandings of what it means to be “mixed race”- what counts as mixed race/what doesn’t and *when*. Lastly, I required participants to live in and around Toronto because the city is Canada’s largest population of racial minorities. I consider how this particular urban, multicultural location impacts how people

identify, and negotiate and understand race/colonial relations. I also wanted to how their understandings of “mixed race” played into or resisted national narratives of Canadian multiculturalism.

Drawing on Eve Tuck’s (2009) theorization, I designed my study as a *desire* based framework. Tuck defines desire-based frameworks as ones “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” (p 416). Tuck references the work of Craig Gingrich-Philbrook (2005) who also highlights how desire based frameworks make a point of documenting wisdom and hope, not only the painful elements of social realities. In citing the lived experiences of my participants, I use desire as a,

thirding of the dichotomized categories of reproduction and resistance. It is neither/both/ and reproduction and resistance. This is important because it more closely matches the experiences of people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/ fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures—that is, everybody (p 419, 420)

My participants, like all of us, exist in the “inbetween”—actively resisting particular forms of oppression in certain instances, while remaining complicit or confused about how to react to oppression in other situations. To make sense of the contradictions, I infuse the words and experiences of my participants into an analysis of the discourse and history of race and race relations.

The Politics of Recruitment - Power Disguised as “Feedback”

Various methods were used to recruit research participants. I posted the call on boards around the University of Toronto campus in order to let the participants come to me. The most effective method for attracting participants was through a snowball method (see Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) in which I passed my study on to friends, colleagues and faculty in the hope that they would know of someone, or be able to pass on the details of my study to their relevant networks. I emailed friends, fellow students, and colleagues to try to get me in touch with people they knew. I contacted faculty and administrators in specific undergraduate and graduate departments to pass on my studies to students who may be interested. I also targeted specific programs, course unions and student groups that were likely to have students that would fit my criteria for participation. Potential participants were asked to email me directly to ensure that they fit the criteria for inclusion, and to clarify any questions they had. I allowed participants to pick a convenient date and time, as well as a comfortable location to be interviewed. My only request was that it be on the University of Toronto campus for convenience and safety, and that the space be fairly quiet so that we would not be distracted, and so that there would not be much background noise in the recording.

Although I ended up conducting five interviews, I was unable to get any participants from the first month of recruiting, probably because I only advertised my study by posting it on public boards. I suspect that there were a number of reasons for this. First, I started recruiting participants in the summer when there

are significantly fewer students on campus. As time went on, I also considered how eligible participants were viewing my study, and the assumptions being made about me. Although I identify as mixed race and a person of colour, I wondered if potential participants might have been hesitant to participate because they viewed me as a white researcher based on my name.

Jillian Paragg's (2014) article *Studying "Mixed Race": Reflection on Methodological Practice* was useful for me in thinking through how and when to disclose my own racial makeup to my participants, and how this would affect the dynamics of the interview. Paragg discusses how disclosing racial identity affected her study on mixed race. Some participants felt like they could "really identify with" (p 356) her because she was also mixed race, while other participants did not find this to be important. Paragg (2014) also noted that some participants "tested" her identity by asking, "what's your racial make-up?" in response to a participant recruitment email (p 357). Paragg's analysis of the situation was that the individual wanted to find out whether she was a white researcher. This stems "from a history of stories being appropriated into the power dynamics of race when an interviewer was White" (357). Sherene Razack (1998) reminds us that there is often an expectation that people of colour will "tell our stories" for white people's edification (p 48). I wanted to be respectful of people's doubts on what research does for participants, acknowledging a longer history of academics using stories of pain merely for analytic profit. I was also cognizant of Audra Simpson's (2014) reminder of the importance of "ethnographic refusal" or the right to refuse research, and was

not surprised when individuals I once knew did not respond to my call for participants, and I did not ask further questions on why the research did not appeal to them.

What was surprising to me was the amount of feedback/commentary/question on my study- from other students, faculty, and community members. There were about ten mixed race individuals that were interested in participating but who were half white. They did not fit my criteria, but were nonetheless interested in the kind of space I was creating for non-white and mixed race individuals. Discussions on who “counted” as non-white, and who counted as a racial minority emerged while recruiting participants. For example, I was asked whether an individual that was half Jewish fit my criteria, and whether I thought “Jewish” was a racial or ethnic minority. I responded that I would appreciate if my study was still passed on, and if interested participants had questions, I was open to discussion or debate. Although I acknowledge that some individuals see “Jewish” as a religion and not an ethnicity, and continue to equate Jewish with whiteness and white-passing privilege, I also acknowledge the ways in which Jewish has historically been racialized and othered, and considered an ethnic minority amongst certain sociologists. I also considered the possibility of the participants’ parent being a non-white Jew, though no individuals with Jewish ancestry came forward to be interviewed. There was also one particularly rude white male who let me know that I might be bordering on some “reverse racism” because, in case I didn’t know- race is a social construction, so technically European

backgrounds can also count as “mixed race”, especially because Irish people were once considered “black” etc. This interaction was a glaring reminder to me of the persistent anxieties of white people when confronted with discussions on race.

When circulating my study to recruit participants, I was asked many questions about my own racial background. People commented on the fact that I was a “good mix”. Another woman asked terribly invasive questions about what my future children might look like -- presuming that I was a heterosexual woman who wanted children. When she laughed that my children might be lucky to get my “Asian features” but my fairer skin, she made the violent assumption that my future children couldn’t possibly be brown or black. These interactions were not shocking (sadly), but something I recount so that we can consider how normalized the anti-black beauty and sexual politics are in our everyday interactions—a topic I explore in more detail in Data Chapter 3. I was a little surprised at the number of follows I got from “Multiracial Dating sites/groups” on social media (Twitter and Facebook), and the significant ones asking for “half Asian women”. These instances were stark reminders—safe spaces are fleeting for women of colour.

Method of Research

As this research project seeks to understand how culture is produced and maintained through identity, I utilized semi-structured ethnographer interviews. I conducted and transcribed five interviews with minority mixed race women with Asian heritage. Though I realize I may be critiqued for my small sample size, Lee,

Woo and Mackenzie (2002) have suggested that studies that use more than one method require fewer participants, as do studies that examine a topic in depth. The concept of “saturation” is also highly debated in qualitative research. As Morse (1995) and Bowen (2008) argue, researchers often claim saturation but do not have an overt description of what this means and how this was achieved. My study does not claim to have reached a level of saturation, but is addressing some key gaps in the field of multiracial studies in the hopes that other researchers will continue to explore them.

The structure of my interviews was fairly flexible. Though I had a set of guiding questions (See Appendix), the questions were open ended so that participants could freely discuss what was important to them rather than having the interview be solely driven by my research goals. This interview style allowed participants to feel more at ease, and enabled them to see me as both a researcher, and as someone who was genuinely interested in mixed race people.

Interview Structure & Researcher Self-Reflexivity

It is important to acknowledge my positionality and bias in doing this project. Although I reject the notion that researchers can examine their work “objectively”, I will have even more difficulty doing so because I am a mixed race person. I cannot separate myself from my experiences, as I am genuinely interested in what the existing literature says about me, and about mixed race people as a category. I must also acknowledge that some of my interest in the field is because I am a mixed race

individual. Some of the questions for participants arose from personal experiences with racism, or the lived experiences of friends and family.

I hoped that participants might feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with me because I am a mixed race individual, as suggested by various researchers in mixed race studies (Root 1992; Tizard and Phoenix 1993; Mahtani 2014). Mahtani (2014) reminds us of how this reflects Kobayashi's (1994) claim that "political ends will be achieved only when representation is organized so that those previously disempowered are given voice. In other words, it matters that women of colour speak for and with women of colour". That being said, I am aware of the multiple power relations between a participant and myself, as researcher and researched. Taking this idea to heart, I reflect on how own positionality affected both the data collection (the interview process) and the analysis.

I am cognizant of the fact that interviews are simulated experiences, in which the power relations between a researcher and the researched need to be carefully considered. I started each interview by disclosing a bit of information about myself. By self-identifying, I hoped this would remove any awkward moments in the interview in which participants would ask about me, and remove the possibility of people making false assumptions about me. In my first interview, I talked about my racial identity and my family and share a few details about myself as a student and a scholar. Towards the end of the interview, discussion of my participant's queer identity entered the conversations in quiet and hurried ways.

Though I was happy that my participant felt comfortable enough in the interview space to share this with me, I also took it as a lesson to consider areas of identity I often take for granted—namely queerness and (dis)ability.

In the interviews that followed, I made sure to disclose on as many aspects of identity as I could think of. I started interviews by saying something along the lines of- *My name is Emily and I identify as a 24 year old, able-bodied, cis-gender straight female. I use gender pronouns “she” and “her”. I’m mixed race—Asian and white. My mom is from Singapore and my father is Canadian born. Some of my family is Christian and/or Catholic, but I don’t identify as practicing either of those. I have an older sister, who was born in Scarborough like me, though we didn’t grow up there. We also lived in Singapore and Whitby, but spent most of our lives in Markham and Toronto.*

It is often falsely presumed that mixed race people might share similar experiences—ignoring the interlocking structure of oppression and privilege. In explicitly touching on multiple areas of identity, I hoped to give participants multiple entry points to focus on that were not *only* about race in the interviews. I also reflected on some of my own experiences in relation to my participants, raising, for example, the experience of non-white and mixed race women as compared to the mixed race women like myself who have white-passing privilege in certain spaces.

All five interviews were audio-recorded for the purposes of transcribing, and ranged from 82 to 111 minutes in length. As a fairly novice researcher, I transcribed entire interviews so I would not be clouded by my assumption of what parts were important (Saldana, 2008, p 15), and so that I could be honest and “rigorously ethical” with both my participants and with my data; not ignoring or deleting passages because they were difficult to understand or problematic (p 29). After transcribing my interviews, I coded all of my interview data, both individuals and across interviews. As Saldana (2013) reminds us, “coding is the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (p 4).

Method of Analysis

To get a richer understanding of the data, I began my ‘Method of Analysis’ by applying a method of ‘Simultaneous Coding’ to the interviews: Initial Coding, Process Coding and Frequency Coding. Initial Codes “are not specific types of codes; they are “first impression” phrases derived from an open-ended process” (Saldana, p 4). Initial Codes were particularly important for capturing the emotional parts in the interview expressed through things like tone and body language. Within transcripts, I made notes of body language in order to seriously consider whether they were signifiers for things not verbally expressed. When read alongside the text and coded, body language could be interpreted as a signified for other emotions, like anxiety and discomfort (shaking the leg, nail biting), guilt, or embarrassment (covering the face, looking down at the floor). Initial Coding was also an important way to engage in self-reflexivity. I accept the post-structuralist understanding of

multiple truths, and the understanding that knowledge is always produced *in relation* to other things, not abstract from them. As Mauthner and Doucet emphasize, “the interpretation of data is a reflexive exercise through which meanings are made rather than found” (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p 414). Further reflections of my Initial Coding helped me understand and reflect on my assumptions, judgment, and the importance of recognizing my social location as a researcher (Alcoff 1991; Mauthner and Doucet 2003).

I also paid attention to the Process Codes, described as “a word or phrase which captures action” (Saldana 2008, p 5). Looking at process codes was important for my analysis because identity formation is a process in itself—something that changes over time. Within the interviews, participants talked about their understanding on things like race and gender changing. Though they didn’t talk about their life in chronological order, the process codes helped me recognize important “turning points” or changes in participants lives that influenced their sense of identity, or sparked a political awakening. Putting codes in order also helped me paint a timeline of the process of both racial identity formation, and the creation of critical awareness.

Analytical Approach

Although the analysis of the data draws on a variety of anticolonial, anti-racist and feminist scholars, my method of research is fairly traditional. I’m not claiming to have designed or used any kind of radical, anti-colonial method of

research here. However, as Arlo Kempf (2010) discusses in the methodology section of his dissertation the project uses,

(R)ather traditional western academic methods of data collection in the forms of qualitative one on one interviews. (However), the protocol design (the questions posed within the interviews) reflects an anti-colonial approach to understanding the topics at hand, as well to understanding the knowings possessed by research participants. (p 184)

When I talk about “knowings”, I’m not simply referring to knowledge we acquire in a book we read, or a lecture we attend. I’m also referring to “home” as an epistemology; “home” as an embodied knowledge of who we are, our place in our family and our community, and who we feel we’re supposed to be. As immigrants or the children of immigrants, “Our place”- what we come to know of as “home” is often a space of other buried histories and subjugated knowledges. These “knowings” and histories are not always validated within Canadian (Western) discourses on what counts as education; but I maintain that these knowings and values are a kind of education in racial and cultural subjectivity. A lot of these “knowings” are passed down our families through “oral histories” or story telling. Regardless of how much detail we can fill in, or how much it is said not to matter anymore, each of us has a history entangled with colonialism. There is no place in the world unaffected by colonial, imperial power, and yet most of us pay so little attention to the multiple diasporic histories that have led us, and have led our families to where we are today. This being said, I pose a question the historian Henry Yu asked when reflecting on B.C.’s Apology-

When are we? Such an odd question. But just as in television shows where a person with amnesia cannot remember their own past, and therefore does not know who they are, the question of “when” we are is another way of thinking about “who” we are. When you do not know your own past, you do not know who you are. Your sense of identity now, in a particular moment, is the product of having a sense of when you are within a much larger and longer story. Memories of childhood and growing up, of family and friends, of loves gained and lost, of loved ones here and gone—these are the stuff of your past, and the memories of which you are made.

Who we are. When we are. They are two sides of the same coin, both bought dearly through days upon months, years upon years of memories both happy and sad. Without these memories, you would not know who you are. Without a sense of **when** you are--- when this moment sits amidst a longer story fully of memory and meaning—you will not know who you are.

I reflected on Henry Yu’s question in order to address the silences in many studies of multiraciality in which the diasporic histories of mixed race subjects and their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents are erased. The focus is on individual experiences in the present tense, and rarely on family experiences throughout colonial histories. Family histories are often negated through the use of the “mixed race” label, and I want to argue that this is often an intentional response to every person of color’s favorite Canadian colonial question: *So- where are you from?* or *Where are your parents from?*

As one of my participants so eloquently put it, “I know that *behind* that question they (white people) wanna say ‘where are your *parents* from?’ because of what made up my colour”. In the Canadian context, the “where are you from?” question is always already a process of categorization. It is always already racially and geographically marking the racialized body as “not from here”, “recently arrived” and/or “out of place”.

Methodological Caution: The Limits of Ethnographies

After extensive feedback from multiple professors and mentors on my initial study design, I realized that I *assumed* that race was the dominant factor that shaped the identities of mixed race people. My judgments shaped by the way I have come to understand my own identity. Race and gender are major factors in the way that I understand the world and the first things people use to try and understand me body.

By reading people solely by race and gender categories, I almost committed a common analytical danger, what Sarah Ahmed calls “Reductive Knowability” (*On being Included*, 2012). Though race shapes their lives in unavoidable ways, it is always contingently articulated, and it is never uncomplicated or linear. Sometimes other factors, such as disability, shaped participants lives more deeply than race. By reflecting on other salient points that came up in the interviews, I hoped to balance the tension between describing and analyzing racial logics, and boxing people into ‘knowable’ subjects. I also reflect on the fact that my understanding of my participants is produced by a mere snapshot of their lives, and in what they chose to tell me. As Mahtani (2014) reminds us, “Certain reflections were told at particular social moments... There is often so much that is not expressed due to the limits and constraints of the interview process” (p 93). There may have been things participants chose *not* to share with me that deeply informed or changed their understandings or feelings.

