Transnational Modernity/Coloniality: Linking Punjab's Canal Colonies, Migration, and Settler Colonialism for Critical Solidarities in Canada

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ABSTRACT   *This paper offers a transnational analytical framework to inform contemporary anti-racist solidarity building in what is now called Canada by engaging with migration, colonialism, and indigeneity. In particular, I trace the historical entanglements of modernity/coloniality from the British Empire's Canal Colonies project in Punjab to colonial policies in what is now called British Columbia while centring land and Indigenous sovereignty.*

KEYWORDS   Indigeneity; coloniality; British Columbia; Punjab; migration; solidarity

In May 2017, a public dialogue organized by the Indian Summer Festival took place between Indigenous and diasporic South Asian historians, elders, and scholars on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səl̓ilwətaʔɬ təməxʷ (Tsleil-Waututh), and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Nations, upon which Vancouver, British Columbia is settled, in an effort to "support solidarity between South Asian and Indigenous communities through the arts" (Indian Summer Festival, 2017). That year, organizers of the festival introduced a new programming stream based on the Punjabi word *taike* (pronounced tha-A-kay), which "was used when First Nations and South Asian men worked and lived together at lumber mills. It means 'father's elder brother.' [Organizers hoped] to highlight and reinvigorate this special and shared sense of community and kinship between these communities" (Indian Summer Festival, 2019). In personal conversations with the two South Asian panelists from the inaugural *Taike* programming, I learned that this word was used by early Punjabi settlers to refer to Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, upon which Canada is settled and created, with its etymology specifically rooted in the constructed settler

colonial space and intracultural circumstances of British Columbia. However, I also learned that it was eventually reimagined with pejorative connotations, complicating the clear notions of respect and kinship that likely informed its origins.

The intentions for this paper are in some ways aligned with the festival's *Taike* programming: to understand the nuances of settler colonialism, migration, and complicity, and to forge new and critical paths of kinship informed by shared and interwoven colonial histories of oppression and power. Central in the following analysis is the land upon which these conversations of solidarity and reimagining relations, and others like it, have begun to take place.

Although scholarship engaging with South Asian and especially Punjabi migration to Canada is substantial, few scholars situate their analysis in British colonial policies relating to land and water in Punjab in order to understand the out-migration of Punjabis into polities of the British Empire, including British Columbia, as a function of modernity/coloniality. This paper offers a transnational framework on colonialism and indigeneity by drawing on these two contexts following the British annexation of Punjab in 1849. I position the British Empire's Canal Colonies project in Punjab as a point of focus in order to trace the entanglements of policies in Punjab under British rule to those in British Columbia concerning land and settlement impacting Indigenous communities under settler colonialism.

Within contemporary discussions of settler colonialism and social and environmental justice, analysis is often limited to histories and points of entry centering white European settlers and Indigenous communities. These discussions should be broadened beyond the white settler/Indigenous binary by re-engaging with early migration histories of settler communities of colour to Canada, and by expanding the frame of analysis beyond colonial state-imposed territorial borders and temporally restrictive articulations of settler colonialism that often situate these events "in the past" or confine them to specific geographies (i.e., within South Asia or Canada). Understanding the ways in which the retelling of Punjabi migration stories can silence and erase Indigenous histories that have existed since before this migration began is critical to cultivating a renewed sense of kinship and solidarity. Dhamoon (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014, p. 19), states,

> People of colour are... structurally implicated in dispossession, whether that's our choice or not. So it posits that... issues of Indigenous land are not separate from 'my' issues if I care about racism, sexism, and I must think about the ways they are related to settler colonialism.

Corntassel (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 20) offers the following reflective response on solidarity:

> There is a different sense of Indigenous place-based and living histories that should be understood by folks proposing to act in solidarity. If someone is just

simply saying 'I'm Canadian, and I don't know my history,' how useful is that to deepening solidarity? Maybe that forgetfulness... is also sort of convenient. You haven't done the hard work to uncover your role, or your family's role in, whether it's direct colonial actions or just settling here.

