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Sexual Racism and the Limits of Justice: A Case Study of Intimacy and Violence in the
Imperial Valley, 1910-1925

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Stevie R. Ruiz

Committee in charge:

Professor Natalia Molina, Chair
Professor Roberto Alvarez
Professor Nayan Shah

2010

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2010

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Sexual Racism and the Limits of Justice: A Case Study of Intimacy and Violence in the
Imperial Valley, 1910-1925

by

Stevie R. Ruiz

Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2010

Professor Natalia Molina, Chair

This thesis analyzes early twentieth newspaper coverage following six murder and assault trials involving Punjabis, Mexicans and Black migrants in the Imperial Valley. Because this thesis is a comparative ethnic studies project, I argue the multiracial lives Punjabis created with Mexicans were classified in relationship to the public disavowal of sex between Blacks and Whites. Using these trials, I examine how race was understood under sexual terms in the courts and how sexuality was classified according to racial difference. These court testimonies and newspapers provide alternative narratives to consider the multiracial solidarities Mexicans, Blacks and Punjabis created with one another in order to dissent against immigration detainment, police enforcement and the criminalization of their sexual lives.

Introduction

Moral panic in early twentieth century Southern California concerning inter-racial sex, immigration and White male labor competition emerged out of a moment when nearly thirty percent of the state's male migrant population was Chinese, South Asian, Mexican, and Black.¹ Interactions and movement between Mexican, Black, and South Asian male workers living in close spatial proximity to Whites generated a host of public concerns over predatory brute masculinity seducing virtuous White women.² By 1910, the California legislature had already passed anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting Whites from engaging in "illicit" sex with Asians and Blacks. Amid growing sexual and racial tensions, newspapers such as *Imperial Valley Press* and *San Diego Union* published sensational stories in El Centro and San Diego warning of the dangers of abnormal sexual practices, such as sodomy, polygamy and rape, as well as erratic violent behavior among Black, Sikh, and Mexican men living in ranch houses nearby. In U.S.-Mexico border spaces, such as Imperial Valley and San Diego, scandalous acts of violence were reported by newspapers characterizing migrant men as hyper-masculine "brutes" committing aggressive sexual acts against young White girls and Mexican wives. Newspaper representations of violent, if not illicit, sexual behavior among migrant males entered into the repertoire of predatory masculinity that was concurrently being debated among social critics, White labor unions and state legislators.

¹ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15.

² South Asian male immigrants discussed in this chapter were Punjabis from India. Primarily Sikh migrants who came from the province called Punjab in India, South Asian male immigrants discussed in this paper were referred to by press coverage and trials as Hindus. See Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 25.

Between the years 1910-1925, press coverage following murder and assault trials involving Punjabi and Mexican migrant workers in the Imperial Valley reported fatal incidents of assault committed by Sikhs against Mexican wives. Central to this thesis, I analyze court trials in the Imperial Valley, analyzing how press coverage and courts worked to classify Sikh migrants in relationship to the disavowal of Black masculinity. On February 26, 1919, for example, Rullia Singh was found guilty of murdering his son-in-law, another Sikh male named Albert Joe, at the footsteps of his daughter's El Centro milk house after the victim prevented Mrs. Rullia Singh's return home.³ The scandal fueled public questions about domestic abuse and inter-familial violence within Punjabi-Mexican domesticities. During his three-month trial at the El Centro Superior Courthouse, press coverage described Singh to be a "deranged lunatic" representing the pathological instincts of the Hindu race. Descriptions of Singh mirrored emerging representations of Black men by mainstream press coverage warning of the possibilities of White women's rape. Singh's story illustrates, like many of the trials explored in this thesis, how fatal events between neighbors, family and friends entered into a larger public debate of how to classify migrant men, homosociality and inter-racial sex to be public liability. Migrant masculinities in Imperial Valley courts were constituted in racial and sexual terms. Certainly in the space of the courtroom, racism was sexed and sexuality was raced.

This thesis, then, is an effort to disrupt categories of racial and sexual difference created within spaces of trial courtrooms and newspaper coverage in the Imperial Valley working to classify Sikh men in relationship to popular representations of Black men in

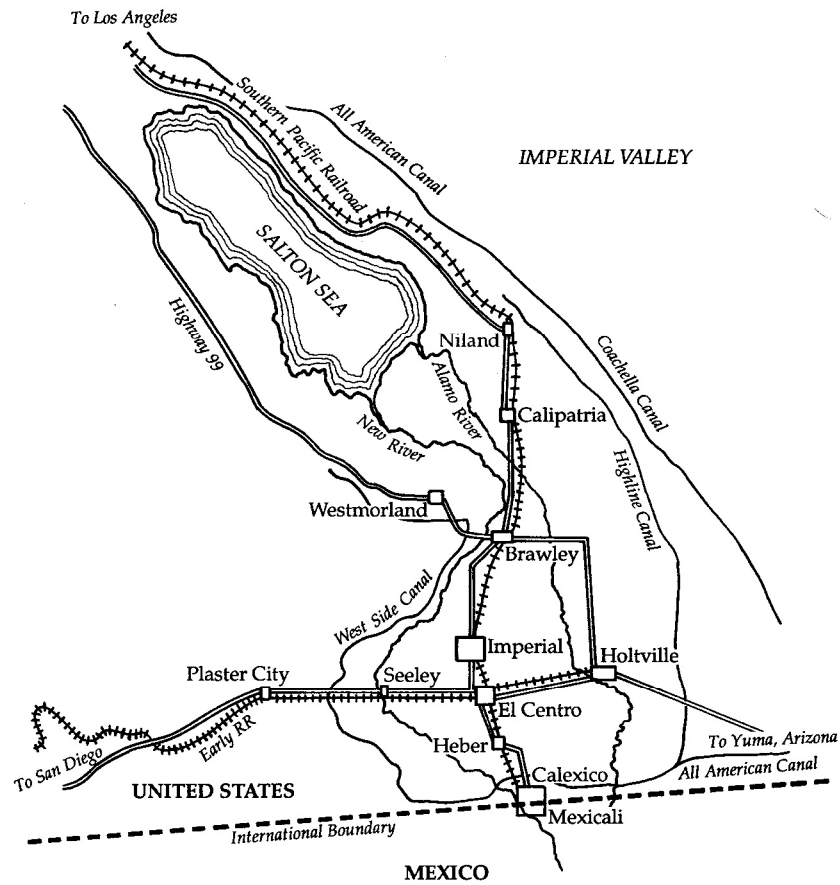
³ *People v. Rullia Singh*, Case No. 773, 25 (1919), Records of the Imperial County Court.

the 1910s and 1920s. My argument is that trials and sensational news representations of mixed-race sexual violence in border towns, such as the Imperial Valley, served as models of the potential risks White women faced if they engaged in illicit sexual relationships with Punjabi and Black men. Efforts made by the courts to prohibit interracial sex in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century happened at two levels (1) through the police enforcement of anti-miscegenation laws in states such as California and (2) the use of scare tactics circulated by media to discourage mixed race co-habitation. Because the focus of this thesis is concerned with how moral panics circulated, I concentrate my research questions on the racial anxieties created by salacious press coverage.

Using murder and assault trials involving Punjabi and Mexican defendants, I trace (1) how early twentieth century courts and mainstream press coverage from 1910-1925 in Imperial Valley worked in tandem to categorize Mexican and Punjabi migrants to be sexually immoral and (2) how migrants created multiracial solidarities to dissent against police enforcement. For primary research questions, I ask: (1) How did criminal trials and newspapers from 1910-1925 in the Imperial Valley work to create social panics classifying Punjabi and Mexican migrants as violent, immoral and perverse in relationship to historical representations of Black masculinity in the West? (2) How did the multiracial lives Punjabis created with Blacks and Mexicans allow for the possibility to counter police enforcement?

Placing the Imperial Valley

East of San Diego on Highway 8, Imperial Valley appears to be an isolated, desolate and arid area of the country. Certainly, Imperial County's desert charm and



Map 3. Imperial Valley. Source: Adapted from Adon Poli, *Land Ownership and Operating Tenure in Imperial Valley, California* (Berkeley: U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942), and recent road maps.