Mahtani's (2014) work also reminded me to be honest about the limitation of studying the lived experiences of mixed race individuals. She emphasized that ethnographic interviews focus too much on the agency that individual mixed race have to resist structural racism. Mahtani also argued that narratives alone are insufficient for a rigorous analysis, because individual stories often do not explore histories of colonialism. The majority of these narratives also do not attend to the colonial, racialized and gendered power relations. I addressed some of these issues *within* the interview by directly asking participants how they understand colonialism, white supremacy and anti-blackness. Rather than focusing solely on what was present in the interview, I also sought to analyze what was absent from conversations and why. For example, I explore the ways in which some participants relegated Indigeneity and colonialism to the past. Lastly, I supplemented the research interview with a spatial analysis that attended to the historical and geographical specificities of each participant.

Appendix- Research Questions

1. Is the label "mixed race" a label that all multiracial individuals feel comfortable identifying with? Why or why not?
 - b. Has this changed over time?
 - c. Do they identify differently in different geographical locations, or at different times (e.g. do you identify as "mixed" with some groups of people, and as "Asian" in other groups?)
2. Do mixed race people who are part Asian identify as Asian? Why or why not? Do they identify as the other race(s) or ethnicity/ies?
 - b. Has this changed over time?
 - c. Does space/geographical location matter? How?
3. Do mixed race individuals that have partial Asian heritage feel a sense of belonging with any Asian communities? Which ones? What about the community of the other race(s) or ethnicity? Why or why not? (e.g. family

- relations, size of community in the GTA or language may be factors that increase or exclude participation)
- b. Has this changed over time?
4. How does the racial categorization “Asian” function discursively? (i.e. why would you avoid identifying as “Asian”, or why would you identify as “Asian” but not another race? What motivates the desire to identify as “Asian”?)
 - b. Does this change for different genders? How?
 5. a. How does the racial categorization “Asian” function materially? (i.e. Are there material gains/consequences of identifying as Asian, or participating in Asian communities?)
 - b. Does this change for different genders? How?
 6. a. What are the different ways that different genders negotiate their Asian identity or “Asian-ness”?
 - b. How do participants of different genders negotiate their “mixed” identity differently?
 7. a. What are the different ways that different genders negotiate their Asian identity or “Asian-ness”?
 - b. How do participants of different genders negotiate their “mixed” identity differently?
 8. How do mixed race individuals understand racism, colonialism, white supremacy and anti-blackness? Is there an understanding of how these structures have impacted race and gender identity formations? How are some mixed race individuals working to resist and dismantle these structures in the present day?

Chapter One

Mixed Race is Not a Place: Origin Stories and Colonial Displacement

In this chapter, I make the case that our understanding of mixed race must include an analysis of how the category “mixed race” changes across time and space. The mixed race women interviewed shared stories of understanding “mixed race” through multiple fields. They are “hailed into discourse” (Althusser, 1971, p 11) or called into being- referring to the way that people are discursively and materially positioned locating themselves in relation to the social and national landscape. I also map how home is an epistemological space in which mixed race individuals get a deeper understanding of who they are in relation to their families diasporic colonial histories, histories that are not taken up in popular discourses about mixed race people. In this chapter, I map what Minelle Mahtani (2014) calls “cartographies of multiraciality” (p 4), looking at a more detailed analysis of diasporic family histories that inform our understanding of what it means to be mixed race. I then draw on Walcott (2003) and Thobani (2007) to argue that minority mixed race women are read contrapuntally- as both Canadian nationalist symbols of “the other” and of “the multicultural citizen”. This ultimately exposes how colonial circuits continuously shape, sustain and/or trouble “mixed race” as a viable identity in Canada.

For many of the participants, “mixed race” was not a viable identity for a number of reasons. When coding my interview data, “feeling out of place”, “displacement” and “belonging” were common threads. In theorizing the reasons for

this, I refuse to pathologize my participants as “torn” or “confused” about their racial identity simply because they’re mixed. This is a popular misperception about mixed race individuals that continues to haunt the field emerging from a particular history, specifically through developmental psychology (Davenport 1917; Castle 1926; Stonequist, 1931). Instead, I posit that these themes of multiracial people as “out of place” or confused about their identity appeared frequently across interviews because of the multiple colonial and imperial circuits that have *produced*, sustained or troubled popular assumptions of who belongs to the category of “citizen” in the Canadian national imaginary. As Sunera Thobani (2007) reminds us in *Exalted Subjects*,

In the case of Canada, all non-Aboriginal populations have historically become nationals or Others through processes of migration... the citizenship rights of settlers, nationals and immigrants remain based in the institution of white supremacy. Citizenship originated in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples and was denied for almost a century to most people of colour or, if allowed, only erratically and as a matter of exception... Citizenship emerged as integral to the very processes that transformed insiders (Aboriginal peoples) into aliens in their own territories, while simultaneously transforming outsiders (colonizers, settlers, migrants) into exalted insiders (Canadian citizens). (p 74)

Examining the colonial and racial basis of citizenship in this light allows us to see the way that “mixed race” is not always a viable identity in Canada, particularly for some minority mixed race women who do not pass for white. As Rinaldo Walcott (2003) reminds us in *Black like Who*, the racial basis of citizenship “requires us to think contrapuntally- within and against the nation” (p22). The counterpoint here is the way that the mixed race body is held up as the Canadian nationalist symbols of one “the racial other” that threatens the white settler while the idea of the

multicultural citizen also plays a key role in the process of settler colonial nation building and Indigenous erasure.

I argue alongside critical race and Indigenous scholars that narratives about the “multicultural/multiracial citizen” operates as a politics of distraction (Hingagaroa, 2000), and a tenet of ‘color-blindness’ that seeks to undermine the saliency of race/racism in the present tense, while limiting the emancipatory potential of critical mixed race studies in the future (Mahtani 2014, p 244). Color-blindness refers to the disregard of racial characteristics, pretending that “not seeing race” will lead to a less racist society. Multicultural narratives do this work, thriving on what Sherene Razack (2002, p 19) calls “historical amnesia”- forgetting Canada’s colonial past and the ongoing forms of colonial violence that systematically target racialized bodies. These narratives of Multiculturalism are not “progressive” because they contribute to the ongoing colonization and de-legitimization of Indigenous nationhood. Put another way, multicultural narratives of colorblindness also relegate colonialism to an event of the past instead of a structure (Wolfe, 2006, p 388) Through multicultural narratives, we are also encouraged to forget our personal entanglements with colonialism, both locally and abroad. As all of the minority mixed race women in my study are the children of immigrants *and* Canadian citizens, their stories each require a special analysis of their position with the Canadian settler-colonial state. I pay careful attention to the way that intersecting colonial and imperial histories created the need for migration, while

implicating each of them/their families in a settler society that makes them the beneficiaries of white colonial genocide.

Although there are no histories that are *not* influenced by colonialism, we do not always talk about our personal histories in relation to colonialism. As a point of remembrance and resistance, I begin analyzing my data by mapping what Mahtani (2014, p 4) calls the “cartographies of multiraciality” that account for diasporic colonial experiences of my participants’ families. I then juxtapose this with their understanding of colonialism (or lack there of). Within my interviews, I asked participants how they understood colonialism and if they thought that it was still relevant to the present day. I purposefully left the question very open-ended so that each participant had the opportunity to connect colonialism with any number of interlocking systems of oppression, in Canada or abroad, in the past or the present (e.g. institutionalized racism, white supremacy, anti-blackness, Heteropatriarchy, sexism, capitalist exploitation, Orientalism, ableism etc.) I end the chapter with a discussion on the way that racial consciousness and colonial awareness is situated on a continuum, and discuss ways of increasing the possibilities for a critical awareness or racial colonial relations.

I give a detailed analysis of each of my participants (who I’ll obviously only refer to by their pseudonyms)- Audrey, Kamini, Diana, Melanie and Zahra. I share their stories out loud with some trepidation. In reproducing their stories, I want to stay away from what Sarah Ahmed (2012) calls “reductive knowability”. I’m conscious of

the way the interview spaces only give me particular snapshots of my participants life, that are obviously influenced by the questions I posed. I'm cautious in balancing the tensions of describing/analyzing racial logics without boxing my participants into what "knowable subjects" (Ahmed 2012, p 196). Although race and gender shapes their lives in unavoidable ways and is the main focus of this chapter, other identity markers and ways of knowing shape people's understanding of themselves and the world. For my participants, race is contingently articulated through gender, sexuality, disability; and it is never uncomplicated or linear.

Audrey

My first participant was 26-year-old Audrey. She was born in the south of France, and moved to Canada at the age of 4. Racially, she identified as "half Indian, half Iranian". When asked if she would identify differently in different spaces, or with different people, she said she identified as "French" with her Francophone friends. Interestingly, Audrey questioned whether she fit my criteria for participation, despite having clarified this earlier by email. Audrey maintains that she was worried about whether or not South Asian was the kind of Asian I was looking for, and whether her father- who was Indo-Mauritian still counted as "Asian". When asked her thoughts on her own questions, she explained to me that she didn't usually tell people that her father is "Asian" because people usually mean "East Asian". She expressed frustration in not being able to validate her father's "Asian-ness" as an Indo-Mauritian man, particularly because, "If I say Mauritian, most people don't

know where Mauritius *is*", let alone the different ethnic/racial backgrounds of the people live there.

Audrey related that her father's family was *Telegu*, from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, but she was not able to tell me when her father's family first settled in Mauritius, and how or why they came to be there. It is quite possible that her family's father was brought over from India as indentured laborers, given that the French East India company maintained its presence in Mauritius until 1767, and half a million indentured laborers were brought to work the sugar plantations on the island between 1834 and 1921. As Audrey's mother's side of the family was Iranian, their histories were also undoubtedly entangled with French imperial expansion. What was interesting to me was that Audrey did not verbally express an understanding of the way that French colonialism had shaped *all* of her families' diasporic histories- maternal and paternal; in Canada and abroad.

When asked how she understood the term "colonialism", Audrey described it as "a historical part of humanity? Where Europeans colonized different parts of the world, and fought for different areas, territories and assimilated people". In other words, Audrey understood colonialism as a series of events, not a structure. When asked further probing question on if/how colonialism was relevant to the present day, Audrey expressed an understanding of neo-colonialism, but only in relation to Canada's relationship with resources extraction in "Third World" countries. Audrey

did not express an understanding of Canada a settler colonial state that continues to enact violence against First Nations people and racialized immigrants.

In fact, Indigeneity/First Nations was barely mentioned in the present tense, and when they were, they were sidestepped and obscured as “other people’s issues”, but never Audrey’s responsibility. This was very telling in a story Audrey recounted to me about a woman she describes as a professor approaching her an “International Development Crisis” event held at Audrey’s undergraduate university in Ontario. The professor asked Audrey point blank why she wasn’t doing something for First Nations *here*, but going all the way to Africa?

This particular encounter highlights two key points. The first is the way that settler colonialism is obscured in order to mask the way that each of us are implicated in the settler colonial system. Though Audrey was able to answer some of my questions on race and colonialism, there was very little self-reflection on what it meant for Audrey to be Canadian against a backdrop of *ongoing* structural, colonial violence that disproportionately targeted black and Indigenous bodies. The second is the way that Canadian nationalist discourses associated with international development white savior tropes of are easily adopted by immigrants of colour &/or their children who see themselves as “benevolent” citizens rather than agents of imperial powers that created the binary between the “First World” and “Third World” through multiple forms of colonial violence. It is significant to note that Audrey questioned out loud why colonialism and “A boriginal history” was excluded

from the K-12 curriculum, but “developing nations” and “great peace keepers like Romeo Dallaire” were not. I hoped Audrey could think through her own question, but was also not surprised when she quickly followed up her question with “Not to sound like the Canadian government was at fault for anything”.

This shows that those who see themselves as mixed sometimes position themselves alongside a multicultural narrative in which Indigenous dispossession is obscured. It also draws attention to the way that colonialism and colonial histories are purposefully excluded from the Canadian social sciences curriculum for K-12 students in Ontario. There is a lack of discussion in classrooms on the connections between history and race relations, locally or abroad. I maintain that the Canadian education system enacts a form of epistemic violence in excluding Canadian colonial histories. This includes the erasure of Indigenous histories and continued presence is intentional. It enforces the ideas of Canada as being discovered as “Terra Nullis”-empty land that white settlers developed (Slotkin 1992). I suggest, as do others (Razack 2002; Lowe 2015) that this also reinforces the narrative of the “vanishing” Native that doesn’t belong in modern times, while justifying the ongoing theft of Indigenous land. By excluding First Nations history from the curriculum, it becomes easier to divert our efforts away from the possibilities of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence (Corntassel, 2012, p 91).

Kamini

In my second interview with my participant, Kamini, Indigeneity entered the conversation early on, and without my prompts. Kamini identified as a 26-year-old cisgendered⁴, Tamil female with autism. As I mentioned earlier, Kamini did not identify with the “mixed race” label. Although though her parents were from *different* ethnic groups with distinct languages, histories and conflicts, Kamini was typically considered a person of colour rather than a person of mixed heritage. In responding to my call for participants, Kamini seized an opportunity to trouble static models of racial identification, taking seriously “the idea that race is not a biological but a cultural fiction” (Kawash 1997, p 129). Though the interview space provided Kamini the opportunity to do so, she chose to identify as “Tamil” because it was “the simplest version”, especially for “white people [who] have a tendency to mix up South Asian people”. What this led to was an erasure of Kamini’s Singhalese and Gujurati culture and languages. This erasure was facilitated by the violence of growing up in a white space that homogenized her “otherness” and taught her that it was not something that was safe to express or explore.

Kamini recounted having “a *really* tough time in elementary school... I went to a Catholic school and I was bullied a lot... I was known as the weird kid, and I was the only brown kid in the class”. Kamini claimed she was bullied because of her disability but also her race. “When 9/11 happened happened, it *really* went into the racial taunts. I got called a terrorist”. Having little to no friends, Kamini frequently

⁴ Cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. It is the opposite of the term transgender

retreated to the library. There, she remembers reading *My Name is Supeetza*- a book about a young girl in residential school. Curious to learn more about the current conditions for Indigenous children in Canada, Kamini sought more information from her teachers, some of whom she described as a “cantankerous bunch of Catholic nuns”. Unsurprisingly- she was met with shock and a great deal of resistance. Kamini was discouraged from reading more about current Aboriginal issues and told that she was too young, that the issues were not hers to worry about, and that she was not mentally capable of understanding them. This particular narrative is important because it reflects a few common problems. Firstly- it highlights the way in which Canadian public school systems have continued to hide and erase violence against Aboriginal peoples. There is little to no talk of the violence of genocidal white settler colonialism, and no discussion about Indigenous futurities or resurgence. I also want to highlight the very violent ways in which Kamini’s teachers enacted multiple forms of violence, infantilized Kamini as “too young”, as an excuse to ignore their complicities in the Residential schooling system. Secondly, by avoiding discussions on settler colonialism, Kamini’s teachers denied her the opportunity to explore her own colonial histories and multi-ethnic identities beyond a flattened racialization of “non-white” and “brown girl”.

Kamini also expressed sadness in not being able to explore these topics at home. She told me that she knew very little about her dad’s side of the family and their stories of migration. This reminded me that identity is often as much about how families can play a key role in silencing or facilitating how we work through

identity. Kamini's identity as a Tamil woman rested in part on the pride in being Sri Lankan Tamil. It was also because she knew she was never "read as mixed race", but was troubled by the way in which mixed race is defined in Canada and who gets to count as "mixed". When asked to define "mixed race", Kamini replied that it was a tough question to answer, but "I guess it could be within different races, like I mean, not specifically ethnic groups, but within certain continents or like maybe with um someone from South Asia with someone from um... East Asia?" When asked, Kamini wasn't able to relate the specifics of her families' diasporic histories, or their relation to colonialism.

Although our first teachers in life are often our family members, we cannot assume that parents will pass on racial literacy to their children. It is unfair to assume that parents are equipped with the language or the strength to talk about colonialism imperialism, or diasporic histories. We also cannot assume that families are willing to share stories of intergenerational trauma, especially when the hope of living pain-free lives in a new country is a hope for their children. I wonder if an understanding of her family's mixed ethnicities and histories would have allowed Kamini to claim the mixed race label as something that spoke to her experiences in a way that my participant Diana did, despite the way she was racialized by other people.