I put this project forward with care and humility, taking direction from work by Indigenous scholars and activists to avoid perpetuating the erasure of Indigenous communities' experiences on Turtle Island and exercising a move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012) for myself or on behalf of Punjabi settlers to this land. To be clear, while I refer to and engage with interlocked colonial histories of oppression and dynamics of power between the Punjabi diaspora and Indigenous communities in British Columbia, this should not be understood as an argument that looks to debate or question the oppressive structure of settler colonialism in which Punjabi settlers came to participate in the early 1900s, albeit indirectly, or that the British colonial/imperial history in Punjab can somehow be equated and compared to the colonization of Indigenous peoples and ongoing settler colonialism in Canada. Instead, my analysis seeks to interrogate the ways in which these histories and experiences became connected through changing relationships to land and territory for Punjabis as a result of British legacies of modernity/coloniality in the Punjab region as well as their complicity in settler colonialism through their eventual settlement on Turtle Island. Understanding these broad global entanglements with increased nuance provides an entry point for future critical analyses on Punjabi and Indigenous social and environmental justice solidarities within the settler colonial context of Canada. Therefore, this paper engages with historical policies of colonialism/imperialism in Punjab under British rule and their connection to the out-migration of Punjabis to British Columbia in the early 1900s, and draws upon and centres Indigenous experiences regarding environmental justice and settler colonialism, while critiquing normative colonial systems of knowledge that extend transnationally.

Modernity/Coloniality

While originally theorized in analyzing the history of colonialism of Latin America, the concept of modernity/coloniality (Casas, 2014; Grosfoguel, 2012; Maldonado-Torres, 1997; Mignolo, 2009; Quijano, 2000, 2007) offers a distinctive framework to understand transnational relationships among land, race, epistemic violence, and power in global Empire. Therefore, it can be effectively applied to an analysis of the British legacy of colonialism/imperialism that connected colonial ambitions in Punjab with the settler colonial project in what is now called Canada. Using this framework, I also briefly engage with the significance of caste in the transnational relationship between the Punjab region and British Columbia. Coloniality can be understood as the "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a

result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism" (Maldonado-Torres, 1997, p. 243).

Modernity is articulated as the celebration and propagation of European Enlightenment-era thinking and its specific traditions, social norms, and technological advancements (Mignolo, 2011, p. 2). The Enlightenment period saw the European "creation of a new framework of ideas about man, society, and nature, which challenged existing conceptions rooted in a traditional world-view... which was sustained by the Church's authority and its monopoly over the information media of the time" (Hamilton, 1996, p. 24). Furthermore, according to Hamilton (1996, p. 37),

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

This notion of humanity's power over nature through enlightened reason, or science, offers insight into the connection between progress and modernity, as well as between modernity and environmentally exploitative policies in European colonialism/imperialism. As European modes of social life derived from the Enlightenment period became increasingly normalized, attaining the raw material supply to fuel these social norms, such as tea, sugar or cotton, spurred European colonial/imperial pursuits to sustain them. Colonial missions by the British Empire to discover new trade routes and land on which to produce sugar and tobacco, for example, facilitated the power and global network of the British Empire (Mignolo, 2011, p. 318).

Modernity/coloniality is not temporally or geographically contained, but rather operates as a "web of Empire" (Ballantyne, 2012), undergoing reconfigurations in response to anti-colonial resistance and counter-hegemonic pressure in order to be sustained. Coloniality and its enduring power structures are reinforced through developmental policies in the name of progress as "the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality are… two sides of the same coin" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 318), where one cannot exist without the other. The historical legacy of British imperialism in India has been documented in scholarship and widely captured in the orientalist gaze of popular culture, often eliciting imagery of the spice and silk trade, sugar, tea, opium, and perhaps to a less romanticized degree, indentured labour for other polities of the Empire, including the Americas. Locating the origins of modernity/coloniality within the era of European Enlightenment unveils its connection to the emergence of "a new type of economy (capitalism) and the

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

In this way, western-centric knowledge is weaponized to entrench hierarchies of power that are constantly reconfigured and sustained, including the persisting normalization of a subject-object dualism in which human beings are rendered superior over other living and non-living things in our natural world. By extension, this dualism drives a wedge between Humanity and Nature (Acker, Kaltmeier & Tittor, 2016, p. 7) in order to deliberately separate those who were considered human beings according to European worldviews (i.e., White, Christian men) from Nature: "the 'subject' is a bearer of 'reason,' while the 'object,' is not only external to it, but different nature. In fact, it is 'nature'" (Quijano, 2007, p. 172). The notion that this rational and self-aware subjectivity was intrinsically European would become vital to colonizing powers during the conquest of Turtle Island as it was thought to be necessary in advancing humanity towards civility by means of industrial projects of modernity.