Figure 1.1: Imperial Valley towns represented by map.⁴

⁴ This map was first published in Karen Leonard's study on Punjabis in the Imperial Valley to illustrate the geographical location and spatial proximity of Imperial Valley towns to the border. Source: Adon Poli, *Land Ownerships and Operating Tenure in Imperial Valley, California* (Berkeley: U.S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942) in Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 39.

rural location seems a world apart from metropolitan San Diego because of its isolated geographical location outside the urban centers of so-called cosmopolitan life. Imperial Valley's geographic and historical significance is critical to the study of race, sexuality and the border region because of the unique mixing of people from Latin America, Asia and Europe. Stories of sexual liaisons and risky encounters between these racial groups help answer questions about how race was organized by courts and newspapers under sexual terms.

The particularities of where these dangerous liaisons took place between Punjabis, Whites, Mexicans and Chinese helps to contextualize why courts were so interested in classifying transient immigrants. Because agricultural industry was a lucrative part of the economy in 1910, immigrants from India, Western Europe, Mexico, China and Japan congregated in rural counties throughout California, especially the Imperial Valley. At this time, Imperial Valley consisted of five towns named Calexico, Calapatria, Brawley, Holtville and El Centro (see map 1). By 1920, 500 Punjabi males lived in El Centro, adding to the already growing number of Chinese (1,300), Japanese (1,986), Blacks (1,648) and Mexicans (6,414), totaling the Valley at nearly 20,000 people.⁵ Karen Leonard, who conducted the first study about Punjabis in the Imperial Valley, suggests racial hostility was targeted against Mexican, Punjabi, Chinese and Japanese immigrants during this time. Brawley and El Centro were particularly well known for discrimination against Punjabis in restaurants, bars and boarding houses. In the town of El Centro, for example, the outskirts of the town were areas to be where the Mexicans, "Hindus," and

⁵ Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 38.

Blacks lived. Brawley was considered to have one of the most nefarious sections of the town, where transient migrants frequented saloons, drank and solicited sex.

Because agriculture was lucrative, Imperial Valley's relationship to San Diego and towns like Mexicali along the U.S.-Mexico border became increasingly important as it began to provide food for larger cities. Towns such as El Centro, Brawley and Calexico were of particular importance in their dealings with Mexicali residents in cotton industries to make textiles. However, transient migrants working in fields in towns like Brawley, El Centro and Calexico were frequent visitors to Mexicali's nightlife, including bars and saloons. These cross border and cross-racial relationships shared by Punjabi and Mexican male workers meant their sociability wasn't limited to the confines of their towns. Because towns such as Brawley were known for its segregation practices, Mexicali might have provided certain possibilities for Punjabi men to socialize with others. The spatial proximity of these border towns meant there was a considerable amount of mixing between Chinese, Mexicans, Blacks, Punjabis and Whites in rural towns, despite its distance from cosmopolitan city life. Still, El Centro was a bustling area of Southern California attracting migrants to its agricultural economy who were willing to perform hard labor for low wages.

Imperial Valley's unique spatial proximity to Mexican border towns such as Mexicali suggests there were a variety of economic and social interactions between Punjabis and other immigrants. Punjabi men, who were physically dark skinned men wearing turbans, were noticeably different from other brown skinned immigrants, including Mexicans. Leonard suggests in her study, the religious and cultural exoticism concerning Punjabi men and their physical appearance were indicators they were

foreigners to the area. Concerns that Punjabi men were acquiring considerable land in 1918 led to over-hyped claims that “Hindus” were staging an invasion along the border. Press coverage claimed many of these men benefited from agricultural proprietary investments after saving their earnings from working in the fields.⁶ White hysteria concerning how much land Punjabis in the Valley quickly became a sensationalized issue, particularly when the 1917 Immigration Law banned Punjabis from entering the country. Land appropriation was evidence to support claims that “Hindu men” were an imminent threat to White society.

Literature Review

This thesis bridges conversations between ethnic studies and emerging conversations in queer studies concerning the topic of intimacy. Scholars who’ve written on homosociality and queer intimacies in rural, urban and imprisoned spaces, such as Regina Kunzel’s *Criminal Intimacy*, Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* and Nayan Shah’s article, “Between ‘Oriental Depravity’ and ‘Natural Degenerates’: Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans,” have raised critical questions about how inter-racial homosocial spaces, such as ranch houses, were targeted by police to be sites of suspicion and illicit sexual behavior in the early twentieth century.⁷ Existing literature focuses questions on how kinships and intimacies among Mexicans, Chinese and Punjabi transient males disrupted White heteronormative logic about family. Many of

⁶ Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California’s Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 38.

⁷ Ferguson, Roderick. *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 4; Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 10; Nayan Shah, “Between Oriental Depravity and Natural Degenerates: Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans,” *American Quarterly* 57 (2005), 704.

these men living in boarding houses created intimate relationships with one another, sometimes sexual, considered perverted and illicit behavior. Because this thesis is dedicated to analyzing how media represented domestic violence disputes between transient migrants, the focus of my project is to interrogate how sexual immorality is organized according to representations of Black and South Asian men as violent. The reason I study representations of violence in the 1910s is to demonstrate how violence was interconnected to the prevention of interracial comingling. Even though fears of inter-racial violence were collapsed with ideas about inter-racial sex by White labor unions, social critics and legislators, the media represented these dangerous liaisons as potentially risky behavior Whites should avoid for safety reasons.⁸

Queer of Color Critique: Domesticity, Sexual Racism and Moral Panics

The space of non-heteronormative domesticities where immigrants lived in during the early twentieth century were spaces of mystery and intrigue for mainstream America. As Roderick Ferguson in *Aberrations in Black* writes how African-American families received considerable attention by the state and social scientists to understand why black and immigrant communities were mal-adjusted from the rest of American society.⁹ Ferguson argues African-American family structures disrupted White heteronormative understandings of nuclear family models that threatened White social order. Criminal black bodies were sites for sociologists to map moral decay in the United States during the 1920s. African-American families were primary targets for sociological study at the turn of the twentieth century lasting into the 1960s. Sexual racism, as Ferguson suggests

⁸ Mary Tin Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.

⁹ Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 10.

sexual racism was the process by which racial subjects were categorized as sexually different by virtue of their familial structures, kinships and gender non-conformity that was counter to White heteronormativity. Building on Ferguson's critique of White heteronormative domesticities, I examine how newspapers and the state created racial hysteria concerning the living arrangements of non-White migrant workers in Imperial Valley. Mixed-raced Punjabi-Mexican families, and homosocial, mostly male, migrant housing disrupted White heteronormative family structures because immigrants created domicile kinships outside the boundaries of what was considered normal. Normative behavior was associated with heterosexual coupling, racial purity and monogamy in the domestic space.

Nayan Shah writes about queer domesticity in San Francisco's Chinatown. Shah suggests Chinese female prostitution, Chinese bachelor societies and unconventional living arrangements for children produced racial and medical anxieties about Chinese immigrants during the 19th century in San Francisco.¹⁰ Anxieties over sexually associated diseases like syphilis and leprosy mapped Chinatown as a space of moral disorder. Medical practitioners and social critics considered Chinese immigrants as disruptive to the moral standards of White American society. Male dominated societies with a lack of mother figures destabilized normative understandings about respectable domesticity.¹¹ Criminalized sexual behavior among Chinese women further marginalized the Chinese community as sexually perverted. Shah uses medical reports and photographic booklets to examine how state officials and the public considered Chinese society as a racial

¹⁰ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 78.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 76.

perversion. In relation to Pérez's use of queer analytics, Shah's article works within the margins to understand how Chinese folks created non-heteronormative kinships and sexual relationships with one another and White folks. Chinese immigrants created living arrangements with prostitutes, children and unwed men that didn't fit neatly within White heteronormative domestic and racial practices, and as such, they were criminalized as dysfunctional. In this project, I build on Shah and Ferguson's historicizing of non-heteronormative domesticities by examining queer domesticities from a relational approach in Imperial Valley. Many of the trials examined in this thesis involve Punjabis, Whites and Mexican immigrants to gain an understanding about how queerness in the borderlands was mapped onto non-White migrant communities. I use murder trials as an interlude into thinking about how queer intimacies, as perverted as they may be, can be useful when disrupting the narrative of pathology. For example, this thesis is an effort to capture what immigrants testifying in front of a jury have to say about their own associations and intimacies in their everyday lives. What paradoxes does this create for historians who use legal archives that have already been categorized as criminal?

I then complicate Shah and Ferguson's historicizing of Chinese and Black non-heteronormative domesticities by examining queer domesticities from a relational approach. Claire Jean Kim's concept of racial triangulation has been useful to examine how racial subject formation was produced in relation to Asian immigrant's differentiation to whiteness and blackness.¹² To borrow from Kim's racial triangulation theory, I analyze how Punjabis and Mexicans were sexualized in relationship to Black-White taxonomies in the West. I argue early twentieth century courts and press coverage

¹² Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27 (1999), 115.

involving assault between Punjabis, Mexicans, Blacks and Whites were spaces where sexual/racial difference was created in relation to Black subjectivity.