Although Kamini wasn't able to tell me much about her family's colonial history, her interest in learning about Canadian colonial histories gave me a

refreshing amount of hope for the possibilities of resistance amidst the stories of racial harm. Topics of colonial violence and Indigeneity entered the interview space without my prompting as Kamini recounted stories about her school experiences. Here, she received not only a formal education, but what Anne Alin Cheng (2001) calls “an education in racism” (p 21).

Frustrated with the lack of resources and support, Kamini asked her parents, who gave her a similar response- that this kind of thing probably didn't happen anymore in a nice place like Canada, and that it was not her issue to worry about. Kamini shrugged as she said “I'm not really sure if it's 'cause they didn't want to acknowledge that it happened or they generally did not know”.

The response of Kamini's parents also warrants consideration. I find it difficult to blame them for their lack of support/response. As first generation immigrant parents, I cannot expect them to be able to provide resources or have a detailed knowledge of Canadian history. Kamini's parents response also highlight the belief that many immigrant families consider Canada as a, a place of refuge for which they should be grateful (Jiwani 2006, xiv), and a place in which they are required to forget the pain of racism. While “it can be damaging to say how damaging racism has been... it is surely equally harmful not to talk about this history of sorrow” (Cheng 2001, p 14). Not talking about race didn't help Kamini let go of the pain of racism, and her teachers harsh words didn't dissuade her from trying to understand race relations and Canada's history with racism. Although Kamini

was persistent in finding community in alternative spaces such as online communities, I wonder whether Kamini's understanding of racial relations, racial identity and the potential for claiming "mixedness" would have been aided if she had a space to discuss any of these topics at home or at school.

Diana

Letting go of the pain of racism was also not a privilege that was afforded to my 3rd participant, Diana. She used the words "Black multiracial cis-gender female woman" to describe herself. Diana told me that both sides of her family were from Jamaica. She described her father as black and Jamaican, but said she didn't know much about the history behind her father's side of the family. Diana described her mother as mixed- white and Indo-Caribbean, but not white passing.

She recognized the privileges that come along with using the label mixed race, and identified strongly with "black thought and black politics" in order to situate herself and show where her alliances lie. Diana said, "I tack on the mixed race [label] as not necessarily an after-thought, but to acknowledge that there's also a privilege that comes with the fact that I'm... black, but I'm mixed with someone else and that ends to be upheld a lot within black communities". Her point about how her a mixed identity can become a way of denying Blackness recalls Jared Sexton's (2008) argument that an inherent anti-blackness informs multiracial movements. Mixed-ness provides a way to say that one is not "all black, all the time" (p 78). Diana's statement also makes it clear that she is conscious of the way that shadism

(preference for lighter skin) operates as an anti-black byproduct of classism, colonialism and white supremacy that has permeated communities of colour on a global scale, including her Black, Asian and white family members. Nonetheless, Diana maintained mixed race as important to her identity “as a kind of remembrance of myself”. She expressed some frustration in often having her Asian side overlooked because of people’s assumptions that bi-racial can only mean half black and half white.

Of my 4 participants, Diana expressed the most nuanced understanding of race relations, colonialism, white supremacy and anti-blackness than other participants. Diana was similar to my other four participants in that racism was not always understood as a structure with a long history. Instead, racism was first understood as a set of mixed emotions that came with a lot of confusion. I make the case the confusion they felt was because they didn’t have a language to name and understand that what had happened was racism or the colonial logics that motivated racist instances. With time and more education, Diana began to understand how mixed race operates as a form of anti-blackness.

Despite the fact that home was a sort of epistemological space for Diana, a place in which she learned about her Jamaican culture, and spoke Patois, it was not a space for her to learn antiracist politics or colonial histories. Although Diana expressed the most intricate understanding of interlocking structural oppressions, she also expressed to me the difficulties she had growing up and not being able to

talk about race with her family. Having been raised primarily by her maternal grandparents- a white grandfather and an Indo-Caribbean grandmother, Diana claims that race was not something they discussed with her until she was subject to bullying for being black. Diana expressed to me that even in these incidents, her grandparents would brush off the bullying as “people will say mean things”, and that she had to work through politics herself. I don’t have enough information about Diana’s grandparents to know whether they thought they were helping Diana grow into a person who wouldn’t think of herself as limited because of structural barriers. Never the less, Diana had to face instances of racially charged violence outside of the home. It was only when she reached university that Diana was able to understand and situate herself within black, feminist politics and get involved in black activist movements such as Black Lives Matter. Having studied race and gender a great deal in a post-secondary setting, Diana laughed as she expressed the difficulty in only have our short interview to fully explain everything she knew/understood about colonialism. Never the less, she was able to highlight a nuanced understanding of many key components even in our short time together. Diana connected colonialism as a structure that was interconnected with white supremacy, anti-blackness and capitalism, both locally (in Canada) and abroad. She articulated a nuanced understanding of her relationship to the nation when she outlined the complexities of being a colonially displaced black, multiracial body on a settler colonial landscape, noting that she considered herself as benefiting from colonialism although not a settler. She understood her complicity, claiming that while “I’m not a setter, but I’m still someone who benefits off of [Indigenous] pain and their land dispossession”.

Despite the policies in place, Diana felt that “the general culture in Canada doesn’t actually make me feel welcome, [yet] I still have to live here”.

Diana also discussed feelings of “double displacement” in that her family members felt that they had to leave Jamaica because the way colonialism and the trans-Atlantic slave trade “royally fucked up the economy”, forcing many families to leave home in search of better economic opportunities. The promise of opportunity for Diana and her family was always juxtaposed with the feeling that she was not welcome as a “Canadian”. This was especially apparent in predominantly white spaces, such as the small town in Ontario where she completed her undergraduate degree. Here, Diana was subjected to great amounts of racialized and sexualized forms of harassment (verbal and physical) in comparison to urban spaces like Toronto with a higher percentage of people of colour.

Diana displays a critical awareness of the racialized nature of citizenship. Despite her status as a Canadian citizen in a so-called “multicultural society”, she is consistently made to feel “out of place.” As Rinaldo Walcott (2003) reminds us in *Black Like Who*, “Even as nations give way to various forms of citizenship influenced by the latest trends in globalization (such as multiculturalism), black people in Canada continue to exist in precarious relation to older versions of citizenship and older versions of belonging” (p 23). Diana expressed similar sentiments to Walcott, and outlined that multiculturalism was merely a “pretty thing” to make Canada look like a “gentler oppressor” and to distract from systemic issues. Diana drew attention

to missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the over-criminalization of black youth as signs that multiculturalism was a myth. As Dei (2007) aptly puts it, “Multiculturalism works with principles of symbolic equality at the expense of material and cultural equity” (p 58). While university was a space in which Diana learned to name and critique some of the race power relations within her family situation, activist spaces community organizations helped solidify Diana’s understanding that educational spaces as institutions that reproduced racial and colonial violence—something I explore more deeply in Chapter 2.

Melanie (19 years old)

Diana’s critical race analysis stands in contrast to Melanie’s. When asked to use any number of words to identify or describe herself, Melanie used “an academic” and “a thinker”. It is possible that Melanie was responding to my role as a “researcher” in the interview, and may have felt that it was important to present herself more academically. I cannot of course know whether she would have given the same response if we had had an everyday conversation. Given that Melanie responded to my call for participants for a research study that focused on “race, racism and racial identity”, her next words came as a bit of a surprise. Melanie said: “I like to associate myself in that *genre* of academic words and like stay away from *race*. Like I don’t usually use that to explain who I am.” She went on to say that she would describe herself as an introvert and then laughed, claiming she didn’t know what else to say. On first hearing this, I was slightly confused and taken aback by what this meant and was almost dismayed to hear Melanie convey what at first I

took to be colorblind sentiments. When asked why she chose to “stay away from race”, Melanie claimed that she didn’t want to be “associated or put in a *box* because I’m x race”, but that it was also because, “I don’t want to say a story of where I’m from and like explain all of that.... It’s a longer process to explain, “Oh! But I’m this and that” and then *but* your parents don’t look like it... because they’re further mixed themselves, and it makes it harder to explain... a lot of things.” If asked to identify herself racially, Melanie said she would say, “just a mix...both my parents... are from different things. So I’d say my dad associates himself as *Indian* even though he’s from a Turkish background, and my mother identifies as Trinidadian or like *West Indian* despite having a Chinese grandfather and her mother (my grandmother) being from Venezuela.”

As this short excerpt starts to explain, Melanie’s family was full of diasporic complexities that might be seen as a “third space” (Bhabha 1990), an “in-between” identification that did not fit neatly into binaries. Melanie’s understanding of herself required a longer analysis of diasporic histories and migration as an effect of colonialism, yet colonialism was not something Melanie could explain. Her conceptualization of colonialism was limited in scope, described as, “Um...is that not the... migration in certain areas of like white populations like...to colonialize an area? I don’t think I understand it.” When later asked whether she associated colonialism with present day race relations or present day Canada, Melanie said “No”. Once again, colonialism was relegated to the past, and something strangely unfamiliar. I found this slightly surprising for two reasons. The first is that Melanie’s

parents were both from countries that underwent a great deal of anti-colonial struggles for independence (India and Trinidad). Jacqui Alexander (2005) reminds us in *Pedagogies of Crossing* that this historical knowledge of colonialism is sometimes a form of privileged knowledge—not all colonized, racialized peoples learn an anti-racist or anticolonial politics (p 129). The second is that Indigeneity entered our conversation without any connection to colonialism. This occurred when Melanie recounted stories of going “up north” to Bancroft, Ontario- a place she describes as “very white”. When there, Melanie says she receives more of our favorite kind of colonial and racial question- “What are you?”, but this time they answered for her. “Oh! You’re... you’re not from this Native tribe or *this* tribe”. She then exclaimed, “I don’t even know if there’s tribes here!” and continues on with her story. Again, Melanie’s not knowing displays how Indigeneity is often obscured or made to disappear from public memory.

For someone that wanted to “stay away from race”, Melanie’s stories made it clear that this wasn’t something she could avoid. Though she didn’t use the academic terms for what kind of encounter she was facing, she explicitly named whiteness- highlighting her awareness that she was not the normative Canadian, and that normative ideas of citizen versus immigrant were always racialized. When white people assumed that she *must* be from out of town, Melanie exclaimed, “I don’t think they wanna say it’s ‘cause I’m not white. But I feel it. Like it’s because I’m not white. You can visually see that I’m not from here.”

Melanie was adamant in explaining to me how there was nothing “exotic” or different about her other than her colour and her heritage. She was insistent about her Canadianess. As she said, “I grew up just like any other Canadian... I went to a school here. I went to an all girl’s Catholic school. So I played sports uh. I can skate? I... live life here in Ontario versus like *on the island* or in the *farms* in India. “ I suggest that in this interaction, Melanie was asserting her identity in relation to nationalist narratives as a way of emplacing herself in the nation. The same sentiments were expressed when Melanie explained to me why she identified as a Canadian.

“Um- mostly because... when *I* look at the definition of a Canadian, I feel like I do fit that mold? Despite my parents not being born here, or having like a heritage here. Um... I don’t think I lived a very different life compared to someone who was... who had a family who was Canadian. I speak the language fluently, I did very similar activities, brought up very similar... Umm.... Culturally like, I like Tim Hortons! I watch hockey. I... These simple, North American, Western things. Um... I’m more comfortable speaking English than any other language, whereas someone who maybe isn’t a Canadian wouldn’t feel the same way. I participate in like Canadian activities; I go to a Canadian university. Um... it’s... Yeah, I come from a family of four, very typical. I think... it’s typical. 4 member family, has a mini van, played sports, watches hockey.”

I theorize that identify as “just a mix” and “a Canadian” was Melanie’s attempt to opt out of the way race is read as a binary, while also responding to its power that is reinforced by Canadian multiculturalism. Here, Melanie outlined for me both her understanding of what the stereotypical “Canadian” embodies, and how her and her family tried very hard to belong to that. In reflecting on what her response speaks to, I think it becomes important to think through who feels the need to assert their sense of national belonging and citizenship, and why. Melanie’s list of recounting these to me was a signifier of the anxiety that comes along with continuously feeling displaced or “out of place”. Melanie’s wanted to “stay away from race” because it could never offer her a place to stand or a consistent community. Her racial identity was always questioned and tested, constantly making her aware of the fact that she was not the “normative Canadian”, especially when she visited pre-dominantly white spaces. Unlike Kamini and Diana, Melanie had difficulty finding a sense of racial community, as she felt that she was always read as “racially ambiguous” or “not quite authentic” in communities of colour.

Zahra (23 years old)

My fifth and last participant was Zahra. She identified herself as a “half Indian, quarter Chinese, quarter black daughter from 2 mixed race parents from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago who is of the first generation born in this land that we call Canada”. Zahra’s way of self-identifying was refreshing to me, in that her identity as the daughter of immigrants was her entry point into understanding her relationship to the nation-state. I also appreciated that Zahra didn’t shy away from

telling a longer story of how she understand herself through her family's histories. She emphasized to me that it was very important to her to remember, and that it was "the crux of my whole racial identity and belonging... ethnicity and nationality are two separate things for me". Having a Jamaican father and a Trinidadian father inevitably shaped how Zahra participated in Caribbean culture, but as she so eloquently put it, she doesn't "have a land to harken back to".

Although Canada is the only nation she can call home, Zahra's understanding of herself as a Canadian citizen has changed over time. She said she "used to just call myself "Canadian", but upon kind of dissecting what colonialism is and um Aboriginal people on this land, I don't think it's fair to just call myself Canadian" This interaction signified to me Zahra's recognition of colonialism as an ongoing project—something that deserved careful attention in the present tense. Zahra's words echoed Diana's sentiments when she talked about understood her place in Canada , and the importance of remembering the histories of the land they occupy. We were able to have a conversation about "settlers", in which Zahra described herself as a "visitor" in relation to the land. She explained that, "even if I didn't have a direct part in European colonialism because I'm not the descendant of settlers".

Like Diana, Zahra was also critical of multiculturalism, and saw the connections between multiculturalism and the settler colonial order. She described multiculturalism as "a scapegoat to say that we can't be racist... It just negates any type of accountability for racism". In Zahra's view, multiculturalism that celebrates

diversity is an example of what Tuck and Yang (2012) call a “settler move to innocence”, defined as “strategies of positioning that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (p 10). The narratives and policies of multiculturalism also produce in the imagination the idea that immigrants of colour can now belong to a nation that has overcome its racism, while mixed race bodies in Canada have permission to “belong” to the white nation, as opposed to the age of anti-miscegenation and the one-drop rule.

Although Zahra was able to express her critical understanding to me, she was only able to come to an understanding once she was in university. Like Diana, Zahra’s racial literacy and critical consciousness increased once she had classes to engage in discussion on race, colonialism, gender and patriarchy. Although both realize that their educational opportunities gave them a language and theoretical background with which they could understand colonialism and interlocking forms of oppression, they both expressed frustration with how the Ivory Tower’s politics were still predominantly white. For example, Zahra was interested in writing an academic paper on “being mixed race with no whiteness”, but “trying to find any type of like academic stuff? Ugh- it’s not there”.