The exclusivity of rational thought became equated with the exclusivity of civility, an understanding that justified the colonization of Indigenous people around the world, including in what came to be known as Canada and India. Thus, European culture, its practices, religion, and worldview were established as a norm through colonizing the bodies and epistemologies of non-European societies: "from an Aboriginal perspective... academic, religious, and governmental Eurocentrism has made itself the default position of what counts as being legitimate knowledge and practice, dismissing or marginalizing 'other'ed epistemologies, bodies, stories, and practices" (Haluza-DeLay, O'Riley, Cole, & Agyeman, 2009, p. 4). Through this logic, Nature and non-white bodies are conflated and become synonymous with the uncivilized and pre-modern, and both become objects to serve the productive and dominant capitalist-based world system; the capitalist paradigm is the means by which this aspirational modernity is achieved. It is through this nexus of global modernity, and upon this base of epistemic violence and expendability of racialized labour, that the links between Punjab and British Columbia emerge.

Moving towards more critical solidarity, one that centres settler colonialism and takes into account the position and histories of Punjabis in Canada, a wide but focused transnational analytical frame is required, as the British Empire and its

> far flung jurisdictions, including the Dominions (Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa), colonies (Hong Kong and India), and territories (the Straits Settlements) were not discrete or separate polities but were integrated through a coordinated network of railways and steamships that joined land to sea. (Mawani, 2018, p. 8)

Furthermore, migration channels to British Columbia that had opened for Punjabi migrant labourers in the early 1900s were developed through these

modes of modernity and in response to policies of inclusion and exclusion in other parts of the British Empire (Puri, 1993, p. 15). Thus, critically engaging with migration and settler colonialism requires examining relations of power originating through global mechanisms of colonial Empire that normalized western-centric knowledge, including the alienation of human beings from their land under the guise of developmental progress.

Working through the inextricable links between modernity and coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p. 318) is a necessary step in understanding how through coloniality, normalized western-centric knowledge has facilitated the ideological separation of human beings from what is commonly referred to as "Nature" or "the environment." This has allowed for an enclosure of the commons through, for example, the development and promotion of large scale agricultural farming, exploitative resource extraction, and the privatization of land. In Punjab, this occurred through the Canal Colonies project, an extensive network of perennial agricultural irrigation that transformed the Punjab region into "one of the major centres of commercialised agriculture in South Asia" (Ali, 1987, p. 3), and the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, under which British mandated social reforms constructed and deeply entrenched an interlocked triad of caste, land ownership, and militarization within Punjab (Ali, 1987, p. 4). This large scale shift towards development discourse and modernity under British rule linked Punjab, migration and capitalism to British Columbia, through the British military. From this historical point of analysis, we can trace the displacement and migration of Punjabis to British Columbia as an expendable labour force to further the Empire's settler colonial aspirations for a colonized Canada. In effect, the canal colonies project was one of modernity/coloniality, the construction of which worked to de-link Punjab from its territory, land, and people and absorb it as an extended space of the global "webs of Empire" (Ballantyne, 2012).

Modernity/Coloniality in Punjab

Punjab's modernity/coloniality legacy and absorption into the global nexus of Empire began under British imperial rule following its annexation in 1849, by which time the settler colonial project on Turtle Island had already been well underway. Punjab, translating to the "land of five rivers," has and continues to have a deep-rooted connection to its territorial water and soil through agriculture, making it a critical area of conquest for British imperialists. Today, the pre-colonial territory of Punjab and its rivers remain divided between Pakistan and India following multiple movements for independence and the violence of the Indian Partition in 1947. During British rule, the relationship between Punjabis and their land and water was drastically reformed. These changes also extended into a reconstruction of the Punjabi social ladder by reinforcing and recreating caste identity, particularly that of

the Jat Sikh, which would become a critical element in the migration history of Punjabis to British Columbia.

Prior to annexing Punjab, the British "had found an immense variety of structures of social relationships and adaptations to the land" (Gilmartin, 2003a, p. 5060) that were at odds with their colonial imperatives. The canal colonization project and its policies are arguably the most significant aspect of the British imperial legacy that began to uproot Punjab's people from their land. Talbot (2007, p. 9) emphasizes the importance of the canal colonization policies and "the development of a system of colonial law in the Punjab [as] the conflicting pulls of the region's strategic importance and the tying in of its agricultural economy into the world market." In effect, the webs of Empire were extended to connect the Punjab region, its reimagined territorial borders under colonial rule, and emerging pool of labour with other established polities of the British Empire through the movement of goods and labour. These policies are a part of what Imran Ali (1987, p. 3) calls the "agricultural colonization in the Punjab," which would serve as the primary catalyst for displacement and subsequent waves of migration of Punjabis out of the region in search of new opportunities, eventually bringing them to the territories of the Coast Salish people in what came to be known as British Columbia, embedding them within the settler colonial project already taking place on Turtle Island.