Shah suggests policing public and semi-public intimacies with anti-miscegenation, sodomy and rape laws were ways the state crystallized, and yet transformed, categories of sexual difference in the early twentieth century.¹³ In his articles concerning perverted intimacies between Punjabi, Mexican and White migrants in Northern California and along the U.S.-Mexico border during the early part of the twentieth century, Shah suggests immigrants' everyday public and semi-public intimacies have historically been adjudicated by the state. For Shah, mixed-race intimacies and homosocial, primarily male, domesticities were mapped as perverted and considered "out of place" according to White heteronormative family structures in rural spaces. Queer intimacies were kinships created between men, women and children that countered categories of normality in rural locales as Whites, Punjabis and Mexican migrants shared common space and built relationships with one another. Queerness disrupted categories of normativity created by the liberal state to surveillance and police immigrant domesticities. Shah's critique is useful when considering how the state and newspapers created racial anxieties over intimate violence between Punjabi and Mexican migrants in the borderlands. I consider how immigrant intimacies were pathologized within domestic spaces, arguing a re-reading of court transcripts can be useful to examine how immigrants publicly testified about their associations and kinships. Even though Punjabis and Mexicans were pathologized, migrants created meaningful relationships with Whites and

¹³ Nayan Shah, "Adjudicating Intimacies on U.S. Frontiers" In *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 124.

one another in their everyday lives. Kinships created by transient migrant workers in the Imperial Valley were complex, messy and sometimes forced upon them. This thesis is an effort to examine the lexicon of social relationships defendants created with other transients in order to understand why they made certain choices. Respectably, transient workers were forced to entrust one another because their survival depended on the formation of bonds.

Inter-racial Intimacies in Border Studies

The history of sexuality, violence and race in the border spaces between Punjabi, Mexican, Black and White transient migrants has been relatively absent from studies about sexuality on the border. Anthropologist Karen Leonard has written about violence and inter-racial marriages between Punjabi men and Mexican women in the Imperial Valley.¹⁴ Because Leonard's research was the first study to examine Punjabi mixed race marriages, her work is a critical foundation to my project. One of Leonard's more critical contributions to the study of race in the Imperial Valley was her analysis of the Pakhar Singh murder trial. In 1925, Singh- a Sikh immigrant- was found guilty of axing to death two White business partners Victor Sterling and John Hager during an altercation over his lettuce farm in El Centro.¹⁵ Leonard suggests the courts created conditions for racial hostilities against Punjabi immigrants in rural locales where they tended to work. Yet, she lacks a critique of how press coverage and court trials created racial anxieties against non-White migrants in Imperial Valley. For scholars interested in questions of criminality, race and perversity in the borderlands, Singh's murder case raises questions

¹⁴ Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ Karen Leonard, "The Pakhar Singh Murders: A Punjabi Response to California's Alien Land Law," *Amerasia Journal* 11, no. 1 (1984), 78.

about mixed-race intimacies, moral panic and non-normative domesticities, particularly since he was married to a Mexican immigrant and worked with Punjabis and Mexicans. In this thesis, I complicate Leonard's analysis of Singh's trial to analyze how the state and newspapers created moral panic targeted against Punjabi and Mexican immigrants in the borderlands.

Scholars researching criminality along the U.S.-Mexico border, including Pablo Vila's *Crossing Borders*, Oscar Martinez's *Border People* focus on the racialization of *Mexicano* and White border subjects on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border, primarily focusing on Tijuana-San Diego region.¹⁶ Policing in the borderlands, as Martinez and Vila suggests, occurs in a variety of places, including the most intimate spaces like homes, churches and places of employment working to pathologize migrant domesticities.¹⁷ Although Vila and Martinez's research is useful when considering how the state surveillances non-White domesticities in the borderlands, questions concerning how immigrants create kinships across racial, sexual and gendered lines remains absent from their analysis. The state, as I argue surveillances non-normative intimacies that are mapped as pathological and perverted. This thesis, then, considers how to rethink criminality across different racial, sexual and gendered categories in order to understand how race operates relationally. While I find it productive to examine larger structural violence committed against Mexican *fronterizos*, both structurally economic and "real" violence, I disrupt the category of border subjectivity raced as Mexican. Frontier spaces, such as Imperial Valley and San Diego, are spaces that attract a variety of migrants from

¹⁶ Oscar Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 10.

¹⁷ Pablo Vila. *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders : Social Categories, Metaphors, and Narrative Identities on the U.S.-Mexico Frontier*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 26.

across the globe for economic opportunities, including agricultural and industrial labor. Scholars who've expressed interests in their research about everyday kinships created among *Mexicanos* and border enforcement might be attentive to how intimacies were created crossing racial, class and gendered "borders." Crossing the racial and sexual frontiers in border studies will be a productive site to examine how pathology, criminality and race are intersected with ideologies about normative kinship and family structures.

Notable studies on gender, race and sexuality in border studies such as Gloria Anzaldúa's *The Borderlands/La Frontera*, have argued the borderlands are the literal boundaries and interstitial spaces occupied by queer, mestiza and mixed-race bodies disrupting normative, stable and fixed categories of race, national boundaries, and sexuality.¹⁸ Borrowed from Anzaldúa's concept of borderlands as the merky spaces where racial and queer subjects do not fit into one fixed category, this thesis engages with broader conceptual approaches about how racial categories *come to be* produced because transient immigrants' sexualities were considered immoral, outside the bounds of what is considered normal. Because the possibility of Punjabis marrying Whites created fears about inter-racial sex and bi-racial children, many of these transient immigrants could not be easily categorized. Instead, many of the suspicions organized about Punjabi immigrants were consistent with racial discriminatory practices used against Blacks and Mexicans in popular media.

¹⁸ Gloria Anzaldúa. *Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 21.

Queer scholar Emma Perez writes the borderlands are spaces where categories of racial and sexual difference have historically been criminalized through colonial processes of white heterosexism. For Pérez, “A white heteronormative imaginary has defined how researchers and historians as well as cultural critics have chosen to ignore or negate the populations who are on the margins, outside of normative behavior, outside of twentieth-century nuclear white heterosexual family systems. A decolonial queer gaze then, allows for different possibilities and interpretations of what exists in the gaps and silences but is often not seen or heard.”¹⁹ Having a queer sensibility means being attentive to intimacies that are dismissed as perverted, ugly and immoral in the borderlands. In this paper, I build on Pérez’s critique of a white heteronormative imaginary to examine the inter-racial kinships created across racial divides between Whites, South Asians, Chinese and Mexicans. To build on Pérez’s point on tracing histories of non-conformity and dissent, I argue the relationships transient migrants built with one another were considered to be nefarious relationships outside of what was considered to be normal. Men colluding with one another in ranch houses, Mexicans befriending Chinese border crossers, and Punjabis entrusting their Mexican workers raised considerable suspicion about the nature of these relationships.

On the Limits of Justice

Nayan Shah argues against the presumption that a society is governed by equal protection under the law when following due process.²⁰ Shah examines how sexual liaisons were criminalized between White men and Punjabi immigrants during the early

¹⁹ Emma Pérez, "Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard," *Frontiers* 2&3 (2003), 124.

²⁰ Shah, *Between "Oriental Depravity" and "Natural Degenerates": Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans*, 710-712.

twentieth century in northern California. White young men engaging in sexual intimacies with Punjabi male immigrants were labeled as degenerates, while simultaneously being categorized as victims. In this thesis, I build on Shah's critique of liberalism to analyze how victims and defendants are represented in court trials. Liberal democracies, such as the United States, often disguise themselves as serving the best interest of victims when prosecuting defendants. However, the state serves the best interest of alleged victims, working to classify who is "normal" and who is a "degenerate." Homosocial spaces and immigrant domesticities were mapped as suspicious where non-normative transient men gathered.²¹

The murder and rape trials used in this thesis categorize Punjabi and Mexican men as non-normative racial caricatures. Suspicion of their foreignness, homosocial, and mixed-raced spaces mapped Punjabi and Mexican men as outside the realm of normative male behavior in the United States. Legal records, as I argue, are one of the few moments immigrants make sense of their own intimacies, kinships and associations publicly in courtrooms. The paradox for cultural critics is finding histories of intimacy within a legal document that has already been historicized as criminal. Within these legal documents are insightful histories about how immigrants come to define their own relationships and associations. Suspicion created by the liberal state about abnormal sexual intimacies between South Asians and White males created social meaning about the need to police the public and semi-private spaces to categorize who was considered deviant or normal. One of the paradoxes of liberal ideology is normality is associated with freedom, consent and choice. Yet, making a choice to be "abnormal" associates folks with perversion.