Although Zahra had difficulty finding academic texts to get a deeper understanding of her identity, she was able to learn from the other students in her academic program. Here, Zahra met a number of Caribbean young people with

whom she could explore questions of racial identity. Having this community was important for Zahra's understanding of her identity because it gave her a sense of validation as racialized and as mixed race. Zahra had not previously experienced this kind racial of community before, having grown up in a predominantly white city in South-Western Ontario. As a young child with mostly white friends, her identity was always articulated through what made her *different* from others, or as she put it "how different I am from whiteness", and therefore not the normative Canadian. Her words reminded me of Fanon's theorizaion of the racial epidermal schema in *Black Skin, White* (1967). Fanon reminds us that the black man "must be black in relation to the white man" (p 83). Growing up, Zahra was constantly reminded that she was different, and like the other participants, Zahra is frequently asked to explain her racial background. Zahra was very aware of the politics behind why people ask the question, claiming that, "It's not necessarily like an overt racist thing... They need to know where to place me racially so they can kind of come up with the history of what might be attached to my body and how to kind of treat me."

Zahra also expressed some frustration in the erasure of colonial histories that came along with questions of racial categorization. Though she didn't have phenotypically "Chinese" features, Zahra's father had a Chinese name and her maternal grandmother could still recall what village in China her family was from before being brought to Trinidad. Zahra was also never encouraged in school to look at a longer story of who she was by looking at family history, and these histories were entirely excluded from public school curriculum. Zahra was also frustrated by

the epistemic violence of erasure on her mother's side. She recounts a story in which people would tell her or her mother, "You don't look like a Jamaican", which she read as them trying to say "you don't look Black", despite her mother being half black. To assume a mixed race person will identify solely on the basis of how she looks is "presumptive, but pervasive" (Root 1990, p 197). Self-identification of mixed race people may not be compatible with the identity that is prescribed to them in society (Rockquemore and Brunsma, 2004). Like others in this study, Zahra could not easily see herself in the Black/white binary and did not always accept how she was labeled by others. I highlight this part of the interview to draw attention to the way that participants did not always accept "social inscriptions" (Streeter 1996, p 308). Zahra was aware of the history of indentured laborers brought over from India to work on plantations across the Caribbean- resulting in racial mixing across communities of colour.

Mapping Zahra's longer history with race was important to me because of the way that stories like hers are consistently erased. In *The Intimacies of Four Continents* Lisa Lowe examines the complicated colonial entanglements that produce the histories out of which people like Zahra emerged. These histories are important because they shed light on the often-observed connections between the emergence of European liberalism and settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Lowe describes, "a narrative of freedom" often "denies colonial slavery, erases the seizure of lands from native

peoples, displaces migrations and connections across continents, and internalizes these processes in a national struggle of history and consciousness” (p3). Lowe also argues that the intimacies of desire, sexuality, marriage, and family are inseparable from the imperial projects of conquest, slavery, labor, and government (p 17). She traces the ““largely ignored shift in the management of race and labor in the West Indian colonies” that imported Chinese workers that served “as a solution to both the colonial need to suppress Black slave rebellion and the capitalist desire to expand production” (p 23). This is important because the Chinese were used in political discourse as a figure—a fantasy of “free” racialized labour (p 24). Forgetting the histories of Chinese indentured labor in the Americas also “attests to the more extensive erasure of colonial connections”, including the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the settler logics of appropriation, forced removal and land seizures in the past and present, assimilation etc (p 38).

Lowe’s analysis reminds us that when transnational colonial histories are excluded from public school curriculum, the state enacts a form of epistemic violence. All of this reveals the politics of memory, and reminds us “that the constitution of knowledge often obscures the conditions of its own making” (p 39). Despite not learning her transnational colonial histories at a young age, Zahra, like my other participants learned a great deal about race relations in Canada in instances where her difference was highlighted. For example, Zahra recounts a story where her family was driving, and a white driver yelled at her parents from his car, “In this country, we drive like *this*”. Zahra remembers her mother yelling back, “In

this country? I've been a Canadian longer than *you*." Similar to Melanie's situation, Zahra's mother felt the need to assert her national identity and right to belong as a defence from racist insults. Despite instances such as these, it was interesting to me to hear that Zahra's parents rarely had discussions with their children about race. Zahra sighs as she tells me that it is, "the biggest thing that kind of really stunted my growth in being able to pick up these things. 'Cause growing up like I had *feelings* but I couldn't talk about them". Zahra expresses with a sigh that they *could* talk about racism in the family, but "I just don't think any of us knew how to start the conversation... none of us knew how to talk about racism or sexism".

Despite not developing a language to talk about racism and sexism from her parents, Zahra expressed to me how wonderful her parents were as allies when she started engaging them in discussions about race and gender. Zahra described her dad as "a full blown feminist", who was "so good at fighting back" in instances where she was too angry or triggered to explain to other family members making problematic sexist comments or engage in victim-blaming victims of sexual assault. This particular narrative provided me an entry point to think about intergenerational racial literacy (Charania, 2015)—and how youth can find new ways to engage family and elders in their community who may not have had the same resources opportunities as them, but still play a vital role if more conversations are facilitated.

From Commonalities to Conversation- A Call to Critical Anti-racist Educators

Participants conveyed their understanding of race through stories, sharing pertinent memories, many of which were stories of pain and racial harm. Saidiya Hartman asks if pain “merely provides us with the opportunity for self-reflection” (1997, p 4). By highlighting stories of pain, I hoped to connect what has been viewed as “individualized experiences” into a constellation of knowledges- a collection of important sociological and political insights into the way racism taints our everyday lives and shapes our identities. Analyzing the commonalities across the data also allowed me to make suggestions and strategies for change. Mixed race women in this study were often positioned by others as outside of the nation state and their citizenship and belonging were constantly called into question by others. All participants narrated instances in which they were subject to the “imperial gaze” (Mawani 2002) by being asked “what are you?” or “where are you from?”, a question their white peers were never asked because of the way “whiteness was equated with invisibility and cultural neutrality” in Canada (Mahtani 2014, p 147). These the argument Bannerji (2000) makes about race discourse in Canada operating within a set of white and non-white binary oppositions that positions whites as the normative Canadians while positioning racialized bodies as the “multicultural element” that enriches Canadian culture. As I highlighted with examples from each participant, these instances of being subjected to the racial gaze contributed to the feelings all participants shared in feeling “out of place”, particularly in white spaces that didn’t have many people of colour. In this respect, they all shared racialization of being read as not-Canadian because they were non-white (Paragg 2015, p 22).

As children educated in Ontario public schools, each of my participants received a particular kind of Canadian nationalist education through implicit and explicit curriculum. As such, they were each exposed to similarly constructed curriculums that privileged Eurocentric, white history while excluding transnational histories that detail colonial power structures. Having spent the majority of their lives in a colonial education system, this undoubtedly shaped and often limited their own understanding of race and colonialism. As such, participant's awareness of the racial and colonial basis of citizenship was situated on a spectrum. Similar to Mahtani (2005), I found that post-secondary education affected how mixed race women "read their race" (p 80) because they are exposed to a more diverse population of people, while many students study the history and sociology of race.

It is not a coincidence that participants that had received more education had a more critical understanding analysis of the stories she narrated. Melanie had the most difficulty expressing a critical understanding of race relations, but she was also the youngest of my five participants, and had received the least amount of education. She was also the only participant in the sciences, meaning that Melanie was less likely to have as many opportunities to discuss topics of race and colonialism, even in the university classroom (the other four all studied some form of social science-- sociology, history, women and gender studies etc.).

This is not to discount how lived experiences impacted how my participants thought about race and identity, but to think about what happens when we have

feelings to talk about race, but no language to name what we are feeling and why. As Himani Bannerji (1995) wrote, there is often “a difficulty in conveying the feeling of things” that create the “fury and humiliation” of racism (p 169). Though the feelings taught them something, and was the start of an “education in racism” (Cheng 2001, p 21) not having the language to articulate what the feelings were indicated a glaring absence in public education. The fact that none of my participants were able to learn about histories of colonialism outside of a family setting until their post-secondary education highlights a quiet, but serious form of state violence. It highlights the urgency for educators interested in dismantling racism to include discussion on race, colonialism and anti-racism in the classroom, and to start doing so at a younger age.

Not talking about race did not mean that racism and racist bullying did not occur. It only meant that participants had to piece together what it meant through processes of “retrospective renaming”. Sarah Ahmed (2010) describes this as a process of returning and reflecting on life and naming the violence of things that once seemed random or unspeakable (p 82).

The category mixed race is often situated in a multicultural imaginary. Participants were variously critical of multiculturalism, and their experiences of racism made it difficult to utilize celebratory multicultural narratives, and ultimately narratives on mixed race. While it was great to see a number of mixed race women of colour engaged in learning colonial histories, and actively

participating in antiracist spaces in their communities, I realize that this is also a reflection of the kind of networks and people I am connected to- which are predominantly educational space; anti-racist networks and feminist communities.

Universities are not perfect spaces for learning, and the purpose of my work is not to push an elitist agenda. Universities are full of institutionalized oppression as Rinaldo Walcott (2009) so aptly reminds us. Despite the remarkable demographic shifts in urban cities, in Canadian universities, “our faculties and their interests remain permanently and characteristically white – there is no other way to name it” (p 22). However, when thinking back on the development of my own understandings of race and colonialism, I have to admit that my knowledge was very limited until the second year of university. At this stage, I began taking courses and engaging in community groups that allowed me to learn more about colonial histories, while unlearning some of the hetero-normative, colonial ways of thinking about things like race and citizenship I had accepted as truths. University and community groups were where I was able to learn localized histories of colonialism., and I’m not perfect- I’m still learning and unlearning everyday. In saying this, my hope is that the stories I’ve presented are not final truths. For example, I participated in a doctoral study done in this department about five years ago, and the way I would have explained race relations and colonialism is very different than how I would explain it now. I write this to underscore that there is always space to increase critical anti-colonial consciousness, and there is always room for new strategies of reclamation and resistance.

Chapter Two

Confronting Categorization- When are you Mixed?

INTRODUCTION

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation (Hall, 1990, p.222).

As Hall reminds us, “identity” and “race” are constructs that are fluid and always produced by a multiplicity of practices and social structures. In the previous chapter, I examined the way each of my participant’s knowledge of their families’ colonial histories, and their relationship to the nation helped them produce and re-shape their understanding of their racialized subject positions. In this chapter, I extend my analysis to examine the daily texture of “mixed-ness” in Canada by exploring my participants understanding of what it means to be a mixed race woman in Canada. I make the case that “mixed race” is hard to sustain because of the way that racial identity is fluid, shifting across time and space. As Hall (1990) says, “we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side- the ruptures and discontinuities” (p 225).

The fluidity of identity is evidenced by the way race is read differently in white spaces. I examine how this requires participants to perform strategies for survival in some instances, while giving them opportunities to name white, refuse its power

and resist it in other cases. Next, I examine how racial identity is understood differently in communities of colour, where “authenticity” is often tested, requiring participants to perform their right to belong through language, knowledge of cultural clothing and food etc. Lastly, I tie together how other axes of identity; particularly gender sexuality and disability informed how participants negotiated their identities. I draw attention for the need for scholarship to bridge an analysis of race and colonialism with understanding of gender, sexuality, and disability (Crenshaw 1991) rather than assuming that race dictates identity (Thornton 1996). I conclude that “mixed race” is an unstable category because of the way it shifts across time and space. Affiliation with the mixed race label was heavily influenced based on how participants were racialized by other people. This highlights the ways the field still needs to address the presumptions that link multiraciality with whiteness.

Compartmentalizing Self, Confronting Whiteness

I move slowly in the world, accustomed now to seek no longer for upheaval. I progress by crawling. And already I am being dissected under white eyes, the only real eyes. I am fixed. Having adjusted their microtomes, they objectively cut away slices of my reality. I am laid bare. I feel, I see in those white faces that it is not a new man who has come in, but a new kind of man, a new genus. Why, it's a Negro! (Fanon 1986: 116).

Though Fanon was writing at a different period in time, his words poignantly describe the process of ‘dissection’ and fragmentation that mixed race people often feel when moving through white spaces where they are subject to a lot of questions about their racial identity. Haritaworn (2009) tells us that mixed race, “more than other racial positionings, appears to invite dissection, and to produce in observers a

need to 'know' and 'recognize' the crossings (both physical and moral) by which a particular body came into being" (p 121). Fanon powerfully reminds us that it is the white gaze that examines, classifies, and then produces the feelings of discrimination. As Melanie put it, it wasn't the mere presence of white people that made her uncomfortable, but the fact that "I feel like I make other people uncomfortable sometimes", particularly in rural spaces where white people were the majority.

Participants experienced urban spaces as *safer* spaces and "more comfortable" in comparison to rural Canadian spaces because of the diversity within urban spaces. They experienced other people's heightened racial anxiety in rural, white spaces (Bancroft and Waterloo, Ontario were named as well as rural Quebec). As I discussed in Chapter 1, white Canadians in rural spaces are more likely to seek to racially categorize the mixed race female body as "other" and out of place, a practice I associated with a confirmation of racial and national boundaries (Thobani, 2007). For example, Melanie claimed she felt most comfortable in urban spaces because of the diversity of cities. Diana said that she only considered universities in Toronto for graduate school because of the amount of racism she felt while attending university in small-town Ontario. She explained that, "When you live somewhere like Toronto that's so culturally diverse, you don't realize how homogenous Canada truly is. It's scary! I can't live away from the city again". Audrey also exclaimed that she "never felt like a minority" until she moved out of Toronto. In highlighting the fact that rural and suburban spaces were often coded as

white in comparison to urban ones, I am careful not to further the idea that the city space is not devoid of racism. My participants imagined the city space as a multiracial utopia, and deemphasized racially exclusive practices that occur in cities.

White Spaces

Part of the colonial violence that has affected mixed race peoples is about erasure and displacement, consistently questioning and categorizing identities in order to exclude certain bodies. None of my participants reported that they ever passed for white, but they were often racialized as “mixed” or “racially ambiguous”. It is significant that the two participants who did not usually use “mixed race” (Diana and Kamini) were those with darker complexions. For example, Kamini accepted the fact that her racial identity would usually be flattened and de-historicized in white spaces. White people would only ever read her racial identity as “Brown” or by misidentifying her with other South Asian or Middle Eastern ethnicities. Kamini thus learned from her experience to simplify her identity, and often just identified as “South Asian” or “Brown”, employing what Haritaworn says is common for multiracial people- a “strategic attempt to evade further interrogation” (2009, p 120) It was only in South Asian communities, that geographic specificity came into question for Kamini, as community members would want to know more, asking “where exactly are you from, like what town are your parents from?” Congruent with their experience, studies on blackness and multiraciality (Twine 1996; Barn & Harmon, 2006; Lafond 2009) found that mixed race and black children are usually perceived as black. Even if they are mixed with

white, they have limited mobility in their identities, but are regulated by social constructs of Whiteness and they are consistently excluded from the category (Lafond, 2009, p 79). This also highlights the pervasive myth around multiraciality and whiteness, and the historical legacies of anti-blackness and multiraciality. I draw attention to this in hopes of thinking through ways that mixed race studies and multiracial movements can pay closer attention to the ways in which our movements can support or hinder racially progressive racial politics.

Regardless of the fact that they were never considered white, participants felt that the feelings and experiences they had in white spaces were very different from the feelings they had when moving through communities of colour. Because people experience racism differently, my participants each had different strategies for moving through spaces. Participants strategized behavior based on the race of the space because, as Fanon reminds us in *Wretched of the Earth*, “The colonial world is a compartmentalized world” (1961, p3). Choosing a performance in a particular space depended on a variety of conditions, requiring participants to enact particular strategies for negotiating whiteness. In certain instances, performing whiteness or staying silent was required in order to stay safe or gain certain privileges. At other times, whiteness was subverted or resisted, sometimes in quiet ways, and sometimes in more outward demonstrations.

Whiteness can be defined as “a tremendous social force mobilizing how people act and interact, not only in the United States, but around the world, in the

ways they think of themselves and others” (Wander, Martin & Nakayama 1999, p 23). Whiteness can be “seen in the history of law, in the extension and denial of credit, in the quality of health care and in life expectancy, in the quality of education, and in job opportunities that... continue to favour Whites over non-whites” (p 20). Performing white identity is not about wanting to *be* white. As Tizard and Phoenix (1995) observed in their study of mixed race individuals, knowing that whiteness offers privilege, power, and higher monetary and social status Whiteness is performed as a survival strategy, and a way to get the same benefits as whites. Naming whiteness meant that participants needed to enact particular strategies to respond to it.