The cornerstone of this agricultural colonization was the Canal Colonies project, a massive irrigation system to institute perennial agriculture with longer growing seasons and increased production (Ali, 1987, p. 8), which began in 1885 and quickly led to Punjab being "regarded as India's model agricultural province" for British colonizers (Talbot, 2007, p. 3). The massive project "was seen as the colonial state's greatest achievement" (Talbot, 2007, p. 7) through a lens of western modernity. However, the Canal Colonies project resulted in the epistemic foundational shift that brought a future of environmental, social, and economic devastation to Punjab that would be reconfigured through subsequent cycles of the same developmental logics of modernity/coloniality following Indian Partition in 1947, during the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and into contemporary contexts of environmental and social justice related issues.

The Canal Colonies project encapsulated western-centric ideas of modernity and sought to exploit the region's supply of water, land, and bodies to meet the imperial vision of the Empire. This feat of ambitious engineering would result in the "transformation of six million acres of desert into one of the richest agricultural regions in Asia" (Talbot, 2007, p. 7), and entailed

> …the construction of a network of canals that took off from the rivers, with branches and distributaries spread over the flat, alluvial plains of the western Punjab. The canals were laid out primarily on uncultivated land, which was but sparsely inhabited by a semi-nomadic population. (Ali, 1987, p. 8)

The development of these colonies was to ensure "canal irrigation was extended to regions where settled agriculture was not yet the established mode of livelihood" (Agnihotri, 1996, p. 38) in a reimagining of land/human relations in the region.

This was in line with the colonial logic of disrupting pre-existing cultural norms in order to advance the goals of conquest and modernity through the separation of Nature and Humanity, "a basic epistemological operation of coloniality" (Acker et al., 2016, p. 9). As Talbot (2007, p. 7) states, the Punjab Canal Colonies project

> was an attempt to remake both the natural environment and its people. Nowhere were the ideals of the modern rational state better epitomised than in the neatly laid squares of land in the canal colony villages, and the eight bazaars in the new market town of Lyallpur radiating out from the central clock tower, 'a telling symbol of middle-class regularity.'[1]

European temporalities "imposed an epistemic shift ... through the regimentation of British calendars and its Greenwich-based clock; the reconfigurations of timekeeping demanded by new technologies – such as railways and irrigation systems" (Mooney, 2013, p. 280). Similar to the European colonization of Turtle Island and its Indigenous communities, temporal hierarchies were established, positioning specific social groups of Punjabis at different proximities to the "colonial present" during the early periods of the colonial reimagining of Punjab (Mooney, 2013, p. 280). Thus, the effects of the Canal Colonies project were far greater than simply the expansion of irrigation for agriculture and would permanently alter the cultural and social structure of Punjab, with global reverberations.

Coloniality in Punjab actively worked to reimagine its land, water, and people through the newly constructed spaces of the Canal Colonies, an attempt to rewrite existing stories of place in the language of western-centric normative knowledge as a force of epistemic violence. Punjab's water played a significant role in this process. As Gilmartin (2003a, p. 5057) reflects,

> Colonial water engineering in the Punjab grew out of emerging 19th century European ideas about the relationship between science and political economy more broadly. These ideas defined Punjab's river waters as a 'resource,' open to increasing state control for purposes of productive 'use' and 'development.'

Engineers constructing the Canal Colonies in Punjab operated through a western scientific doctrine "defined by a common struggle for production against a wasteful nature" (Gilmartin, 2003a, p. 5059), where the term "waste" was attributed to water that went unharnessed for agricultural production. Thus, "the language of opposition between engineering science and natural 'waste' paralleled the dominant language of market efficiency

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[1] The embedded quotation is from Gilmartin (2003b).

shaping late 19th century ideas of political economy and economic man" (Gilmartin, 2003a, p. 5059). British policies in the Punjab operated with the specific purpose of "cultural and intellectual colonization, via epistemologies of difference and superiority, which embedded Indian communities allochronically and differentially within the corpus of modern historicity and thus time" (Mooney, 2013, p. 279).