²¹ Ibid, 712.

Anne Laura Stoler argues European colonial governance coincided with sexual management of intimacies between colonialists, colonized subjects and White women at the height of imperialist expansion.²² Anxieties over mixed-raced associations and the management of White women's relationships were efforts by colonial governments to create normative domesticities in colonies. In this project, I build on Stoler's critique to examine how courts used charges of domestic violence to classify Punjabi males. Charges made by the state were adjudicated with relational understandings about how to grapple with mixed-raced intimacies, homosexuality and fatal acts of violence between Punjabis, Mexicans and Whites in Imperial Valley.

Methodology

Data collected for this project was taken from the years 1910-1925, including court transcripts from Imperial Valley and San Diego, immigration files collected from INS record group 85 located at the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and newspaper articles from *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union/Tribune*, *Imperial Valley Press*, and *Holtville Tribune*. Out of the thirty murder and rape trials located at the Imperial Valley Courthouse and San Diego Historical Society, I examine six involving Punjabi, Black, Mexican, and White migrants during the years 1910-1925. I then critique how press coverage from the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union*, and *Imperial Valley Press* produced racial hysteria concerning perverse migrant men along the U.S.-Mexico border. I take my cue from cultural studies critic Stuart Hall who suggests popular culture works in tandem with the state to produce meaning about racial groups as

²² Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race, and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 67.

pathological/criminal.²³ Trial transcripts and newspapers are the public artifacts that not only represent historical “events,” but also as queer theorist Emma Pérez writes, *were ways of knowing* non-normative sexualities and racial bodies.²⁴ In this section, I explain 1) where I located primary sources 2) limitations of sources and 3) analytics I will use to read my findings.

Trial transcripts used in this project were found in legal archives located at the Imperial Valley Courthouse and San Diego Historical Society. During my visit to both sites, I located twenty homicide trials and ten rape/sodomy trials involving Black, Punjabi and Mexican migrants occurring between the years 1910-1925. I use trials to answer 1) how knowledge about racial groups is being classified and 2) how the state frames its role as benevolent protector of victims’ rights, while at the same time creating ideas migrant domesticities are dysfunctional. These trials will allow me to answer my main research question about the limitations of liberal governance, specifically, to examine what discourses trial lawyers, witnesses and judges used to mobilize ideas about race, gender and sexuality in the space of the courtroom. That said, I read trials *against the grain* to disrupt social meanings produced by the courts in early twentieth century that worked to criminalize Punjabis, Mexicans and Blacks.

The limitation of these transcripts is defendants and witnesses held little power over how their testimony was transcribed and the possibility that the accused might (sometimes members of their family) faced imprisonment, or imminent death by the state. I will be attentive to reading against the grain so I can “trace the gaps/silences” where

²³ Stuart Hall, "Popular Culture and the State" In *the Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 364.

²⁴ Emma Pérez, "Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard," *Frontiers* 2&3 (2003), 122-130.

migrants refrained from answering questions that would incriminate themselves or their friends.²⁵ Tracing moments of silence in court testimonies allows me to examine the complexity of migrant testimony in the space of the courtroom. Rather than exhaustively examining what is state in testimony, I'm interested in finding what's left unheard, unintelligible and untraceable. As I work within and against these legal archives, I use this as a site to consider what meaningful kinships and intimacies could ethnic studies scholars mine from legal archives. The paradox, for ethnic studies scholars, interested in histories of intimacy between Punjabis, Mexicans, Blacks and Whites is a limitation of sources because many of these men and women were illiterate, making it difficult to search for written records in their own words, such as diaries and letters from the early twentieth century. One of the few public records where migrants publicly testified about their everyday kinships and affinities was in the space of the courtroom.

As cultural geographer Steve Macek in *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right and Moral Panic Over the City* suggests newspapers create racial anxieties about the possibility that certain racial groups are more prone to commit rape and murder.²⁶ I argue the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Diego Union*, *Holtville Tribune* and *Imperial Valley Press* characterized migrants' sexuality as an impending sexual danger to White society. The limitation, however, of using mainstream newspapers is the lack of counter-representation from communities of color, such as the Black press, Spanish-speaking newspapers and social activists fighting against racial injustice. While mainstream

²⁵ Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 103.

²⁶ Steve Macek, *Urban Nightmares: The Media, The Right and The Moral Panic Over the City*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 25.

newspapers are useful to disrupt knowledge that is produced by popular media, there is a lack of narratives countering mainstream representations of criminality in this project.

Newspaper articles were found using secondary literature, online databases, and immigration files in record group 85 located at the National Archives. *Los Angeles Times* newspapers, for example, were located in *Proquest* online database where I focused searches on stories related to homicide, rape and fugitives. Newspapers were selected based on sexually perverse representations of African-Americans, Mexican and Punjabi immigrants in Imperial Valley and San Diego. The newspapers were useful because they demonstrated how press coverage created racial anxieties about non-normative migrants and African-Americans living along the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition to articles selected, I located advertisements covering issues related to sexual hysteria and violent crimes in the Imperial Valley.

Immigration files collected at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. were detainee files of illegal immigrants and smugglers. Newspaper clippings and magazine articles were found attached to correspondences between congressmen and White labor unions regarding the Hindu “threat.” Perhaps most striking is all newspaper clipping are from California newspapers and were referenced within the letters as proof of that South Asian immigrants were criminal, sexually perverse and required containment. The strength of the immigration files, newspapers and magazines is each of the materials, whether they are cultural products or state records, displayed how the state used newspapers to support racial profiling against Punjabis in the 1910s. During my research, I located twenty detainee files where migrants were asked to testify about whether they were thieves, polygamists, and whether they entered into the United States with the aid of

smugglers. I use these records to examine how immigrants publicly defended protect one another from possible incarceration, deportation and possible death from INS officials.

Objectives

In chapter one, I argue newspaper coverage of murder trials created knowledge to classify racial minorities to be immoral under sexual terms. Peggy Pascoe suggests in her study of anti-miscegenation law that when courts intervened in the late nineteenth century to allegedly “protect” White victims’ rights, judges were simultaneously invested in prohibiting inter-racial sex.²⁷ The contradiction, as I argue, is although courts fashioned themselves as benevolent protectors of victims’ rights in murder cases, judges, lawyers and witnesses were equally committed to classify defendants to be culturally and racially inferior because of nefarious sexual behavior. I take my cue from Stuart Hall’s assertion popular media and courts mobilize criminal representations about immigrants, Blacks and sexual minorities in order to create widespread panic.²⁸ Placing immigrant sexual intimacies under legal suspicion in court confirmed ideas transient men living in close proximity were an imminent danger to White women and youth. The possibility of sexual relations between transient migrant males and White women discursively linked migrant sexualities outside the bounds of morality. Risks of transient men living nearby intensified the possibility of inter-racial co-mingling, and dangers of inter-racial sex with White women and youth.

Taken from Claire Jean Kim’s concept of racial triangulation where she suggests Asian subjectivities are produced in relation to Black and White racial subject formation,

²⁷ Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

²⁸ Stuart Hall, "Popular Culture and the State" In *the Anthropology of the State: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 364.

I argue Punjabi criminal masculinities were constituted in relation to popular representation of Black criminality in murder trials and press coverage.²⁹ Similar representations of Black brute masculinity were used to describe Punjabi and Mexican men in the trials I explore in this thesis. The emergence of hyper-violent and hyper-sexual masculinities generated by the courts created social meaning about interracial sex and the potential risk of living in close spatial proximity to non-White men. Borrowing from Kim's work, I want to interrogate how race and sexual difference were part of an assemblage of categories that were used to discursively reorganize categories to classify sexual criminals.

My departure from focusing on criminality in chapter two is an analysis of the importance of using trials to narrate hidden histories of intimacy, friendship and rivalry. The paradox for historians is tracing histories of intimacy within legal archives already historicized as criminal by virtue of its documentation in murder and rape trials. Rather than tracing the mystery of "who did it" in each trial, I use legal testimonies to analyze the meaningful relationships migrants created with one another despite being criminalized. Despite court efforts to control ideas about sexual morality, court testimonies were one of the few public venues where illiterate Mexican, Punjabi and Chinese workers' testimonies were recorded. I am attentive to the multiple layers of power relations between court transcribers, archivists and historical interpretation potentially erasing what was said in courts. Still, this thesis is an attempt to examine how migrants exercised their autonomy both within the courtrooms by refraining to

²⁹ Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans," *Politics & Society* 27 (1999), 106.

answer prosecutorial questions, and in their everyday lives by forming bonds and associations in order to work against discriminatory laws.