The first strategy I explore is the performance of whiteness, in other words how people adopt the behaviors and values of the category. Mahtani (2014) tells us that “racial performativity relies upon an understanding that informants often actively respond to the ways that their racialized selves are perceived by others” (p 219). One of the methods participants used was the performance of “white civility” (Coleman 2006), described as a set of everyday practices that disciplines and obscures realities about race (p 10). Civility is a form of practices in which subjects control conduct in order to participate in the civil realm. For example, it is possible that one participant, Melanie, considered that if she stayed away from race, she would appear “academic.” Talking too frequently and too loudly about race makes a person part of the problem of racism. Melanie uses the strategy that Moon (1999) calls “Whitespeak”, described as overlooking issues of race, as well as “the

employment of a passive voice, wherein the agent of an action is made to disappear completely” (p 190). In saying that she felt comfortable in academia because it was a place where racism didn’t matter was a way of subjectifying racism, something usually done by white people. Moon writes that “Subjectification allows White people to engage in disengaged discussion of race and racism in ways that clearly communicate that these topics have little to do with them” (p 189). When travelling through white spaces, Melanie would always “wear university gear” in hopes it would show she was Canadian and prevent awkward, invasive questions about where she was from. It’s interesting how Melanie considered the university as a site of hope, and a space that offered protection. Bannerji (2000) reminds us that academia sometimes keeps people like Melanie “in place” by he “constantly deferred promise” that one day she can be successful enough for race not to affect her (p9). Drawing attention to racism puts these dreams at risk, since white colonizers continue to assert “the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated” (p 42).

For Audrey, Zahra and Diana, university played a paradoxical role because it was a place they could cultivate racial literacy, but also a place in which racial boundaries were reinforced and whiteness was normalized. School was the one space in which Audrey felt she could talk about race without fear of punishment. In contrast, the workplace was not a place where one could speak about race or racism. Instead, it was a place where there were frequent racist interactions. Women of colour like Audrey know that they are regulated, and will be bullied or punished for

speaking out about racism. Audrey knew that a Sri Lankan colleague was fired very quickly with no cause, leading her to believe she was fired for being an immigrant and the darkest person in the office. For her, this event opened up the question of *which* people of colour are acceptable. To protect herself, Audrey tried to perform white civility at work as a way to carve out a space for herself against a backdrop of racialized hierarchies that would mark her as an immigrant and therefore undeserving of a job that displaced white, Canadian workers. Audrey's concern about her colleague being fired for her skin colour echoes Adele Perry's (2012) concern about immigrants being "positioned outside the nation and its special institutions... perceived as a danger to a polity presumed to be and always to have been white" (p65).

Of all of my participants, Audrey seemed the most aware of what she had to lose if she did not blend in with the whiteness of her workplace. She knew that she had to be financially independent and that speaking out at work could cost her a job. Audrey was the one participant that brought class to the forefront of our discussion. She told me that she didn't always grow up in "happy home". It was a "stressful home because of money issues", leading to her and her brother starting work at the age of fourteen. Although money was initially an issue, Audrey knew that her fluency in English and French gave her an advantage in the job market, seeing as they were the two national languages. As she noted, "As a bilingual person, you get more opportunities. Umm, I got 10% or like...higher, an increase in my salary just because I... I speak French". Audrey identified as "half Indian, half Iranian" but

identified as “French” in Francophone communities. For Audrey, comfort was not always about race, but about finding “a similarity or like a bond.... To belong I guess you could say”. In some instances, Audrey performed her difference because multiracial people were more welcome than mono-racial people. She laughed as she told me that people would call her a “world citizen” because she was a lot of different cultures. They saw Audrey as an opportunity to learn more about cultures that weren’t their own. This echoes what Mahtani (2014) found from her participants, who saw themselves as individuals who could “simultaneously act as an interpreter, translator, and ambassador between groups” (p 199). Mahtani cites Spencer (2011), who reminds us not to romanticize people as natural bridges, because “this is a biological argument dressed up in sociological attire” (p 184). Audrey recognized that her appeal as a mixed race person enabled white people to consider themselves open to race.

It was interesting to hear Audrey address some contradictions in her understanding of the connection between the French language and power relations. She told me she had “some white friends who have this white guilt, where they don’t feel like they’re culture, or they don’t like the past of colonialism and how everything is so Eurocentric so they’re continuously looking for somebody who is of a different origin than they are, so they don’t end up like every other white person”. Hearing Audrey make connections between whiteness, colonialism and Eurocentric values made it clear that Audrey was aware of what colonialism was, yet she did not verbalize an understanding of the colonial connections between the French

language and communities of colour.

Though Audrey and some of her colleagues had linguistic and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to help them navigate the workforce, they constantly had to negotiate the workforce as racialized bodies. For example, Audrey describes how she felt that Francophones of colour were separated from the white Anglophones in the workplace in multiple ways. Physically, their desks were divided into Francophone and Anglophone, with the Francophones of colour having visibly smaller desks. Anglophones were promoted and received higher pay. Audrey also observed that none of the people of colour (who were mostly Francophone) ate in the workplace lunchroom. Audrey attributed this to the fact that her white boss and many white colleagues make racist, inappropriate jokes in the lunch room, such as making fun of the name Shaniqua. Audrey also felt uncomfortable engaging in debates with white coworkers who would criticize the *Black Lives Matter* protests in Baltimore. Audrey drew attention to how her Francophone colleagues were treated worse than Anglophones colleagues despite the fact that many of the Anglophone colleagues were Irish. As she laughingly said: “They weren’t even Canadian! That was the funniest part.” As such, the discrimination they face in the workplace was not about citizenship or the minoritization of French in relation to English, but about the racialized nature of citizenship. Audrey’s recounting of the treatment of racialized Francophones in comparison to white Anglophone immigrants reminded me of Roland Coloma’s analysis (2013) of the way in which Asian immigrants who are caught in a double bind, welcomed or seen as a threat based on the needs of the nation (p 588). Immigrants of colour are seen as a burden to the nation for the

resources they use, while also seen as a threat to the citizen, who is always presumably white.

Audrey's choice to avoid her white colleagues and eat with her colleagues of colour is a strategy adopted by other participants. Melanie also chose avoidance of white colleagues as a strategy for managing racial relations. She felt frustrated when questioned about her race, and especially about explaining the differences between West Indian and Punjabi cultures and preferred to avoid the discussion altogether. Rather than seeing silence as an indicator of shame, I see it as actively resisting racial categorization. By refusing to give people the satisfaction of thinking they could "know" solely based on her skin colour, Melanie set the terms of engagement. It was her quiet way of speaking back to the hegemonic powers that continuously classify her and her family as "out of place", from elsewhere and "not belonging".

Melanie's refusal to engage was different than Diana and Zahra's, whose silence was always first and foremost about survival and self-care. Both Diana and Zahra narrated situations in which they purposefully kept their cool because they were afraid for their safety. During her undergrad in a predominantly white town in Ontario, Diana told me she should be careful to have her sunglasses on and headphones in order to avoid street harassment. She avoided going out to bars and clubs because she knew these were spaces in which she would be subject to racialized and gendered harassment. Diana chose her battles carefully, knowing very well that caring for herself was "not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and

that is an act of political warfare” (Lorde 1988, p 131). Diana was politically active in movements such as *Black Lives Matter* when she knew she had allies in the space.

As a way of practicing self-care, Zahra also chose to avoid exploring new spaces. When asked how she felt on campus, she told me she didn’t really go anywhere new. She would go to classes where there were a large number of people of colour, and then would go home. Zahra made strategic choices to be quiet at work to protect herself. Zahra expressed frustration in performing civility by “staying professional” and smiling at men who made sexual comments. In any other space, Zahra explained, she would “cuss them out”. Zahra’s responses are similar to Diana’s in that each calculated the conditions of safety. In Zahra’s words, “if it’s just one to one, then I’m probably going to be a lot more aggressive, but if it’s like two to one, three to one, four to one... no. No! I’m just going keep walking and just try to get away from that situation.” Both Zahra and Diana’s stories illustrate how race relations are always layered along axes of gender and sexuality that are connected to colonial and historical relations of power. I pay detailed attention to the connections between race and colonial conceptions of gender and sexuality in Chapter 3.

Resisting Whiteness

Diana actively resisted whiteness by participating in social movements such as Black Lives Matters, both locally and abroad. This included protests at Police Headquarters in Toronto and New York, participating in a “buy nothing” on Black

Friday, and actively trying to support black businesses instead of white corporations. Diana also resisted whiteness by refusing to subscribe to white, hegemonic beauty norms by wearing her hair natural in a big, curly fro most of the time. By choosing to associate herself with black friends, Diana was also interested in actively building communities of colour rather than trying to fit into white communities. Although Audrey had trouble speaking against the anti-blackness in her family and in the workplace, she participated in Black Lives Matter movement in Toronto, attending rallies, and trying to read more critical articles. She told me she was interested in finishing her undergraduate degree and pursuing graduate studies in the social sciences to continue getting a more critical perspective. Diana and Zahra also chose to study social sciences that focused on history, politics, sociology, and equity-based work. Both were interested in learning more about colonial histories that analyzed the intersections between multiple forms of oppression.

Kamini resisted in more quiet ways—participating in online community spaces such as Tumblr where she could learn more about First Nations communities and history. Here, Kamini also participated in fan casting projects where she and her friends would actively subvert whiteness by re-casting people of colour, and/or queer and Trans* actors as the leading roles in Hollywood films. Online spaces have the potential to be a more accessible pedagogical space for poor and/or disabled folks who find it difficult to access the academy. They might also be a good way for young people of colour living in predominantly white spaces to find community, and have their sense of cultural identity re-affirmed. For Kamini, Tumblr gave her a

space to experience what Sarah Ahmed (2010) calls “retrospective renaming”- returning or reflecting on life, naming the violence of things that seemed random or unspeakable at the time. The struggles for language are not simply an individual problem, though participants are often not able to see this until they see others struggling to name the same feeling. As Charania (2016, p 136) also found with her participants, there are so few opportunities to publically and collectively develop racial grammar and analysis, that an online space becomes very important. Though Diana didn’t see Tumblr as a safe space, devoid of racism, she still enjoyed using it as a form of self-care. She also enjoyed seeing herself reflected in the images in comparison to mainstream media representations of what was beautiful.

Though Kamini’s movements were quiet, I draw attention to them because I think it is important to prioritize multiple sites of resistance that are accessible to a larger group of people. Internet communities like Tumblr also form organically across geographies, seemingly without nationalist agendas, and without capitalist profit as the goal. Tumblr gave Kamini the time, comfort level and confidence to produce something new, namely the “ability to speak and be heard”, which is “clearly connect to power” (Oikawa 2012, p 50). Tumblr gave Kamini the ability to be a part of a community with shared values and to circulate knowledge about racism in ways that academia. Importantly, such knowledge was publically accessible. Andrea Smith (2006) encourages us to develop resistance and accountability that does not “inadvertently keep the system in place for us all”, and that includes making knowledge accessible.

Academic response are no more important than front-line activism, just as on-the-ground community organizing is not the gold standard of activism. Each of us comes to our political understanding from different entry points, at different times, and with different abilities. The important is to connect the movements to form a constellation of resistance that actively works to dismantle interlocking structures of oppression. In a capitalist, neoliberal structure, we are encouraged to be individualistic and thus competitive. If our movements are to be truly liberating, we must resist these notions in our organizing.

Negotiating Communities of Colour

Each participant identified with the term 'mixed race' at particular moments to create what Mahtani (2014) calls a "temporary linguistic home across racialized terrains" (p 178). This has also meant that mixed race individuals have needed to engage in what Ibrahim (2000) calls an "ethnography of performance" to express their identities differently in white spaces than in communities of colour. Though most of the analytics on passing are about passing for white, mixed race people are also required to "pass" as legitimate members in communities of colour. They are often required to perform race through language or through an ability to engage in cultural practices. According to Ibrahim, "The mode of speech is more complex than just a verbal utterance. It includes as well what Roland Barthes (1982) calls 'complex semiological languages', the languages that do not have utterances: the body, garments, etc." (p 16).

This was very true for Audrey, who found that her sense of identity shifted based on the dominant language of the space, not just through race. She said, “I know that my French comes out sometimes, and Mauritian comes out sometimes”, and my Persian comes out sometimes. So it depends I guess”. Audrey’s statement was a reminder of the importance that language plays in maintaining culture, but also in navigating white spaces as a woman of colour. In constantly looking for a place to “fit in”, Audrey expressed the difficulties in performing race or culture in order to be accepted and recognized as a person who carries legitimate knowledge. In learning to navigate, Audrey learned to survive. Her fluency in English and French allowed her some privilege in white spaces compared to other women of colour who did not speak the national languages fluently.

It was interesting that Audrey felt more comfortable in Francophone spaces than in English spaces despite the racism and micro-aggressions she often faced in spaces where she spoke French. This may have been because Audrey was socialized in predominantly white spaces. A study by Twine (1997) found that mixed race girls who have been socialized in predominantly white and suburban environments “have learned to feel comfort in racially exclusive milieus that exclude most people of African descent” (p 230). Another part of Audrey’s level of comfort may have been that Audrey could only speak conversational Farsi, and did not speak Hindi. “Even if I’m brown, like I’m not Indian *enough*”. Audrey rolled her eyes as she expressed the frustration in being called “white washed” despite not being white. She attributes her discomfort wearing cultural clothing, her lack of knowledge about

Indian culture, music, dance or Bollywood movies to not growing up around her Indian side of the family. Although her father was more familiar with this, he would only participate in Indian culture with his family and not in local Indian communities because of the way culture is lost across generations when families are forced to migrate.

Kamini's connection to her cultural identity was similar to Audrey's in that she was caught in a strange bind- feeling a sense of shame in being Tamil as a child. Although Kamini went to Tamil language classes, participated in cultural activities like dance classes, she lost the ability to speak Tamil fluently. Kamini told me that when she was younger, her Tamil was more fluent. Once she started elementary school, she was bullied and made fun of for calling her mother *Amma* instead of Mom. As a compromise, Kamini decided to call her mother *Ma*. This led to Kamini losing some of her ability to speak Tamil, which she described as "very broken". This ultimately disappointed the parents greatly and made her feel a sense of shame within the South Asian community.

Kamini and Audrey's story brings to mind Fanon's analysis in *Black Skin, White Mask* (1967) of the connections between colonialism and language. Fanon examines how colonialism is so pervasive that the colonized internalize colonial values and end up emulating their oppressors as part of their racialized inferiority complex. This often happens when the colonized begins to "adopt a language different from that of the group in which (s)he was born" (p 14). Fanon reflects on

how the colonized self is “dislocated” or “separated” when they “adopt a language different from that of the group in which (s)he was born” (p 14). Although Fanon was speaking of his own experiences, he was “not unaware that the same behaviour patterns obtain in every race that has been subjected to colonization” (p 15). Zahra also expressed feeling a sense of disconnect from her Indian roots. As her parents both moved to Canada as children, neither of them had foreign accents and they were very comfortable with English. Zahra’s mother spoke Patois, but only with her family. Zahra felt that she understood herself differently when she went to India, which felt like “a brand new country and a brand new culture”. This is similar to how Shome (1999) notes about how he is perceived in India, as a person with a Western education versus how he is perceived as an immigrant in the United States. Zahra was similar to Audrey in that she often molded her identity to fit whatever group was dominant in a particular space. She said would “feel a switch go on and off” when she was with certain people. Her Caribbean culture would come out when she worked with other Jamaican woman, but that would be suppressed when she worked with Indian people. This was very different than when Zahra moved through white space where her identity was “just understanding how different I am from whiteness”.