The exertion of power over Punjabis, then, was dependent upon control over knowledge and the utility of the region's water and land, where "increasing state control over water – and thus over the land – defined new frameworks for the exercise of control over the local 'communities' comprising Indus basin society" (Gilmartin, 2003a, p. 5057). As one British colonial official stated in his accounts,

> A tribe in the chains of its own customs, unrelaxed and unrefined, may stand still for centuries, but a tribe recognised and lifted into the system of British administration … has, in the guardianship of the governing body, the best possible chance of disguising savagery and learning the wisdom of civilised men. (Talbot, 2007, p. 9)

The means by which this ascent to civility would be effectively realized, according to the British, was through European articulations of modernity. Thus,

> The raj commissioned and depended on the production and implementation of... colonial forms of knowledge and representation [that] were paradigmatic exercises in power... written within a project that sought to characterize India as in a state of "arrested development"... that required British intervention. (Mooney, 2013, p. 279)

Narratives of rendering non-White bodies as uncivilized and savage are consistent with European discourses and processes of modernity/coloniality that were also applied to the colonization of Turtle Island. The positioning of Punjabis along an evolutionary continuum relative to British conceptions of modernity and civility not only facilitated British efforts to redefine the ways in which local communities interacted with their land and water, but also included the entrenchment of caste identity to these new environmental formations.

Efforts to permanently establish colonies on the land between the newly formed network of canals, or *doabs*, were supported by introducing land granting schemes and proprietary status in order to promote migration from more densely populated areas of Punjab (Ali, 1987, p. 13). However, the distribution of *doabi* land was strategic and divisive, and would not only serve the colonial imperial aspirations of the Empire, but also legally entrench existing social caste distinctions, exacerbate social differences, and completely transform land/human relations. In effect, British policies of modernity/coloniality in the Punjab looked to aggressively institutionalize the

environmental formations of private property (Dempsey, Gould, & Sundberg, 2011) and colonial capitalism.

The allotment of much of the canal colony land was deliberately tied to wide scale military recruitment for the British Indian Army that heavily favoured Jats (predominantly Sikhs), a caste in Punjab that the British sought to socially position and legally entrench as superior to others and that could be relied upon for continued political and military loyalty (Ali, 1987, p. 5). As Mooney (2013, p. 280) explains,

> Caste distinctions were categorized, quantified, administered and imposed to preserve and extend imperialism through the well-known tactic of divide and rule and religious categories were joined to caste and similarly reconfigured and fixed in tactics of colonial domination.

Therefore, the colonial project in Punjab not only involved an exacerbation and entrenchment of existing social class distinctions, but also included the reformation of land relations through western-centric notions of modernity that wove together private property ownership, military expansion, and agricultural development.

Through accounts by British ethnographers and colonial administrative officers, Jat Sikhs came to be celebrated "as both a martial race and a caste of yeoman agriculturalists" (Mooney, 2013, p. 278). Malcolm Darling (1925), who was Assistant Commissioner of Punjab, provides an account that captures the epitomization of the Jat Sikh:

> The Jat... is the very marrow and soul of the peasantry. [Jats] have a tenacity of character and a skill in farming which make[s] them the best cultivators in India… It would be difficult in any country to find a more remarkable combination of cultivator, colonist, emigrant and soldier. Educated and organized, and relieved of the handicaps imposed upon him by custom and debt, he might well become the foundation of a new rural civilization in the Punjab. (p. 38)

However, these imagined colonial identities of Punjabis, particularly the idealized Jat Sikh, were constructed "through the Orientalist imperial gaze, which denied contemporaneous modernity to colonial subjects" (Mooney, 2013, p. 278) and co-opted pre-existing knowledge and histories in the region and reconfigured them to serve British imperial interests of modernity, specifically through military expansion and agricultural development.

This construction would serve British "interests through an essentialist and masculinist view of the men of particular communities, not races nor necessarily castes or religions but ethnic groups ... as being especially suited to military recruitment by virtue of their bravery, fortitude and heroism" (Mooney, 2013, p. 281), giving rise to a what Talbot (2007, p. 4) describes as the "Punjabifisation of the Indian Army from the 1870s onwards." Thus, the British resettlement project of Punjabis into the newly created Canal Colonies following annexation intimately embedded the imperial facets of militarism

and revenue extraction through agriculture within a deliberate effort to target and appeal to the Jat Sikh colonial subject.

Over time, the Canal Colonies became fundamentally linked to western-centric modernity/coloniality through both agriculture and the military. The emerging caste, military, and private property ownership triad would play a role in the eventual migration and settlement of Punjabis to British Columbia. Furthermore, "as Punjabi agriculture was commoditized and both prosperity and debt exacerbated... the military provided an important means of financial recourse to struggling families, as did the burgeoning opportunities of the Punjabi diaspora" (Mooney, 2013, p. 283). The growth of the Punjabi diaspora in the Pacific Northwest and the community's strong presence in its emerging forestry industry would solidify the transnational reciprocal relationship between the British colonial project in Punjab and the settler colonial project in Canada, specifically in British Columbia.