In chapter two, I argue despite courts and newspapers efforts to criminalize migrant workers living in male homosocial spaces, migrants still created formative bonds and relationships with one another that weren't necessarily sexual. Instead, Mexican, Sikh and Chinese migrants created a host of proprietary relationships and kinships where migrants were willing to take legal risks for one another even though they were not blood related. Intimacy, commonly associated with erotic, sexual and "familial" relationships in the domestic sphere carried a broad range of associations for migrant workers living in ranch houses in Imperial Valley in the 1910s. Ann Laura Stoler's definition of intimacy as a set of broad relations, ranging from business relationships to sexual trysts is useful to argue the co-habitation and co-mingling created by Punjabi migrants with Mexican and White workers operated outside a normative understanding of intimacy that couldn't be classified under uniform categories such as sexual or private.³⁰ Rather, the personal intimacy people experienced went beyond sex. These non-sexual relationships can best be described as kinships, where people were able to create familial ties with one another, yet at the same time weren't intimately connected by blood or marriage. That said, I argue these intimacies can best be understood to be kinships transient workers created under difficult circumstances to avoid legal prosecution, detainment, and sometimes death. Because survival for transient men was dependent on building friendships with other folks who were equally discriminated, if not worst off under the law, to exercise

³⁰ Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," In *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 31.

some version of autonomy in their lives. Protection from discriminatory legal practices required the building of kinships and friendships.

Chapter One

Predatory Masculinity and Geographies of Sexual Encounter in the Imperial Valley

If race and sexuality in the 1910s were organized within a constellation of predatory violence, criminality, and vigilante justice, the play *The Clansmen*, then, exhibited White America's fears of Black male sexual violence in public space, and the potential instability inter-racial sex created for White domesticities. When the play visited Southern California in 1911, *The Clansmen* packed theatre houses in small towns lining along the coast, including San Diego. Reviews of the play by *Los Angeles Times* and *San Diego Tribune* celebrated the traveling melodrama as a major contribution to the performing arts for its "realistic" portrayal of White Southern life. Set in the American South after Reconstruction, *The Clansmen* was a cultural site where normative ideas about Black-White intimacies, or for that matter inter-racial sex, were registered as dangerous.

On stage, White male actors dressed in Black face performed rape scenes in public grass fields with White female co-stars. The fear White women, and thereby White families, were vulnerable to physical attacks made by Black predators in public space was a common theme in popular films, featured in *The Clansmen*'s crossover silent hit *Birth of a Nation*. In places such as San Diego where *The Clansmen* visited, however, taxonomies of racial pathology looked quite different for South Asian (Punjabi), Mexican and Chinese immigrants. What is less translatable from *The Clansmen* is how cultural sites, such as plays, newspapers, and legal trials, provided a vocabulary to sexualize other racial groups outside the Black-White binary in the American West.

I use this play as a caveat to consider how categories of racial difference *came to be* situated in relation to representations of Black masculinity in the 1910s. In chapter one, I analyze how press coverage of *The Clansmen* created questions about potential sexual threats in Southern California. Even though the play never visited the Imperial Valley, the media scandal surrounding the play created an opportunity for Whites to express their suspicion of transient migrants living in nearby quarters. For White residents, the play translated into a public venue to voice anxieties about White women's security, inter-racial sex and the dangers of co-mingling with transients.

Chapter one, then, is dedicated to understanding how moral panic over violence in Punjabi-Mexican families was represented by newspapers in three assault trials in the Imperial Valley between the years 1910-1925. Specifically, I analyze how inter-racial violence between Punjabi males, friends and their Mexican wives, was portrayed within the larger discussion of inter-racial sex and representations of South Asian male violence. Three areas of my concern are (1) how Orientalist discourses were mobilized to create panic in the Imperial Valley in relation to national fears about Black predatory masculinity (2) how White women's security was represented by newspapers, and (3) the limits of categorizing immigrant domesticities as private. I argue the *Imperial Valley Press*, *Holtville Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times* and the *San Francisco Call* gravitated towards sensational news stories representing South Asian males as sexually perverse and violent, some of the same concerns circulated in newspapers about Black men at this time. Because categories of racial difference are not produced in isolation to one another, I argue in order for Orientalist discourses to work, they had to be readjusted to echo

historical representations of sexual violence among Black men.³¹ Using testimony made by witnesses, prosecutors and judges in trials involving murder between Sikh men accused of murdering close friends and Mexican wives, I examine the space of immigrant domesticities placed under public suspicion. How might we situate Orientalist discourses representing Punjabis in relationship to historical representations of Black men as predators? What would the framing of private intimacies do to disrupt Black-White race relations circulated nationally during this time? What might public suspicions circulated in newspaper gossip suggest about the limits of privacy for immigrants in the West?

The theoretical move to translate the category of predatory masculinity from Black to South Asian is best modeled by earlier scholarship concerning relational racialization. Michael Omi and Howard Winant suggest race is a set of ideologies constructed in relationship to previous racial struggles over autonomy and freedom from oppression.³² Transient men living in the Imperial Valley had little power over how they came to be categorized publicly by the press, and in the context of the play by civic society. The foundational work of Postcolonial scholar Edward Said examining how the West pathologized the East to be decadent and effeminate seems almost contradictory to the hyper-convoluted representations of Black men. In order for racial anxieties about sexual violence to work in the Imperial Valley in relationship to South Asians, Orientalist discourses working to pathologize South Asians required the representation of hyper-

³¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant's concept of the historical racialization is a process of categorizing race emerging from previous historical struggles against White supremacy. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s-1980s*, (New York: Routledge), 57.

³² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s-1980s*, (New York: Routledge), 57.

violence, a successful strategy that was already useful to classify Black men.³³ Without collapsing blackness as an essential category to describe criminality, there is evidence from public discourses that the same concerns circulated in *The Clansmen* racialized other groups, such as South Asians in relationship to newspaper representations of Black masculinities.

The importance of newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Call*, *Holtville Tribune* and the *Imperial Valley Press* is the social meaning they create about murder and the work that goes into categorizing racial groups as sexual threats. Moral panic, as Stuart Hall suggests in his reading of policing the crisis argues newspapers work in tandem with the state to produce panics.³⁴ By way of Hall, I enter into conversation with moral panic studies to suggest that these newspapers not only represent how South Asian subjectivities looked in the early decades of the twentieth century. Instead, I'm interested in how these discourses produce ideas about how to categorize racial groups in relationship to other racial subjectivities. While the primary focus of this chapter is to examine how discourses related to moral panic and Black male subjectivity work in tandem with Punjabi male representations, I'm interested in how newspapers and courtrooms present their case to classify these intimacies as racially inferior.

Race, as I argue, was discursively organized in trial proceedings and newspapers in sexual terms. In this way, trials served as *sites of knowledge production* where discourses about queer sexual encounters, inter-racial intimacies and sexual violence in

³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 23.

³⁴ Stuart Hall, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order* (Hong Kong: MacMillan Education, 1978), 7.

migrant ranch houses were criminalized. What I see at stake is the management over immigrants' sexual freedom to be represented outside the bounds of Western morality. Within my analysis in this chapter, I offer a critique of liberal discourse, that is, the regime of power that discursively organizes state intervention as benevolent.³⁵ The paradox, as I suggest, is although courts mobilized categories around the discourse of "protecting the victims," trials did the "work" to criminalize Punjabi and Black male migrants by creating suspicion of their privacies as a form of policing.

Interracial sex playing out on stage in melodramas like *The Clansmen* suggested there were popular concerns that could give Whites in California the vocabulary to define race relations in the West. Immigration from Europe, Mexico, China and India created a flurry of concern over how to make sense of the variety of men and boys staying in California. By 1910, nearly twenty percent of the working male population was Chinese, with a growing South Asian males working in California industries such as laundry, agriculture and railroads. Where many of these migrant men spent their leisure time including boarding houses, bars and alleyways, police officials categorized as spaces of suspicion in towns such as Sacramento, Marysville, and the Imperial Valley.