Because Zahra spent the majority of her life in a white city in South-Western Ontario, she did not grow up with a lot of black people or in black culture. As she grew older, Zahra found herself feeling increasingly comfortable in Caribbean communities, both brown and black, and was able to learn more about her roots

here. Zahra told me how her blackness or her mother's blackness was often in question because they did not have physical markers of blackness. Although Zahra felt comfortable claiming different identities at different times, she also felt uncomfortable claiming Blackness because neither her nor her mother looked Black. Zahra was told by a non-black coworker to "chill out" because she was from a white suburb, and was laughed at because she didn't talk "like a black person". This echoes what Smitherman, cited in Gay & Baber (1987) speaks about. Smitherman claims that Black language is a "functional dynamic that is simultaneously a mechanism for learning about life and the world and a vehicle for achieving group approval" (p7). Although Zahra was hurt by these comments, she knew that her "whitewashed" behavior was largely due to the fact that she did not grow up with black people or black culture. Zahra also felt that there was "so much black influence on Caribbean culture, that it kind of becomes yours". At the same time, she was conscious that she didn't pass for black and said she knew that it was important "to constantly remember how my non-black passing body exists with a black person". This understanding informed Zahra's understanding of the complexities of racial identification that led her to hyphenate her identity rather than flattening it with the multiracial label.

Like Zahra, Melanie's understanding of her multiracial identity was also shaped by the way she understood herself in communities of colour. Melanie only started identifying as mixed as she got older because it took her some time to learn what race really was. Race was not something that was explained to Melanie, but

something she came to experience through everyday interactions. Melanie's racial identity did not fit neatly into categories, meaning she was subjected to a lot of questioning, both in white communities and in communities of colour. Melanie learned quickly that she would never be perceived as white. She also learned that she was different from her South Asian peers because she was so multilingual- able to speak Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and understand a bit of Spanish. Melanie notes that it wasn't until she was older that she realized her father never spoke English to her, and laughs as she said she thought for a long time that it was because her father couldn't speak English. Melanie's father made a strategic decision in this in order to ensure Melanie was able to maintain a sense of cultural identity, especially when she went to Catholic schools that were mostly white. Melanie's racial identity was tested more when she was like her parents. She told me how embarrassed she would feel when people would say "*those* are your parents?" because she did not look like either of them. Melanie's father was white passing, something she attributed to his Turkish background, while her mother was significantly darker- identifying as Trinidadian, with Afro-Venezuelan, Indian and Chinese roots. Melanie's parents chose to identify with their respective nationalities, and did not identify with the multiracial label. This reminds us that questions of *when* are you mixed or *where* can you identify as mixed come into question. For Melanie's mother, the mixed race label didn't have a lot of utility. Melanie and her mother felt a sense of shame when elders in the South Asian community would comment that her father "should have married within his culture". They claimed this was because Melanie's mother did not understand the language, though their comments about wanting lighter children

make it clear that their commentary is rooted in shadism and anti-blackness.

While my thesis focuses on mixed race identities, these comments are important for thinking about racial differences *between* communities of colour and how meaning is made out of perceived racial differences. Race is always articulated relationally. Nobody is fixed in a position of dominant or subordinate, oppressor or oppressed. Power relations operate differently and are always shifting across time and space. Because anti-blackness is embedded in white supremacy, it offers non-black people of colour (such as some of the elders in Melanie's community) the opportunity to not be at the "bottom of the racial hierarchy" (Smith 2006, p 67). Racism generates shared conditions of oppression, while inviting us to be "complicit in the victimization of others" (p 69). I am also cognizant of Jared Sexton's (2010) reminder that the term "people of colour" institutionalizes color-blindness that "misunderstands the specificity of anti-blackness and presumes or subsists upon the monolithic character of victimization under white supremacy" (p 48).

Melanie said that comments about her father marrying "outside the culture" made her feel a "sense of separation", like she was "not considered one of them", even though she *could* speak the languages. Melanie said she was often worried about being scammed at the Indian butcher shop or Indian clothing stores, in which her mother would "give them away" as "not one of us". Melanie said she experienced this even more when in India, claiming "they think you're like not *authentic*". It was interesting that Melanie spoke multiple languages, but her

younger brother did not, yet Melanie was the one that was subjected to more questions of racial categorization than her brother, something Danielle Lafond also found in her study (2009) about multiracial men in Toronto. Melanie stated she knew it was also because her mom was not white, and that racial mixing was only acceptable to some of the South Asian elders for the purposes of “making whiter children” or a “better mix”. Melanie felt uncomfortable with some of the assumptions made about her that she might be part white because of her green eyes, but she had trouble linking the assumptions of whiteness to structures of colonialism or anti-blackness.

Melanie was starkly different from Diana, who connected how she felt in a space and a longer history of structural oppression. Like all of the other participants, Diana understood her own racial identity differently in communities of colour than in white communities. Diana knew that she didn’t consistently pass as mixed. As she put it, “When we talk about people who are “mixed”, they have to give off a visible marker of *being* mixed”, which often has an underlying assumption of whiteness. Although some people would read her as mixed, Diana was undeniably black, and did not feel like she needed to prove or perform her blackness. Never the less, language also changed for Diana when she was in communities of colour, particularly when she was with her family. We discussed how the “nice, polite, Canadianized English” she spoke in academic spaces was very different than the mix of English and Patois she spoke at home with her family. What was interesting was that Diana did not grow up with family that had conversations with her about race

or political movements. Diana was raised by her non-black grandparents who were Indo-Caribbean and white. Her sentiments were similar to the ones expressed by participants in a study conducted by Ray (1996) who felt like their White parent could not understand their mixed race experiences.

With time, Diana worked her way through a more critical set of politics. As Twine (1997) notes, the shift in critical consciousness occurred during university where one is exposed to courses that deal with issues of race or gender and gains exposure to ore people who are racially conscious. Diana now identifies strongly with “black thought and black politics to show where (her) alliances lie”. This should not be surprising, given that, “...fantasies of American mulattoes dreaming of whiteness are a function solely of the white imagination” (Spencer 2011, p72). These findings dispel some of the myths “that mixed race people commonly choose to identify as white if they can do so.” (Mahtani 2014, p 142). Diana chose to identify as multiracial *and* black. Although she recognized her light-skin privilege, Diana claimed that her friends did not make much of an issue with it, knowing that Diana would never pass for white, and was seldom read as “mixed race”.

Layers of Identity

It is important to consider how other axes of identity inform how my participants negotiated white spaces and spaces of colour on an everyday basis. As Crenshaw (1991) reminds us, there is an urgent need to bridge an analysis of race with how we understand gender, sexuality and disability. This was made clearer to

me during my first interview with Audrey, whose disclosure led me to adapt my interview style to disclose more information about myself in order to ensure participants could feel comfortable disclosing different layers of their identity to me. This included race, gender, sexual orientation, the fact that I was able-bodied, languages, and information about my family.

Audrey mentioned that she could never bring home a black man, just like she couldn't bring home a girl. When asked how she knew this she said, "the Persian community is very racist against black. Aryan Persians are very racist against darker Persians". When asked why she thought it wasn't acceptable to bring home a girl, Audrey said her father used to make jokes like, "You better not be a lesbian because you've been single for a while". She would say nothing in return. She laughed, blushed and moved on to discuss something else. I highlight Audrey's story to draw attention to the way that communities of colour are invited to reproduce hetero-patriarchal forms of homophobia, but also to draw attention to the way that queerness enters the space in quiet ways and then disappears. Her story highlights how the "coordinates of the female figure remain inevitably fixed as wife, mother, and daughter" thus rendering "queer female" impossible (Gopinath 2005, p 191). It also highlights the way that women of colour often feel a "border both from within and outside communities of colour" (Jiwani 2006, p 71). As Charania (2016) posits, participants may not have known "the proper place of queer in a research project that purported to understand how racism is deciphered, lived and responded to or not knowing how I might respond to such disclosures" that made queerness "only

quietly hinted at” (p 296). Audrey’s story was a reminder of the ways in which scholars need to interrupt the presumed heterosexuality of critical race theory, and/or the presumed whiteness of Queer Theory.

Disability was another important part of identity for both Diana and Kamini, though it affected them in different ways. Kamini identified as a person with autism, and although she was only recently diagnosed, she felt that it shaped her everyday interactions with people and who she was. Kamini said she often felt shy and nervous around new people and was intimidated whenever visiting a space for the first time. This made it difficult for her to meet new friends in school and was one of the reasons she believes that she was bullied so frequently, alongside race. Kamini also expressed how her disability was something that was hard to talk about it with family. During our discussion on community, Kamini said she didn’t feel like she belonged with South Asians because she didn’t fit with “what parents expect me to be”. When asked to clarify she said “I’m not the most obedient daughter”, “I can’t speak Tamil very well”, and “they don’t expect me to be autistic”. In analyzing the implications of their response, I consider how the push to be a “good immigrant” and therefore a productive citizen has increased the stigma and made it difficult for Kamini’s parents to be accepting of her difference.

Diana negotiated her disability differently than Kamini because it was invisible. She identified as a person who was bipolar, who also struggled with a generalized anxiety disorder. Because it was invisibilized, Diana felt that a lot of

people didn't understand the realities of her disability. Diana understood the way that this was intertwined with race, as she sometimes that the amount of racism and harassment she faced affected her mental health. Although she didn't say whether her family members were especially supportive, she mentioned that some of her best friends also lived with disabilities, giving her a space to talk about struggles in ways that Kamini didn't have.

Conclusion

Within this chapter, I have tried to convey a picture of the complexity of identity for mixed race women who come to understand who they are differently in difference spaces. Their stories tell us a lot about the ongoing struggles to feel a sense of belonging or community, the struggle to acquire deeper understanding of race relations from their respective communities, and the difficulty in having all of the layers of their whole identities be accepted and recognized.

I conclude that "mixed race" is an unstable category because of the way it shifts across time and space. Affiliation with the mixed race label was heavily influenced based on how participants were racialized by other people. Though some of my participants were not racialized as mixed, they were able to "notice the way in which meanings are located on the body" in order to "disrupt the current racializing processes" that would seek to erase a longer, and more complex set of histories (Alcoff 2001, p 281). Identity was also about how participants could perform a sense of "belonging" in particular racial groups. The question of *when are you mixed*

and *who do we imagine the mixed race subject to be* were questions worthy of reflection when unpacking the question *do you identify as mixed*.

Chapter Three

Your Hybridity Will Not Protect You: The Sexual Politics of Mixed Race

Introduction

As mentioned in previous chapters, I was concerned about which analytical frameworks would provide the scaffolding for my project. I took very seriously three big questions that I believe all researchers interested in social justice work should be asking. What kind of analysis is appropriate for the data? *Who* is the work for, and what is the utility of it beyond a rigorous theoretical exercise? Although I chose feminist and anti-colonial frameworks, many of my colleagues suggested that I examine mixed race with a focus on discourses of “hybridity” and the emergence of the mixed race “hybrid subject”. Discourse, or language is shaped by power relations, yet how we are read and labeled in discourses shape how we construct our identity (Foucault, 1971). This is because, as Stuart Hall says,

Identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power (1990, p4).

Responding to the increasing fascination with hybrid, mixed race identities, this chapter analyzes how popular discourses on “hybridity” affect the lived experiences of mixed race women in Canada. More specifically, I ask: How do popular narratives affect the gendered and sexual relations for mixed race women in Canada? Though I see the post-colonial usage of “hybridity” as a counterpoint to the idea that race is a

fixed, bounded category, I also see a number of limits in its political and material utility.

In this chapter, I make the case that hybridity is a cis-centered sexualized discourse, and thus affects women more than men. The feminization of “hybridity” carries with it a set of colonial sexual politics that has fetishized mixed race women. As such, discourses on “hybridity” perpetuate violence against mixed race women, while the “mixed race” label has not protected women from racialized or sexualized violence. Discourses on “hybridity” are not new, but the proliferation of celebratory narratives on mixed race are increasing. I make the case that popular discourses on “hybrid” multi-raciality operate as a tenet of multiculturalism and can derail radical political movements towards racial justice. The mixed race label also has limited political utility as evidenced by the anti-blackness that is normalized or excused in mixed race families.

Why Women? “Hybridity” as Feminized Discourse

Although my study was open to all gender identities, it is important to highlight the fact that all of my participants are female. I suggest that this is because there is a gendered nature to the way that discourses on “hybridity” are understood, often focusing on the body and the gendered physical features that mark bodies as “hybrid”. The current public discourse on hybridity is that the children produced are a “good looking” mix, signifying the way that multiraciality is still about what is sexually produced, and still about bodies rather than politics. Having experienced

these conversation first-hand, there is also an implied sexualization connotation to the discussion. In instances where I was asked about my “hybrid” backgrounds, there was very little interest in geography or diasporic family history, the conversation was always about my body. When I was questioned about my family, the focus was always on how my Asian features made me “fascinating” because I was so “different”, and the conversation was about knowing more about my difference.

Yegenoglu (1998) reminds us of the orientalism of these interactions. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of discourse and power as productive and constitutive, Yegenoglu posits that the Western desire for the Other simultaneously produces the Western subject and the possible resistance to the constitution of this subject (p 60). In the same way that the Western subject is obsessed with veil and uncovering the Oriental woman underneath, the Western subject is obsessed with unraveling ambiguity and “knowing” the racial mix. “This metaphysical speculation or meditation, the desire to reveal... is at the same time the *scene of seduction*. The metaphysical will to know gains a sexual overtone” (Yegenoglu 1998, p 45). The ambiguity that the mixed race female body present challenges white masculinity, because the white man is both seduced and mocked by the fragility of not knowing. “It is this incapacity to fix and control that is unsettling and terrifying and yet so seducing”(p 46).

Zahra poignantly summarized this for me when I asked her why she thought she was questioned so frequently about her mix. She said,

It's because people need to understand how they're going to treat you. It's not necessarily like an overt racist thing like "This person is this, therefore I have to treat them like that". It's how they understand my body. They need to... know where to place me racially so they know... so they can kind of come up with the history of what might be attached to my body and how to kind of treat me... in a very like subvert way that they don't really understand.

Zahra's words tell us that the need to *know* and classify race is still a colonial encounter. Popular discourses visibilizing "hybridity" does not represent a change in race relations, but rather embodies disturbing racial trends of the past. My personal experiences had some similarities with my participants, though it's important to consider how their "mix" and "hybridity" was questioned very differently from mine because none of them could ever "pass" for white. As I explored earlier, there are large assumptions about *what mixed race is* and who counts as mixed race.

Danielle Lafond's study (2009) of multiracial men in Toronto found that that the majority of multiracial men "did not think they were asked about their ethno-racial background any more frequently than their mono-racial friends" (p 37). Lafond attributes the difference to the fact that the, "multiracial men I spoke to were largely indifferent or responded positively to these incidents, and they rationalized them as a normal part of everyday life in Toronto" (p 42). This fit with the responses my participants gave about their brothers. For example, Melanie claimed that her brother "didn't care all that much" because he does not get racialized as "mixed". As mixed race women are subject to greater amounts of gendered and sexualized

scrutiny and questioning than their male counterparts, it makes sense that mixed race Asian women were more interested in participating in my study than mixed race than men.