Punjabi Migration, Settler Colonialism, and Modernity/Coloniality on Turtle Island

The out-migration of Punjabis into the diaspora, particularly to British Columbia, during the early twentieth century developed from the processes of modernity/coloniality that alienated Punjabis from their land through colonial subjectivities, opening new channels of migration and opportunity: "the extension of railways in the twentieth century was meant primarily to forge linkages for the export and import of foods for trade, though these lines promoted passenger traffic as well" (Grewal, 2013, p. 45). This led to the establishment of regular channels of migration to Coast Salish territory, facilitated through the British modernity/coloniality project that tied Punjab and its reformed economy to other polities of the Empire. For example, by "1906, the shipping agents of the Canadian Pacific Railways in Calcutta city were playing a role in attracting emigrants towards Canada" (Verma, 2002, p. 103).

These migration channels for students, tourists, former military officers and labourers emerged for Punjabi migrants to Canada, the first of which arrived in 1904, to work primarily in British Columbia's forestry industry and to a lesser extent its fishing industry (Jagpal, 1994, p. 19). As gold mining in the province began its decline, natural resource industrialization in British Columbia, specifically with the forestry and fishing industries, began to grow, coinciding with the development of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Nayar, 2012, p. 11). This particular transnational connection of predominantly farmers impacted by British imperial policies in Punjab migrating to Coast Salish territory was significant, and became entrenched to a point where "Punjabi settlement patterns reflected the changes in [British Columbia's] forestry industry" (Nayar, 2012, p. 28), and in early and mid

twentieth century Canada, "lumber labour had become associated with ethnicity" (Nayar, 2012, p. 28).

Racialized migrant labour was utilized for constructing the Canadian Pacific Railway as well as in the logging industry that produced its materials. The railway helped develop a sense of Canadian national identity through the symbolic and material unification and amalgamation of territory and resources appropriated from Indigenous communities. Its construction and employment of racialized migrant labour was dependent upon clearing land of its Indigenous inhabitants who were subjected to purposeful and planned starvation by the Canadian state in the name of modernity (Maynard, 2017, p. 32). Also, the railway served as a conduit for market capitalism through the natural resource exploitative economy that had begun to take shape in Canada. British Columbia's industrialization, the marketization of Indigenous land, and the use of exploitable racialized labour from the British colonies to work on nation-building projects of modernity such as the Canadian Pacific Railway (Puri, 1993, p. 21), illustrate the dense entanglement of settler colonialism with global processes of modernity/coloniality.

The structural nature of settler colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5), which continues to operate within broader processes of modernity/coloniality, connects the British colonial project in Punjab and the arrival of Punjabis to Coast Salish territory. However, settler colonialism is itself

> different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain… Within settler colonialism, the most important concern is land/water/air/subterranean earth. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, 5)

While some of these dynamics of power can also be identified in different contexts of colonialism, such as that which took place in Punjab**,**

> settler colonialism operates through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony … [and] the horizons of the settler colonial nation-state are total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5)

Obtaining Indigenous land has been the cornerstone of the Canadian nation-building project, an imperative facilitated through the normalization of private property ownership over pre-colonial Indigenous relations to land. Tuck and McKenzie (2015, p. 64) articulate,

> through the process and structuring of settler colonialism, land is remade into property, and human relationships to land are redefined/reduced to the relationship of owner to his property. When land is recast as property, place becomes exchangeable, saleable, and steal-able. The most important aim of

recasting land as property is to make it ahistorical in order to hack away the narratives that invoke prior claims and thus reaffirm the myth of terra nullius.

Western-centric private property land ownership regimes were

a key site through which First Nations peoples were racialized as uncivilized and inferior due to their apparent lack of this particular land management regime…The institutionalization of private property rights in Canada, therefore, was a crucial mechanism in colonial projects of whitening both space and subjects. (Dempsey et al., 2011, p. 240).

Thus, the colonization of Indigenous territory, knowledge, and bodies included the stratification of a social, racial, and epistemic hierarchy that reinforced notions of European superiority. This was done by aligning Indigenous bodies and their epistemologies with Nature and narratives of being uncivilized, which were echoed, albeit with different consequences and relations of power, in the colonization of Punjab in the late 1800s. In Punjab, "recording of rights in land, periodic settlements of land revenue, and extension of agriculture through canals" (Grewal, 2013, p. 47) represented the foundational planks of an imperial policy that was consistent with an "external colonialism" as described by Tuck and Yang (2012), in which an administrative colonial dynamic of power operates to construct aspects of what is called Nature into natural resources to be exploited for the benefit of the colonizer: "bodies and earth for war, bodies and earth for chattel" (p. 4).