In his notable research on sodomy trials during the early decades of the twentieth century involving South Asian men accused of soliciting sex with teenage White boys in automobiles, brothels and ranch houses, historian Nayan Shah argues sexual publics migrant males created with one another in brothels and saloons lacked the privacy

³⁵ Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy and Carnality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 89.

afforded to heterosexual couples.³⁶ For Shah, “in the early twentieth century it was impossible for migrant men to pursue ‘privacy’ or to enjoy freedom from state surveillance of those spaces removed from public view, such as automobiles, boardinghouses, bars, and gambling houses. These counter sites and landscapes of queer contact and communities were shaped by both the activities of migrant men and policing.”³⁷ Where these queer contacts occurred, as Shah suggests, were not easily classified as public, semi-public or private. Instead, the murkiness of privacy for migrants living in transient societies, engaging in supposed lewd sex with one another placed their every intimacies open to policing.³⁸ Shah’s conceptual move to examine queer semi-publics and semi-privacies is useful as I situate my research in this chapter in conversation with histories of domesticity, race, and intimacy. By way of Shah, I examine how these domesticities, or semi-publics, were spaces open for public scrutiny. Where I depart from Shah’s analysis, however, are the trials I examine involve a calamity of violent events between husbands, wives and family rivals in the Imperial Valley. I suggest the discourses used to pathologize Sikh immigrants as violent in the press worked in relationship to popular representations of Black male predatory violence. In order for Orientalist discourses to work to categorize Sikhs, then, they required a readjustment to make them newsworthy enough to compete with popular violent representations of violent Black masculinities.

³⁶ Nayan Shah, “Policing Privacy, Migrants and the Limits of Freedom,” *Social Text*, 23 nos. 3-4 (2005), 277.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 281.

³⁸ Nayan Shah, “Between ‘Oriental Depravity’ and ‘Natural Degenerates’: Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005), 714.

Interracial marriages between Punjabi males and Mexican wives during the 1910s were not uncommon. As Karen Leonard describes in her groundbreaking study on Punjabi-Mexican domesticities, she argues although state laws prohibited miscegenation between Asians and Mexicans, rural towns such as the Imperial Valley distributed marriage licenses, allowing for the possibility of land ownership for Punjabi males.³⁹ Because Mexican women were categorized as White according California's racial classification, Punjabi males could secure land rights through hundreds of marriages to Mexican women. I situate Leonard's discussion of Punjabi-Mexican intimacies to contextualize how common these marriages were in the Imperial Valley. Still, the lewdness of inter-racial domesticities is present in the court cases and trials I explore involving Punjabi-Mexican domesticities. Although these marriages were monogamous, they were called into question in ways that White heterosexual families living in the Imperial Valley were not. For example, newspapers and courts argued caste rivalries between families dating back generations in India created disputes leading to property conflicts and fatalities. In this chapter, I examine how these disputes ending in fatality over property between Punjabi-Mexican families translated as evidence of the failure for South Asians to create healthy meaningful intimacies and associations outside the constraints of "primitive" caste systems.

Geographies of White Women's Security

Because violence was intimately tied to ideas about race in the borderland region, media coverage of violent assaults were not uncommon. Jose Saldivar argues in his

³⁹ Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican-Americans*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 57.

analysis of historical representation, media and the borderlands, the region has been historicized to be a geographical space of anticipatory violence since the time of the Mexican Revolution.⁴⁰ In the 1910s, when *The Clansmen* visited San Diego, photographic journalists from the *Los Angeles Times* published hundreds of photos about on-going civil war battles in Mexico. Newspaper coverage of poor Mexicans engaged in a civil war was a form of entertainment for people living in Los Angeles, San Diego and the Imperial Valley. The circulation of media and popularity of violence was fueled by the exoticism of the border region, as Jose Limon argues in his study about the relationship between U.S. spectatorship of Mexico.⁴¹ The intimate cultural encounters between Mexico and the United States were defined by violence and sex. The allure of the border region as a space considered untamable and danger were part of the larger social meanings associated with border aesthetic in the late nineteenth century.

The collision of representations of “American violence” told by the story of *The Clansmen* paralleled with popularized ideas about border violence in the region. For residents living in El Centro, Brawley and Calapatria, salacious news stories were part of their everyday encounters with the media. The salaciousness of domestic disputes in nearby communities suggested the violence committed by criminal activity along the U.S.-Mexico border was quite different than the associations with danger in nearby transient camps. Stories of murder coupled with representations of Black brute masculinity entered into a larger repertoire of criminality. The interconnectedness of

⁴⁰ Jose Saldivar, *U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, (Wilmington: Jaguar Books), 5.

⁴¹ Jose Limon, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, The United States, and the Erotics of Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 49.

news stories traveling from Los Angeles to the Imperial Valley suggests the border region preoccupied popular imagination in the American West.

Press coverage during the early decades of the twentieth century were one of the few places where mainstream White America encountered gossip, adventure and danger. Mary Lui's examination of press coverage in the early twentieth century argues newspaper coverage were cultural sites, by which, White America could live stories about murder, mystery and danger, particularly involving Chinese immigrants.⁴² The salaciousness of these crimes, as Lui, points was that it was a space by which White Americans could not invest the work of categorizing South Asian, Chinese, and Mexican immigrant domesticities to be dangerous, but were fortuitous sources of adventure, intrigue, and excitement. The mystery behind stories of news crimes that was different for Punjabis living in the Imperial Valley was encountered within a socio-political context, where these domesticities were considered to be outside what was normal. This section, then, is an effort to examine how normative understanding of normative White masculinity associated with restraint, respect and civility were mobilized by newspapers to create panic about immigrant males living in close spatial proximity to White families. Specifically, I contextualize how these newspapers were distributed by press coverage that was interested in selling stories of dangers, suspicion and sexual adventure for White Americans. What I look for in these stories, however, is how spaces where immigrants had little choice in living, working and spending leisure time were placed under public scrutiny by the press.

⁴² Mary Tin Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.

If danger was articulated through the subject of Black masculinity during the early decades of the twentieth century, then, press coverage concerning *The Clansmen* was a space that celebrated efforts to prevent inter-racial dating, sex and marriage. The play arrived in San Diego one year after the anniversary of the Mann Act, a federal law allegedly to stop middle age men from having lewd sex with underage women. The problem, however, was Black men were disproportionately prosecuted for engaging in lewd sex with White women. Famed boxer Jack Johnson, for example, was placed into custody when he and his white girlfriend crossed state lines in 1912.⁴³ Under the auspices of protecting White women, the Mann Act intended to categorize Black men as potential predators of young White girls. Certainly, the play was a cultural site that created panics in San Diego, where residents submitted editorials after watching the play about the dangers of miscegenation, particularly fears that Black men and White women could create families. The making of Black masculinity as a sexual subject to be feared in *San Diego Tribune's* coverage of *The Clansmen* primarily focused on the celebratory attributes of the play, particularly its contributions to the performing arts, and its message about what White male protection of White women from Black predators.⁴⁴ Hidden beneath these discourses of celebratory angst, predatory criminal masculinity could be distinctly categorized as Black. Because San Diego had a small Black population at this time with an estimate running into the hundreds prior to WWII, there was relatively little imminent concern about Black men courting White women. The difference, however, is

⁴³ David Langum, *Crossing Over the Line: Legislating Morality and the Mann Act*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

⁴⁴ "Traveling Vaudeville Visits San Diego," *San Diego Tribune*, July 19, 1911.

black men were sensationalized in coverage of the play creating a panic among residents about what this meant for their daughters and wives.

Even though the play never visited towns in the Imperial Valley, circulation of news stories were enough to generate conversations among Brawley and El Centro residents. From the editorials submitted to newspapers, there was no evidence Imperial Valley residents actually saw the play. In subsequent editorials submitted to the *Imperial Valley Press* after the release of the play concerning the dangers of transients spending their leisure time in close proximity to White families, William Langley from Holtville argued transient men were lurking in spaces where his daughters walked alone. According to Langley, “any father, who loves his children wants to ensure their safety. My daughters have lived here all their lives, still I don’t trust these Hindus and Chinese who come here, and can leave at any moment when committing a crime.”⁴⁵ The irony is although *The Clansmen* exhibited inter-racial sex as lewd between Blacks and Whites, there was little need to be concerned over Black men in the Imperial Valley. In the 1910s, Imperial Valley’s Black population was estimated in the dozens, and there was little evidence that Black men engaged in rape of White women. The problem, however, was plays such as *The Clansmen* were useful for White men to argue the need to securitize and police gender relations in public spaces. As Mary Lui describes, during 1910s to 1920s, young impressionable White women living in urban areas such as New York City, Los Angeles and San Diego were considered to be vulnerable to sexual slavery, lacking

⁴⁵ Editorial column, *Imperial Valley Press*, November 14, 1912.

the wit or naiveté to know when they were being manipulated by Black and Asian men.⁴⁶ Imperial Valley, outside the periphery of San Diego's bustling urban life, was still a place of immense interaction between groups that were racially different, and places where White women could get themselves into trouble, such as brothels and saloons. Still, these spaces were not places that were frequented by supposed strangers in town. The variety of interactions, or fears following these associations, between transient migrant men and White women replicated in a variety of discourses voiced by parents of young adolescent women.