The frequency of encounters with racial categorization is also linked to colonial legacies that have constructed gendered Asian subjectivities in opposition to one another. Racial discourses have constructed Asian male bodies as de-sexualized or effeminate, and Asian female bodies as hyper-feminine, submissive and seductive (Fung, 1991). Looking back at the discourse on Asian males in history, Richard Fung (1991) traces how Asian women in film are mostly cast as “passive figures who exist to serve men- as love interests for white men, or partners in crime for men of their own kind” (Fung 1991, p 146). Asian men were first read as hypersexual and a threat to white femininity in a similar way to the racial tropes about black males (Sexton 2008, p 35). However, the popular discourse shifted with the “success of anti-Asian immigrant laws in excluding Asian women... [Creating] ‘bachelor’ communities of Asian and especially Chinese men for much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (Frankenberg 1993, p 76). This shifted the discourse of Asian masculinity from “hypersexual” to asexual or “effeminate”. This stereotype is often reinforced through the absences in popular media. Hollywood films have failed to cast Asian males as strong, lead characters, thus making them seem passive and effeminate in comparison to the white and black male. Asian males are also rarely cast as the subject of romantic interest, thus reinforcing stereotypes about Asian males as sexually lacking or asexual. This works in tandem with

representations of Asian women in Hollywood, who continue to be displayed as the arm candy of the leading, white male in the same ways that Orientalism has represented the Asian woman in art and literature (Fung 1991; Maclear 1993). These images reinforce racial tropes of Asian women as mysterious and exotic, but also as feminine, seductive and dangerous (Yegenoglu 1998, p 11).

Sexual Politics and Limit Points of “Mixed Race” Womanhood

Just as the stereotypes about Asian women as submissive have contributed to the fetishization and harassment, celebrating multiraciality is limited in both material and political utility. My data shows that the “mixed race” label does not and cannot offer a safe place from racialized and/or gender-based violence, and such has failed to be anticolonial. Andrea Smith (2005) urgently reminds us that we cannot separate anticolonial movements from struggles against gendered-based and sexualized violence, “because sexual violence has served as a tool of colonialism and white supremacy” (p137). Smith goes on to say that, “such an understanding presupposes that we could actually decolonize without addressing sexism”. Though Smith is speaking about colonization and land theft for Indigenous folks on Turtle Island (North America), her words are relevant for thinking about the sexual politics of mixed race.

The histories of miscegenation are always linked to a colonial sexual politics. Celebrating the fascination with multiraciality has increased fetishization and the propensity towards racialized and gender-based violence. What seems like a

harmless group of men lusting after mixed race woman is in reality a reproduction of the same racist, sexualized violence of the past. This is largely because of the way that, “visuality is not merely about images”, but is “a structuring method of making the world” (Agathangelou 2014, p 428). Media is an important landscape to examine because of the way it is infused into our everyday- playing a large role in forming common public understandings. If we analyze popular culture, we see a lack of stories in which Asian men have dominant roles. There are also little to no storylines in which Asian men are the subject of desire, or where Asian men are cast as the partners of white women; yet there are several examples across history in which Asian women are portrayed as submissive to white men, often in sexual terms. It is when these images are committed to public memory that violence against the Asian or “Oriental” woman’s body is normalized.

Knowing this, it was not surprising to hear all of my participants recount stories of sexually charged harassment, whether verbal or physical. I draw attention to these reported incidents because they reveal the connection between violence and exoticization. It is also important to, as Cheng (2001) says, take a look at hidden or “private grief that has gone into the making of the so-called minority subject” (p 6). This is because “the connection between subjectivity and social damage needs to be more complicated than either resigning colour people to the irrevocability of “self hatred” or denying racism’s profound, lasting effects” (p 7).

Exoticism and Racialized Particularities

As I explored in the previous chapter, racism's profound effects were often articulated along lines of gender and the body. Each of my participants internalized or resisted racism at different points. What my participants did share was the painful lesson Zahra said she learned upon surviving sexual assault- an "understanding of my racialized my *female* body, and gender difference. Just by being out in public, your body is a part of public space". Haritaworn (2009) extends Fanon's existential phenomenology and Fanon's notion of "dissection" from *Black Skin White Masks* (1967) to assert, "that the discourse of 'mixed-race ambiguity' reinscribes the relations which entitle some to gaze at others. Rather than a normal reaction to abnormal bodies; this theorizes multiracialism as a legacy of colonial knowledge." (Haritaworn 2009, p 116)

Being a racialized women in public space means being subject to scrutiny and questioning, but not all of the participants were "read" or racialized in the same way. Kamini did not get sexualized as a "mixed race" woman because she did not give off visible markers of "mixed-ness". Never the less, she was puzzled by how often she would be asked whether or not she had a boyfriend. She claimed that most of these questions came from her white classmates, who would press her for details on why she had never had a boyfriend. Knowing she was uncomfortable with these questions, I did not ask Kamini questions about her dating experiences. I focus on this instance to draw attention to the way that women of colour are assumed to be heterosexual (erasing possibilities for queerness or asexuality). Kamini's

experiences also highlight the ways in which women of colour's experience with sex and intimacy are constantly subjects of public interest and consumption.

Zahra also gave examples of feeling subject to the sexualizing gaze in the workplace. She felt pressured to be polite to customers who would ask questions or pass comments about her mix. Haritaworn (2009) also found that mixed race interviewees were subjected "to stare, remarks and sometimes public debates about their bodies" (p 116), and conceptualizes the process as symbolic violence because of the way it violates personal boundaries. For Zahra, questions about race were questions about the body, making her uncomfortable about both race and sexuality. As a survivor of assault, just the mere presence of men in groups was triggering for Zahra, and yet the pull to maintain professionalism carried more weight than the violence that reproduced feelings of trauma. Zahra's story reminds me of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) work that tells us that, "sexuality and power on the personal level become wedded to the sex/gender hierarchy on the social structural level in order to ensure the smooth operation of race, gender and class oppression" (p 196).

Claiming "mixed race" or having whiter features did not change this. Diana had an acute awareness of the limits of the mixed race label, citing the example of Loretta Saunders, a 26-year-old Inuit women who was murdered and whose body was dumped along a Canadian highway. Diana emphasized the fact that "Loretta Saunders had light brown hair, blue eyes and *that* didn't *matter*.... That didn't protect her." Diana understood that being mixed race or using the label would not

protect her from racialized and sexualized violence because of her visible blackness. She expressed to me the discomfort she faced in being subject to sexual scrutiny from a young age. Diana was sometimes read as “mixed”, depending on the space, but rarely read as Asian because of her visible markers of blackness. Being “big boned” and “developed” at a young age meant that Diana learned quickly that here body was watched, and that her body would be touched without permission, by males and females alike.

Diana also noted that people were more aggressive towards her in white spaces as compared to communities of colour. She recounted stories of white girls running, arms outstretched to touch her fro, exclaiming, “Oh my God! Your Hair!”, and feeling shocked when Diana resisted. Patricia Hill Collins reflects on the ways this is connected to literature that linked Black sexuality with animals and degeneracy, reinforcing “Eurocentric notions of unrestrained Black sexuality” (p 192).

Diana also had many experiences in which white men would try to stick their hands down her pants or slap her butt in public spaces. Diana exclaimed, “I would even get accosted at bus stops [where] people would treat me like I was an *escort*”. These experiences speak to the longstanding assumption that white people have the right to use black people’s body like property (Harris, 1991), and the fact that violence against black women’s body is often a spectacle-- a public display of power relations. Yegenoglu (1998) reminds us that, “Foucault’s analysis shows how the body does not stand in an external relation to power, but is marked, stamped,

invested, acted upon, inscribed, and cultivated by a historically contingent nexus of power/discourse... Power is the productive principle through which the materiality of the subject is constituted” (p 113). Through an insistence on “knowing” the multiracial subject and physically seizing hold of multiracial bodies, colonial control is exercised.

The existing literature in multiracial studies has not thoroughly examined the “links between sexuality and power in a system of interlocking race, gender and class oppression” that are important in revealing how “controlling Black women’s sexuality has been to the effective operation of domination overall” (Hill Collins 1990, p 164). Diana’s stories are not unfamiliar ones for black women, who have “served as the primary pornographic ‘outlet’ for white men in Europe and America” (Walker, 1981, p 42 cited in Hill Collins, 1990) for centuries. This is undoubtedly connected to the longer history that attempted to mark particular races as being more sexual and more animal-like (Spelman 1982, p 52) in order to justify slavery and sexual exploitation. “Exploiting Black women as breeders objectified them as less human because only animals can be bred against their will” (Hill Collins, p 167). Diana used words like “uncomfortable”, “tiring” and “traumatizing” to discuss how these situations made her feel.

She also described how this contributed to her feeling a sense of “activist burnout”. Audre Lorde (1984) prompts us to think about how “every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the

oppressed that can provide energy for change” (p 53). What is interesting is that despite all of the hyper-visibility and trauma Diana experienced, they did not make her less docile or politically motivated. Through her undergraduate program, Diana identified strongly with “black thought” and “black politics” to “show where my allegiances lie”. Diana’s politics were rooted in love, community and justice; what Katie G. Cannon (1998) describes in *Black Womanist Ethics*. Drawing on the work of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr., Cannon suggests that love is the basis of community and becomes the arena for moral agency. Though Diana had to work through her politics on her own, her politics were firmly rooted in a long-standing tradition of black women’s activism.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) has theorized the two primary dimensions on which black women’s activism occurs. The first dimension is about the struggle for group survival in which black women “resist by creating their own self-definitions and self-valuations in the safe spaces they create among one another” (p 142). This was juxtaposed with how Diana often felt she was “too black” for her white friends, particularly when they would want to frequent white spaces where she was likely to be harassed. This also explains why Diana’s circle of white friends grew smaller as she got older. She chose to hang out with more woman of colour, and more black women in particular, choosing to only visit “clubs or spaces that were mostly filled with *black people*” where they would “play *my* kind of music, like dancehall or hip hop”. Diana also noted that being in a small town meant that, “you would know at least 80% of all the black people in your area”. Finding or creating Black

communities was Diana's strategy for coping with everyday racial violence, and for finding ways to have blackness validated.

Having a community was also tied to the second dimension of Black women's activism, "the struggle for institutional transformation- namely, those efforts to change existing structures of oppression" (Hill-Collins 1990, p 142). Diana actively participated in campaigns to combat gender-based violence on campus, but expressed frustration in some of the members failing to focus on issues of race. Diana found a better sense of community when she joined the *Black Lives Matter* movement in Canada and the U.S. Here, "Black women activist come to see the interconnection of race, class and gender oppression and the need for broad-based political action" (Hill-Collins, p 156), challenging interconnected issues of anti-blackness such as carding, state-sanctioned police violence, etc. The organizational style of Black Lives Matters also echoes how Black women have conceptualized and used power. For example, Black Lives Matter has multiple co-founders across its chapters, rejecting models of authority based on hierarchical power structures, embracing alternative vision of power rooted in self- actualization, self- definition, and self-determination. (Hill Collins 1990; Lorde 1984; Steady 1987; Davis 1989; Hooks 1989).

What Diana's story raises are question on how the multiracial movement can work in solidarity with other racialized communities against the interlocking systems of white supremacy, colonialism and anti-blackness. I apply the same

suggestion to scholars in multiracial studies that Loomba (1998) urges post-colonial scholars: to utilize the wealth of Indigenous and Black scholarship and research methods that has already been produced and to acknowledge how these are central to the psychological and spiritual healing of Indigenous peoples, black folks, and non-black people of colour.

The Colour of Confused: Contradictions

Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed out rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking out of the world put me back in the world” *Black Skin White Masks*. (Fanon 1967, p 80)

I reflect on Fanon’s words because they offer a starting point for me to think about the ways in which some mixed race women struggle with racial harm. Some of my interviewees internalized beliefs about racial inferiority, despite being seen as “fascinating” or “exotic” because of their mix. Mixed race studies has not successfully facilitated the kind of radical communities to think through race and heal from racial violence. Mixed race women still exist in a kind of liminal space, where they are fetishized for their “uniqueness” and their difference, while many of them (including Audrey, Kamini, and Zahra) feel discomfort about being darker skinned because of media representations that privilege whiteness and experiences of racial exclusion and/or rejection. For example, Audrey expressed frustration with the fact that her racial ambiguity left her in a kind of liminal space. She was seen as ‘fascinating’ to white males, but she also rejected because of the boundary that always marked her “not white” and therefore inferior. Audrey explained to me that there was a lot of

cultural appropriation from her friends in the white hippie community at university. Despite the “kindness” and “interest in being cultured”, Audrey said she always knew the underlying message was still that “you were inferior” to white people because “people won’t date you because of your skin colour and because you come from somewhere else”. When asked how she knew this, Audrey told me a story of being “invested in a relationship” with a white male during her undergraduate years. The boy eventually told Audrey he did not want to date her. Instead, he chose “the prettiest white girl I had ever seen”, who often wore culturally appropriative clothing or jewelry, like stick-on Bhindi tattoos. Audrey commented that the Bhindi tattoo was acceptable to the boy, but that the ‘limit point’ was “dating a coloured girl”. When asked why she thought this was the case, Audrey said, “You’re *safer* being white than being... something else or being with something else”. I wondered if Audrey was talking about herself, seeing her association with white people as a way to resist racial exclusion, and to build bridges between racial communities by sharing her culture with them.

As I reflected on in the previous chapter, Audrey had conflicting feelings about race. While Audrey said she felt a sense of anger towards white girls who would appropriate culture to make themselves sexually appealing, it seemed like her anger was more about losing the affection of a white boy than about not wanting to be associated with white people. Audrey *chose* to befriend white people, claiming that the Persian and Mauritian communities in her undergrad university did not share similar interests as her. Audrey also cited Francophone spaces as spaces of comfort.

It was also contradictory to hear Audrey explain why she was uncomfortable with cultural appropriation, while she claimed that being called “exotic” was usually a compliment. Audrey excitedly told me that, “If you see a plant that’s tropical, like a palm tree in Canada... You’re just like *Wow! I’ve never seen a palm tree here, but it’s so beautiful!* So you’ll kind of feel like a piece of art?” Audrey’s views were similar to some of the participants in Mahtani’s (2014) study, which found that participants often claimed “mixed race” as a label in order to be seen as racially unique, while failing to adopt a set of critical, anti-racist politics (p 96).

As Shotter (1993) reminds us, “there are many... human activities in which- though we may loathe to admit it- we all remain deeply ignorant as to what we are doing, or why we are doing it” (p 47). Melanie’s commentary was equally confusing, engendering contradictions of affiliation and distance, protection and pain (Cheng 2001). She laughed off comments people made about her “looking exotic” by eschewing difference and attempting to write herself along lines of national belonging. Melanie adamantly stated that she was, “just like any other Canadian. I play sports, I can skate and I lived life here in Ontario, not like *on the island* or in the *farms* in India”. What Melanie reproduced was what Ibrahim (2007) calls the “rhetorical emblem of successful integration” (p 155) that reproduced “the economy of white supremacy through apolitical and neutral affiliations with the nation-state” (Mahtani 2014, p 97). Melanie’s statement also describes what Asian-Canadian scholar Roland Coloma (2013) calls, “the discursive enactment of ethno-nationalism” (p 581). He describes ethno-nationalism as,

a form of identification and resistance by racialized minorities who contest and work to redress their marginalized status and conditions in White-dominant nation-states by appropriating and associating themselves with national citizenship in order to be regarded as full-fledged members of the civil society.

Coloma argues (2013) that assertions of ethno-nationalism are troubling because of the way they privilege Canadian-ness while distancing and rejecting forms of “Asian-ness” (p 581). This articulation of “ethno-nationalism” is similar to what Hall (1990) speaks of the disturbing realization that identity is understood, “only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks” (p 4). To make a claim about racial identity, this requires constructing people as subjects of a place, both in the imagination *and* in the physical sense, as racial and ethnic identities are often tied to geographic locations and nation-states. Hall cites Laclau (1990) in arguing that “the constitution of a social identity is an act of power” and goes on to explain the “suturing” that occurs with identity, as subjects are hailed into the discursive, but are also directly invested in the positions by articulating identities (p 6).

Melanie’s statements were contradictory, because she could not “stay away from race” despite all of her efforts. Race was visibly marked on Melanie’s body at all times, and thus race structured her everyday interactions. Attempting to ignore race seemed to be more about gaining distance from historical racism as a way of belonging to the happy multicultural nation. This was also an attempt to clear her conscious of any discussion on responsibility towards other groups of colour.