Interconnected relations of colonial power tied Punjab and British Columbia together in the global nexus of modernity/coloniality and space-making, particularly through British Columbia's forestry industry. Racialized labour from British colonized Punjab helped to further European epistemologies normalizing the separation of Humanity and Nature and the utilization of this Nature for development. The emergence of British Columbia's forestry industry coincided with the intensification of "annexation and reterritorialization of lands occupied by First Nations" (Black, 2017, p. 24), whereby white settlers were able to privately acquire forested land. As Black (2017, p. 25) explains,

these early land policies of the British Crown, based on distinctly English conceptualizations of property laws and land ownership, enabled colonial administrators to unilaterally transfer land rights and all their attendant advantages to private bodies through… Crown grants and pre-emptions.

Consistent with British developmental policies in Punjab, epistemic violence was apparent in British Columbia which devalued Indigenous conceptualizations of land/human relationships and relied on the premise of *terra nullius* to continue Indigenous land dispossession. According to Coulthard (2014, p. 12), "Canadian state-formation and colonial-capitalist development required first and foremost *land*," which served as a precursor to the entrenchment of the forestry industry and settler colonial structure in

British Columbia. Punjabis settling in British Columbia in the early 1900s largely found economic opportunities in a forestry industry that had surged under new licensing policies and foreign speculation (Black, 2017, p. 30).

These changes to land policies and land/human relations were a component of the structure of settler colonialism highlighted earlier by Tuck and Yang (2012), which also included residential schools, the reserve system, and restricted movement for Indigenous communities. This structure would also eventually rely on the settlement of racialized bodies for cheap and exploitable labour, including Punjabis in the forestry industry, linking the settler colonial project to other polities of the British Empire. It is within this specific context of settler colonialism that Punjabis would find themselves simultaneously encountering their own experiences of inclusion and exclusion, while in their own fight to belong also contributing to the erasure of Turtle Island's Indigenous communities.

Mawani (2012, p. 372) traces the extension of colonial hierarchies across the Pacific and their use by passengers aboard the *Komagata Maru* to challenge the discriminatory continuous passage legislation and disembark onto Coast Salish territory, thereby "making claims to their own racial superiority and their readiness to join the Imperial polity." Mawani (2012, p. 380) states that those aboard the ship,

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

The legal challenge undertaken to allow passengers aboard the ship to disembark undermined Indigenous sovereignty, played into colonial racial hierarchies, and reinforced the western-centric epistemological foundation of the colonial settler state. Examining these legal proceedings, Dua (1999) traces the ways in which race and its connection to subjecthood and citizenship became intertwined with white settler formations of the nation-state as a direct result of Chinese, Japanese, and Indian presence in British Columbia. Furthermore, lawyers for the passengers argued that Punjabi migrants were "'not of the Asiatic race' but of the Ayran one, and thus, the order-in-council that excluded Asiatics did not apply… [and] 'that the Hindus [sic] are of the Caucasian race, akin to the English'" (Mawani, 2012, p. 386).

This narrative, however, reached beyond the specific context of the *Komagata Maru*. It invoked internalized racial hierarchies and aspirations to whiteness embedded within and implemented through the global nexus of modernity/coloniality (Quijano, 2007, p. 169) which, in the context of British colonialism/imperialism in India and Turtle Island, would position migrants from British India, specifically the Punjabi Jat Sikh, as superior to racialized others, namely native Africans in British South Africa and Indigenous communities of Turtle Island (Mawani, 2012, p. 394). As Mawani (2012, p.

395) explains, "during his time in South Africa, [Mahatma] Gandhi gestured repeatedly and strategically to the putative racial superiority of Indians over Africans" by utilizing the colonial and western-centric trope of the industriousness and hardworking Indian while positioning native Africans as lazy and uncivilized, feeding into western-centric narratives of measuring humanity through capitalist productivity. Thus, belonging among Indian migrants within the spatial bounds of the British Empire, including Punjabis travelling to British Columbia, became contingent on a likeness to whiteness and the internalization of western-centric epistemologies. Upadhyay (2019) reflects on how non-Indigenous and non-Black racialized communities, particularly South Asians, continue to benefit from Indigenous erasure in settler states through their labour and investments in whiteness, contributing to the making of model minorities (p. 156). The Canadian state ultimately ruled migrants from India to be inherently different and less civilized than white Europeans and unable to assimilate (Mawani, 2012, p. 388). Recalling the analysis regarding the construction of the Jat Sikh identity (Mooney, 2013), it becomes clear how normative constructions of the separation of Humanity and Nature as well as the spatial and temporal limits of civility worked in tandem to maintain and uphold the power structures of modernity/coloniality between different localities within the web of Empire such as Punjab and Turtle Island.