A group of concerned mothers who heard about *The Clansmen* from newspaper stories in El Centro, California wrote to the *Holtville Tribune* arguing, "given our concerns in the past regarding the safety of our daughters when riding our bicycles and walking to town, we see these Hindu men as vagrants, not knowing what their intentions are with being here. They frequent saloons and others areas of town unimpressible and unsafe for our children."⁴⁷ The contradiction was although White men were advocating for the policing of public space where transient men leisured, including alleys, boarding houses and saloons, White civic societies run by women publicly voiced their panic over transient migrant men living and working in spaces that were considered too close. The paradox is although young women, at this time, were being categorized by the state into a separate taxonomy into adolescents to help prevent statutory rape in the home, White mothers advocated for greater spatial constraints to limit their daughters' public

⁴⁶ Mary Tin Yi Lui, *Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 25.

⁴⁷ Editorial column, *Holtville Tribune*, February 2, 1912.

mobility.⁴⁸ Using White women as an auspice to police transient men meant young White women would also undergo increasing surveillance to discourage associating with transient migrant workers.

As White women advocated for enhanced gender security to police the semi-publics where transient Punjabi men, and other Asian men lived, it reveals two major translations that occurred during this time regarding White women's relationship to immigrant men. First, Black men were not overwhelmingly represented demographically in the Imperial Valley. The press coverage circulating *The Clansmen's* debut was registered within certain socio-political contexts of its time. Still, black sexuality was overwhelmingly represented to be lascivious sexual behavior, if not lewd. Yet, the taxonomy of racial and sexual difference in the Imperial Valley was situated within the discussion of transient men loitering in public spaces. What is left unknown by the newspaper articles and editorials submitted to the *Imperial Valley Press* and the *Holtville Tribune* is what impression these women had of transient Hindu men prior to watching, or even hearing about the play. Second, the precarious nature of *The Clansmen*, while situated in an entirely separate geo-political contexts outside the Imperial Valley, and involving populations that were not an imminent threat to Whites as they were believed to be in San Diego, Los Angeles and San Francisco, is how panic over Black masculinities *worked* to create widespread panic among Whites about White women's relationship to public space and accessibility to the moral corruption of South Asians considered to be foreigners.

⁴⁸ Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005), 720.

What is less obvious, however, is how questions of Black masculinity were translated into concerns of other transient men living in bunk houses and in ranches near White families. The desire to protect women from suspected sexual assailants wasn't so much about producing a subjectivity concerning blackness. Instead, in the space of the Imperial Valley, a much wider concern over how to deal with an even greater number of Punjabi, Mexican and Chinese males spending their leisure time in brothels, saloons and boarding houses. How was it possible, then, for cultural representations involving salacious crimes between Blacks and Whites, could catapult South Asians to be similarly, if not more menacing.

By this time, California was a hotbed of social debate concerning large numbers of Hindu, Mexican, Chinese and Japanese immigrants working in the golden state. Fears over inter-racial sex were circulated using a variety of media, including films, newspapers and advertisements. That same year, *San Francisco Call* published, "Hindus Force Autoists to Witness Orgies," where the weekly paper claimed Hindus publicly engaged in "sex acts" in Northern California. Stories of sexual perversity vilified foreigners, including Mexican males, as un-assimilable to the moral standards of the "fair state of California."⁴⁹ In San Diego, newspapers like the *San Diego Union* published outrageous pieces including, "The Coming of the Hindu," where Hindus were targeted for abnormal sexual practices, such as polygamy, sodomy and affinity for group sex.⁵⁰ Edward Said suggests in his critique of Orientalism the West historically has used cultural products to fetishize "the East" as decadent, feminine and sexually exotic.⁵¹

⁴⁹ "Hindus Force Autoists to Witness Orgies," *San Francisco Call*, March 8, 1910.

⁵⁰ "The Coming of the Hindu," *San Diego Union Tribune*, September 22, 1910.

⁵¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 7.

Newspapers, as Melani McAlister writes, are the cultural products that create social meaning for racial groups to “encounter” each other across different spatialities, borders and continents without ever meeting one another.⁵² For California newspapers, sensational press coverage concerning abnormal sexual practices of migrant workers in rural and urban spaces produced sexual anxieties about lingering threats of non-white men potentially engaging in sexual acts with white women, and even more disturbing the possibility of same sex relationships with white men.

From 1916-1923, few stories of random sexual violence were published in the *Los Angeles Times* describing Black men as sexual predators. One of the more infamous cases of sexual assault in the Imperial Valley was in 1916 when an African-American male field worker from El Centro was accused of attacking a four-year-old White girl. The *Los Angeles Times* reported “the unidentified ‘black fiend’ offered the little girl candy and took her to the lower level floor of a movie house on Main Street and proceeded to assault her.”⁵³ When the assailant saw a janitor approaching, he allegedly pushed the girl to the side and ran with his pants down to the street corner. Nearly a decade later, a similar story ignited a lynch mob to hunt down a Black man accused of fondling himself in front of two White girls in 1923 outside a saloon. Lewd sex crimes mapped a geography of fear onto the bodies of Black men. The sexual assault of a White child resonated with ideas that predatory violence was imminent, even in the most leisure of spaces, such as movie houses. The spatialities of these dangerous sexual liaisons in movie houses, saloons and bars were constituted as sexual publics where transients could prey

⁵² Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6.

⁵³ "Negro Attacks Four-Year-Old Child," *Los Angeles Times*, October 24, 1916.

on children and wives. The sexual geography associated with these spaces where men lurked in caddy corners hoping to prey on innocent youth were similarly placed on South Asians during this same time period. For Nayan Shah, the suspicion of South Asian, European, Mexican and Chinese males spending leisure time in boardinghouses and bars meant access to privacy was not easily defined. Instead, the separation between public and private, semi-publics, where many of these men spent their leisure time were categorized by the press and news coverage to be sexually immoral.

Restraint and Semi-Private Intimacies on Trial

Efforts to police migrant sociability in early twentieth century courtrooms were earmarked by stories of violence involving Sikhs killing other Punjabi men, as well as their Mexican wives. In this section, I examine press coverage surrounding three assault trials involving fatal altercations between extended South Asian family members, friends and Mexican wives. What I find useful about these trials is they allow historians of sexuality and race to consider how discourses circulating in courtrooms worked relationally to discuss the failure of Punjabis to function without violence. I focus explicitly on (1) how predatory masculinity was used to describe defendants, (2) if fatal disputes between Punjabi males were represented as the failures of assimilability into White normative masculinity and (3) how the management of privacy was interconnected to the policing of Punjabis. This section works to imagine how categories of Blackness worked in relationship to the production of fatal violence between Punjabi families.

If popular representations of African-Americans in the 1910s were discussed in relationship to other racial groups, then, predatory violence was just as useful to single

out immigrant men to be degenerates. For example, on June 13, 1913 when a group of Punjabi men named Partap Singh, Meta Singh, Budh Singh, Kehr Singh, Bahn Singh, and Kandar Singh allegedly robbed and assaulted Natha Singh and Jai Singh in Calexico during a dispute over money, prosecutors raised questions whether the physical altercation was caused by caste rivalries. Caste rivalries, as Karen Leonard describes in her research on Punjabi resettlement to the Imperial Valley, were considered by police officials to be the source of domestic disputes. The case was eventually dismissed, and the group of men was found not guilty for attacking Natha Singh and Jai Singh. Because the altercation occurred at night, the prosecution had to make the case the men undoubtedly robbed the two men. The problem, however, was the witnesses called to testify were not certain of the attackers' identities. Because Bahn Singh, one of the defendants was suspected of having a case rivalry with the victims, prosecutor H.L. Welch placed he and his friends under suspicion, even though they were working across town at the time. Judge Brown eventually dropped all charges on the grounds of dismissal and lack of evidence.