If Hall and Laclau's assertion is true, articulating identity into a category such as "mixed race" speaks to the way power operates, interpolating people (subjects) into positions of privilege and penalty. The idea that recognition from the state (Canada) as "legitimate"⁵ citizens has been a way for some immigrants to, as Louise Tam says, 'survive' racist and colonial violence; but it does not resist the violence or seek to dismantle the structures that uphold it (Chaterjee, Mucina & Tam, 2010). If anything, "the consequences for pan-Asian solidarity and for community building across racialized minority and diasporic communities are profound. In particular, foreign-nationals who already have limited juridical and tenuous socio-cultural relationships to the White-dominant nation-state will become disregarded even further." (Coloma 2013, p 594).

It is important to remember that these discourses connecting multiraciality to multiculturalism are part of a larger national project, and a larger colonial project that requires us to *actively* erase a longer history. As Mona Oikawa (2012) suggests, this history does not merely belong to people of colour, it belongs to all Canadians because it is the nation itself that creates and reproduces racism. Forgetting is "actively produced [because]... Remembering and forgetting are collective processes" (2012, p xiii). We have to remember that Melanie's coping mechanism of not engaging with race or attempting to diminish its importance is an *active* response and a learned choice. It requires people to acknowledge that something doesn't

⁵ I put the word legitimate in quotations, because I don't ascribe to the belief that all undocumented migrants are illegal and should be deported. I also question "legitimacy" with the understanding that the legal system is a colonial and neo-colonial structure that continues to uphold hetero-patriarchy and privilege white supremacy.

matter, or that it no longer matters. Celebratory narratives of mixed race work to provide a “fleshy confirmation that racial equality has arrived” (Elam 2011, p 9), erasing longer histories of settler colonial violence that still structure the everyday realities for communities of colour.

“Multiracial” Multicultural- Settler Colonial Distractions

With the exception of Mahtani (2014), most studies on hybridity have also lacked an analysis of how the mixed race subject might “support neoliberal conceptions of the state, thereby excluding other racialized bodies, particularly black and Indigenous bodies” (p 95). This is bolstered by an increasing number of Canadian media narratives proposing that Canadians are beginning to live in a “post-racial era” because of the presence of mixed race people. For example, *The Globe and Mail* hypothesized that the increase in mixed race marriages was evidence that, “multiculturalism is working in Canada because mixed unions—and biracial children—break down barriers on perhaps the most personal of levels” (Mahoney, April 2010). As Nyong’o tells us, “the impossibly burdened figure of the biracial child cannot conceivably do the work of utopia that we repeatedly impose upon her” (2009, p 174-5).

Although the mixed race body is read as a “rhetorical emblem of successful integration” (Ibrahim 2007, p 155), McNeil urges us to think about the ways in which conversations about mixing and post-racialism are used to “delegitimize expressions of black anger in the American public sphere” (2012, p 7). Because she

was non-black, light-skinned, and middle to upper class, Melanie was not subjected to police brutality, housing discrimination, or violent hate crimes. However, as anti-racist scholars and community organizers, we have to ask what the place of the non-black multiracial figure plays in political movements like Black Lives Matters? What does it mean for anti-black racism to be absent from Melanie's interview?

Participants like Melanie, by choosing to ignore race or asking why it mattered did not have "a broader outlook on race", but reproduced "a color-blind ideology that slights the continued salience of race and racism" (Makalani 2001, p 94). By aligning herself with multicultural, but distinctively "Canadian" values, Melanie ignored the "more distressing images of racism occurring as a social relationship of dominance and subordination, created by and engendering structural inequality" (Kobayashi 1993, p 22). Highlighting Melanie's statement about being "just like any other Canadian" is not about laying blame, but to draw attention to the way that historical amnesia (Razack 2002) is *actively produced* in order to relegate colonialism to an event of the past rather than a structure (Wolfe 2006, p 388).

I also highlight Melanie's statement in order to pay attention to the connections between obsession with "hybridity" and discourses of multiculturalism that overstate the power of ambivalence. As Ang (2001) cautions us, ambivalence "does not overturn the binary opposition between the (white) self and the (non-white) other" (p 147). Because the ambivalence is imposed, it becomes "a space in

which minority subjects are both discursively confined and symbolically embraced. Ambivalence is not only a source of power, but also a trap, a predicament” (p 147).

Ang goes on to explain how the Asian operates as a function of nationalist desire because of the way in which Asian “hybrids” are read as “westernized, highly educated professional... a presentable and articulate Asian whose presence is arguable of economic and social benefit to the nation” (p 148). Melanie very much embodied this figure when she named academia as a comfortable place because people there “could care less about race”, forgetting the way that institutions are always implicated in reproducing systems of domination. Andrea Smith’s words (2012) are relevant here, because they remind us that “[t]he consequence of not developing a critical apparatus for intersecting all the logics of white supremacy, including settler colonialism, is that it prevents us from imagining an alternative to the racial state” (p 75).

Limit Points and Limited Utility: Multiracial Families and Anti-blackness

Though some of the mixed race women I interviewed were able to critique whiteness, colonialism and to recognize anti-black racism to varying degrees, there were clear instances when these were all ignored. While I focused on the idea of family and home as an epistemological space for mixed race women to learn subjugated knowledges, I also draw attention to the ways in which the family was a space in which racial hierarchies were reproduced. The majority of multiracial studies have focused on negotiating space have not deeply engaged with the way

that anti-blackness is ignored and/or reproduced in multiracial families. As Jared Sexton argues, the focus on self-identification and “passing” in multiracial studies has produced a “misleading comfort” in which individuals have avoided “an engagement with struggles of racial inequality for those who are, in society’s eyes, ‘all black, all the time’” (p. 76, 78). Cheng writes,

While much critical energy has been directed toward deconstructing categories such as gender and race, less attention has been given to the ways in which individuals and communities remain invested in maintaining such categories, even when such identities prove to be prohibitive or debilitating. The rhetoric of progress or cure can produce its own blind spots (p 7).

All of the participants were interested in talking about race and antiracism in the interview space, but each of them had limits in where they were willing to engage and with whom they were not willing to engage. All of the participants had family members who expressed sentiments of color-blindness and/or anti-blackness and these sentiments were often excused or acknowledged, but left unchallenged.

Melanie told me that in high school, she did not have many black friends, but that she liked to hang out with other mixed race people because “they had something in common with each other”. She then added that she had dated a few people who were also mixed, but that “we don’t normally tend to say what we are. My current boyfriend, for example? We didn’t know what our races were until *much* later... because it didn’t matter”. Melanie then went on to explain that she had had conversations with her parents about inter-racial dating, emphasizing to them that

there would always be compromise because their children would always already be mixed. It's interesting that Melanie had this conversation with her parents, while not naming her father's discomfort with black communities as anti-black racism, or seeking to change it. Instead, racism was coded as "fear" or "discomfort". Melanie excused her father, saying he was not used to being around Black people because he grew up in India, yet she did not mention her father's discomfort around white people or other non-black people of colour.

Audrey's family also expressed anti-black politics in regard to inter-racial dating. Audrey claimed that she could "never bring home a black man", and when she chose to date a black man, she made sure her parents did not hear about it. This behavior echoes the critique Jared Sexton (2008) makes that claiming "mixed race" continues to free individuals from the constraints of being identified with racial blackness (p 6). This is often because multiracialism also renders the discourse of race as a matter of personal identity, despite the politicization and development of historical consciousness (p 7). Audrey's coping mechanism echoed that of one of Ruth Frankenberg's participants, who attempted to "protect" everyone by keeping her black partner, but keeping him a secret. Frankenberg raises the important question, "who was being protected, and from what?" and concludes that instances like this are examples of "protecting her parents from feeling the effects of their own prejudice" (p 109).

Kamini also admitted that her family was “prejudiced against black people” and that shadism was an issue amongst some of her family members. Despite their sense of pride in identifying as Tamil, Kamini always felt bad for her cousin who was constantly told that she wasn’t as pretty as her sisters or that she “looked rough” because her skin was much darker than the rest of her families. Although she did not speak up with her family, Kamini was interested in subverting hierarchies of race, gender and sexuality in online communities. Kamini excitedly told me about the Tumblr group she participated in, where she and a few friends would have fan-casting projects in which queer, racialized and disabled folks were re-cast as leading characters in popular films. Although she had difficulty challenging her parents’ anti-blackness, her activism in online spaces is an important step to acknowledge because it opens questions on how communities can imagine and create images that do not reproduced racialized tropes and narratives of white saviors and white desirability.

Although Diana’s non-black family members adopted a color-blind set of politics and avoided discussing race with her as grew up, she was able to work towards a more critical, antiracist politics, as evidenced by her participation in Black liberation movements like *Black Lives Matter*. Despite her participation in these movements, Diana said, “I’ve hit the point in my life where I refuse to discuss racial issues with my mother’s [non-black] side of the family... it’s too tiring and it takes too much to invest into”. The key difference between Diana and my other

participants was that Diana chose when to engage and when not to, but did not deny the fact that her family had problematic views.

Racial politics in Zahra's family was particularly interesting for two main reasons. Firstly, we discussed interracial dating across generations. Second was the fact Zahra's family was full of racial mixing between non-white communities. Zahra's family showed that not all people of colour hope to gain proximity to whiteness through marriage. If anything, some of Zahra's family members hoped to *distance* themselves from whiteness. For example, Zahra's Chinese grandmother was especially pleased to find out she was dating a Chinese boy. When asked why, Zahra said "she sees it as me dating within my race". When asked how she knew that, Zahra explained that "my other cousin is dating a Trinidadian Indian boy, and she *loves* him and he's great! Amanda⁶ is dating Gord, a white guy. She's not okay with him", dispelling some of the myths the media proliferates about "good mixes".

Frankenberg (1993) emphasized that although she "heard more tales of rejection by white families than by families of colour", the "more important question is whether opposition from a family of color should be viewed as exactly mirroring that from white families, or whether each should be set within different, but linked trajectories." When families of colour prefer their children to date and marry within their race, this is not so much a concern about racial hierarchy, but a historically based belief that views whites as colonizers and/or oppressors. Frankenberg also

⁶ Aliases used to protect the identity of my participant and her family members

explains that keeping relationships within communities of colour is a way to emphasize the value of their culture group (p 272).

In Zahra's case, her grandmother seemed to love the Trinidadian Indian boyfriend as much as the Chinese one, and it was whiteness that made her uncomfortable with her other grandchild's partner. This should not be surprising given the long history of "women's sexual abuse by white men and the unresolved tensions this creates. Traditionally, freedom ... meant freedom *from* white men, not the freedom to choose white men as lovers and friends." (Hill Collins 1990, p 191).

Despite her maternal grandmother explicitly stating a preference for her grandchildren not to date white men, Zahra's paternal grandfather was explicit in his anti-blackness towards Zahra's mother. Zahra's parents were high school sweethearts, and when their relationship started getting more serious, Zahra's grandfather told Zahra's father that he "probably shouldn't be hanging out with girls like that". When I asked Zahra what she thought that meant, she was quick to say "Black girls... Black girls who wear short skirts". Zahra's father did not accept the comments, and Zahra's grandfather was fine over time. What was interesting to me was that earlier on, Zahra said she did not see examples of anti-blackness in her family or community. This speaks to the way that the policing of blackness and more specifically black sexuality is both normalized and disconnected from broader structures of racism. Ranier Spencer's critique (2011) is relevant here in thinking about the limit points of our politics. Although some of the mixed race women were

interested in working towards a more critical set of politics, “racial ambiguity, in and of itself, is no guarantee of political progressiveness [or] racial destabilization” (p3).

Conclusion

Although my sample size was small, there are some salient points to take away from the stories I shared. If scholars in mixed race studies really want our work to be “critical”, we must be careful not to “romanticize the colonial histories that produce hybrid subjects” (Mahtani 2014, p 244). Although participants did not always understand it as such, their views were often connected to historical tensions surrounding race, gender and colonialism. I explore this in depth in Chapter 1, where I found that all participants experienced various forms of racism and eviction from the nation because they were labeled based on their skin colour. “Mixed-ness” shifted for all of participants and was not always something that was easy to articulate. I also found that some participants use the mixed race label as a way to deny blackness. This should not be surprising, given that participants will often reproduce the popular discourse that gives multiraciality social capital- that of being an ambassador or bridge between racial groups (Spencer 2011; McNeil 2012).

In Chapter 2, I extended my analysis to look at the way that mixed race is an identity that is hard to sustain because race is understood differently based on the space. I examined how participants negotiated white spaces very differently than in communities of colour, performing whiteness in particular instances, while choosing to resist in others. Participants also performed their identity in communities of colour, where their sense of belonging was articulated through things like language and knowledge of cultural practices. Lastly, I looked at how race was understood through multiple axes of identity such as disability gender, and sexuality. Although

the family was often a good space to learn about race, I also found that families and communities of colour were often spaces where participants were uncomfortable with their disability or queerness.

My last chapter focused on discourses of “hybridity” and how they affected the everyday lives of my participants. I concluded that hybridity was a sexualized discourse that contributed to the fetishization of multiraciality. I highlighted the limits of its utility because it has not protected women from racialized, sexualized forms of violence. I also found that while some non-white multiracial families did not want their children dating white partners, others reproduced anti-blackness or shadism in their dating preferences for their children.

It was important for me to draw attention to the way that mixed race people and families, who experience racial privilege in relation to other groups (Mahtani 2014, p 427) can reproduce racial hierarchies that are anti-black and anti-Indigenous. As the responses of some of my participants showed, scholars need to take a closer look at how multiracial groups can perpetuate racial inequality. Though some of my participants thought of themselves as people who were invested in antiracism, the absence of thought about Indigenous nations and decolonization, or their silence in the face of anti-black racism spoke to some of the existing tensions that need to be addressed in our communities and in scholarship. These findings call into question the utility of studies that focus on the everyday

resistance that mixed race people exhibit when they negotiate space. Pointing out these ongoing tensions with Antiracism forces us to think about whether claiming mixed race as an identity is a “race to innocence” (Fellows and Razack 1998) when passing and negotiating space does little to challenge the interconnected forms of systemic oppression.

By ignoring the relationship between anti-blackness, Indigeneity, and the celebration of multiraciality in scholarship, we risk reproducing the epistemological violence that colonialism encourages (Makalani 2001). As Mahtani (2014) urges us, “it is worthwhile remembering that we need to not only decolonize mixed race but also denationalize mixed race” (p 254). Indigenous people are required to disappear for the nation to justify the possession of land (Smith 2012, p 69), and in the Canadian context, this occurs in two main ways. The first is through miscegenation and racist, colonial policies that police Indigeneity in Canada. The second is by relegating Indigenous people to figures of the past, and focusing on the “mixed race”, multicultural futures where “the mixed racial figure now represents post-integration discourses” (Ibrahim 2007, p 156).

By tracing the histories of my participants, I practiced an “active attentiveness to a racial past” (Ibrahim 2005, p 171). People talked about their understanding of race and racial relations through stories, sharing pertinent memories, many of which were uncomfortable or even painful. This painful knowledge might “produce critical understanding of how violence, as a relation of

force and harm, is directed towards some bodies and not others” (Ahmed 2012, p 216). The interview created a time and space to reflect and make meaning of how geographies and histories of race have shaped who we are, our relation to one another, and how we interact with the world. I took instruction from Cheng, who writes that it might be “useful to ask what it means for social, political, and subjective beings to grieve” (p 7). In the end, our task as mixed race scholars and communities to ensure our theory and praxis does not advance our position at the expense of another group in the margins. My hope is that my questions served as openings for my participants to continue unearthing buried geographies and histories of colonization that have informed how we think about who we are in the present, and who we want to be in the future.

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