Conclusion

When the etymology of *taike* is broadened and traced back along the transnational web of Empire that led to Punjabi migration and settlement on Coast Salish territories, it reveals complexities for contemporary solidarity building efforts. In particular, it becomes necessary to engage, as I have tried to do in this article, with present-day positionalities and dynamics of power through a deeper historical analysis, one that considers how land, race, and caste relate to Punjabi migration to Canada. The analysis presented here takes place against a backdrop of persisting social and environmental injustice impacting Indigenous communities in what is now called Canada as well as the people of Punjab. The deep-rooted history of imperialism in the Punjab region explored above through the Canal Colonies project provided a foundation for the exploitative and environmentally destructive Green Revolution of the 1960 and 1970s, resulting in the water, farmer suicide, and agricultural crises gripping Punjab today. Within the Canadian context, "since European contact, Aboriginal peoples have been articulating environmental injustices in relation to loss of land, Aboriginal title, and devastation of their traditional territories and the life forms they support" (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 7). Indigenous communities across Canada continue to feel the impact of these injustices. Many reserves are still without access to safe drinking water (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p. 15; McGregor,

2012, p. 6) and toxic emissions and chemical runoff into local water systems from large-scale industrial projects continue to disproportionately impact Indigenous communities. Indigenous and non-Indigenous ally activists and scholars have noted the deliberate marginalization of Indigenous voices in calls to action and self-proclaimed solidarity as a means to ignore the ties between environmental justice and settler colonialism, and preserve "settler futurity" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 70).

As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 5) explain, "the disruption of Indigenous relationship to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence… [which] is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation." Policies of genocide inflicted upon Indigenous communities continue to sever human relationships to land through the modernity/coloniality apparatus so that "epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). By extension, if "Indigenous nationhood is seen as something of the past, the present becomes a site in which Indigenous peoples are reduced to small groups of racially and culturally defined and marginalized individuals drowning in a sea of settlers" (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 123), de-centering settler colonialism and perpetuating an erasure that stands to benefit settlers. As the transnational threads connecting Punjab and Canada persist through multi-generational migration and global capitalism, it has become increasingly urgent to broaden analytical perspectives to also consider displacement and migration, race, settler colonialism, and environmental justice if we are to reimagine effective solidarities of resistance.

However, solidarity is multi-layered and complex. Anti-racist and Indigenous scholars continue to grapple with questions surrounding the positionality of diasporic communities of colour in the context of settler colonialism, in solidarity movements, and within anti-racist theory. In particular, the politics of naming Punjabis arriving in British Columbia, themselves displaced by British colonialism/imperialism in India, as "settlers of colour" is reflected in broader ongoing conversations (Arvin, 2019; Byrd, 2019; Chatterjee, 2019; Dhamoon, 2015; Jafri, 2012; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Phung, 2011; Sehdev, 2011; Sharma & Wright, 2008/2009), adding more considerations when thinking about the role and positionality of peoples of colour within settler colonial structures. The use of "settlers of colour" in this analysis does not subordinate or render irrelevant the exploitation of Punjabi labourers in British Columbia's forestry industry, or the racism and discrimination they experienced from the Canadian state and white settlers. Instead, it allows for relationships to land to be centred in critical solidarity building, particularly Indigenous land rights and sovereignty. Analyzing race, caste, and indigeneity in the context of South Asians working in the Alberta tar sands, Upadhyay (2019, p. 164) notes "it is necessary to unsettle the logics of similarities and commonalities between differently racialized and colonized communities" in order to move away from what Byrd (2019, p.

208) calls "slippages inherent in identity politics, positionality, and the ranking of oppressions that have us collapsing distinctions for expediency within the necessities of rapid mobilization." Upadhyay (2019, p. 165) goes on to suggest that "to dismantle varying cacophonies of power, intersectional, transnational, and decolonial analyses are required to see the intertwined processes of violences." For example, in line with this trajectory, future work may apply the transnational frame of analysis developed here to engage with the formation of the anti-colonial Ghadar movement in the Pacific Northwest, its connection to colonial land policies in Punjab, and calls to end global Empire (Tirmizey, 2018, p. 136). What may be required is a framework that expands the scope of analysis transnationally and historically beyond the events of settler arrival to explore global linkages of modernity/coloniality, so that solidarities – while differently aligned – are understood as interwoven and rooted in anti-colonial struggle.

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