The intriguing part of prosecutor H.L. Welch's case was the insistence this altercation was part of a larger dysfunctional sociability tied to primitive masculinity and social caste systems in India. During cross-examination, the prosecution accused the victims Natha Singh and Jai Singh of hating the defendants because of lower caste status. According to the prosecutor, "You don't like them very well do you because they are not you're your village? In your country, some people are from one village, and some from another, is that right? And when they are from a different village, they are not friends, are

they?”⁵⁴ Even though Natha Singh and Jai Singh denied caste rivalries as the source of tension between the group of men and themselves, it represented the alleged victims’ failure to socialize like normative White men without the so-called burden of caste disputes. The failure of normative associations was the failure of the Sikh males to assimilate into Western liberal societies. The promise of liberal societies was to allow normative men the free range of sociability despite where “anyone came from.” The making of caste rivalries as a reasonable explanation for physical disputes between Punjabi men situated the conflicts between migrant men as normal behavior expected from primitive caste rivalries. The exceptionality of these caste rivalries as inherently violent represented the efforts courts made to categorize South Asian masculinities as brutal and felonious.

For example, on February 26, 1919, *Los Angeles Times* reported a fatal altercation between Punjabi immigrant nicknamed “Albert Joe” and his father-in-law Rullia Singh in Holtville, ten miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border.⁵⁵ After receiving death threats for nearly three months, Albert Joe was killed at the footsteps of his milk house while operating a cream separator during a heat wave. The *Los Angeles Times* article entitled, “Slayer of Albert Joe Found Guilty,” explained, Singh was angry with Albert Joe because he prevented Mrs. Rullia Singh from rejoining her husband after she had deserted him because of allegations of sexual abuse.⁵⁶ Press coverage of the trial went to great lengths to solve the events of what occurred that night. A series of articles in the *Imperial Valley Press* were published chronicling the exact times, where Singh was suspected to be at

⁵⁴ *People v. Partap Singh, Meta Singh, Budh Singh, Kehr Singh, Bahn Singh, and Kandar Singh*, Case No. 222, 3 (1913), Records of the Imperial County Court.

⁵⁵ “Slayer of Albert Joe Found Guilty,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1919.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

each moment and detailed descriptions of the crime scene. A fatal dispute between father-in-law and his son turned into a salacious murder mystery about sexual abuse. Graphic details of Alberto Joe's blood mixing with milk were part of the newspapers' efforts to classify Singh to be psychotic. Little is known about the extent to which editorial contributors went to place Singh at the scene of the crime, however, chronicling the horrific events of Alberto Joe's murder meant there was suspicion, at best a public curiosity, about the inter-personal lives and disputes between Punjabis in El Centro.

The graphic details concerning Alberto Joe's killing were part of the unusual interests in Rullia Singh's murder case. When testifying during her husband's trial in El Centro courthouse, Singh's wife Valentina Alvarez, referred by the press as his "Mexican wife" testified about her long history of sexual abuse and her husband's bad temper. During questioning, Alvarez stated, "he would hit me, torture me and then expect me to be with him sexually. I was expected to service him sexually at any time of the day."⁵⁷ Alvarez's painful sincerity came across in her husband's trial drawing commentary by newspapers throughout the Valley. The problem, however, was the court testimony made by Valentina Alvarez did not match the published reports in newspapers. Alvarez's testimony was altered turning her testimony into a public indictment of Hindu males. Not once in her testimony did Alvarez refer to Singh's race to explain why she endured such sexual violence. The press argued, however, based on testimony from Alvarez's testimony was evidence of unusual sexual practices committed by Hindu men in domestic quarters.⁵⁸ The perverse sexual demands Singh allegedly required were situated within a

⁵⁷ *People v. Rullia Singh*, Case No. 773, 18 (1919), Records of the Imperial County Court.

⁵⁸ "Hindu Trial for Murder," *Holtville Tribune*, November 29, 1919.

larger ideology of what it meant to be a normal man who could rationalize restraint. Unable to control his sexual urges, like Black male subjects featured in *The Clansmen*, Singh was racialized to be a sexual degenerate. Susan Lee Johnson argues popular cultural products including newspapers and dime novels at this time associated normative White masculinity with restraint, sexual temperament and self-controlling rational manliness.⁵⁹ The press coverage, working at this time to categorize migrants outside the realm of White normative masculinity described the failure of Singh's degeneracy as a Hindu.

From court testimony, dozens of additional witnesses were called to the stand to testify against Rullia Singh. Witness accounts and the pistol used to kill Albert Joe solidified a guilty verdict by the jury. Prosecutor E.R. Simon invited witnesses including the defendant's step-daughter Alejandrina Cardenas who was a witness to the entire shooting. Singh later petitioned appellate courts for a reversal of the decision, arguing Albert Joe died of influenza. Despite his appeals, the courts never granted a reversal of the verdict and he was eventually placed under a life parole sentence.

The suspicion characterized by Rullia Singh's case crossed over into other trials related to domestic abuse in nearby towns. On April 16, 1921, Margarita Montoya was killed on by her husband in the town of Brawley sending shockwaves across the Valley. Described by her mother as a good-hearted woman who fell in love with Punjabi immigrant Gaudet Singh. Tales of being forced to participate in sexual orgies by her husband foreshadowed accounts given by family members of the victim's sweet image.

⁵⁹ Susan Lee Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers: The Significance of Gender in the History of the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1993), 506.

Montoya's mother Rosa Estrada testified Singh in a drunken fit, attempted to prostitute his wife to Japanese and Hindu migrant workers at a nearby ranch where primarily Japanese, Mexican and Hindu males lived. According to Montoya's mother in an El Centro courthouse, "[Gaudet Singh] would say give me ten dollars, give me five dollars, give me two dollars. I will leave my wife here with you for one night or two nights, it did not make any difference."⁶⁰ Estrada later clarified that despite numerous attempts to get her daughter to engage in sex with male workers, Montoya ran away each time prior to each "incident." The details of Singh's perverse sexual demands of his Mexican wife in newspapers like the *Los Angeles Times* associated the Hindu's lust for sharing his wife with concubine marital systems in India.⁶¹ Caricatured by the press and medical physicians as insane, Singh was represented as a killer with an outrageous sexual appetite. His thirst for alcohol and pimping his Mexican wife to other males created racial and social anxieties about the sexual demands of Hindu men wanting to force his wife to have sex with transient men in ranch houses.

The sexual encounters in labor camps described in Gaudet Singh's murder trial offer a different type of panic than prior concerns over inter-racial intimacies in boarding houses. Earlier research on taxonomies of perversity in Northern California suggests boarding houses were places of sexual suspicion primarily for encounters between men and boys. The difference with Singh's attempts to solicit his Mexican wife to transient men suggested there were other concerns besides homosexual sex in one room boarding houses. Instead, there were a variety of sexual encounters taking place, or at least people

⁶⁰ *People v. Gaudet Singh*, Case No. 1031, 39 (1921), Records of the Imperial County Court.

⁶¹ "Hindu Murderer Believed Insane: Prisoner Sentenced to Hang Will Probably be Sent to Asylum," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1922.

suspected, what migrant men and boys do when they're alone. The solicitation of group sex, then, was a useful discourse for newspapers and trial lawyers to argue migrant male domesticities were suspect of lewd and lascivious behavior. Sexual trysts between men were described to be causes of situational sex as a consequence of female absences. Singh's trial shows, however, there were other classifications at work where hypersexual representations were used to racialize immigrant households.

When the prosecution summoned neighbors, doctors and family friends who lived in Brawley, the prosecution solidified its case against Gaudet Singh. Many of the witnesses who arrived at the crime scene testified to watching Montoya suffer at the end of her life. She was shot in the head and abdomen a few times when she died. After an El Centro court found Gaudet Singh guilty, he was transferred to San Quentin where he was placed under psychiatric observation. On September 2, 1921, according to police records transferring Singh to San Quentin, he was "hung by the neck until he died."⁶²

Conclusion

The focus on immigrant intimacies comes out of my general interests to understand how taxonomies of racial difference get circulated from one racial group to another. The translation of racial difference, as I see it, allows for different possibilities when reading historical documents, including trials, newspapers, plays, and dime novels. Race, in the context of the trials and newspapers was talked about in sexual terms. While I'm not suggesting these documents require this type of analysis, I am invested in the project of interrogating how categories of racial and sexual difference intersect to create knowledge about subjects. For the purposes of this chapter, I examined how discourses

⁶² *People v. Gaudet Singh*, Case No. 1031, 1 (1921), Records of the Imperial County Court.

concerning Black masculinities in plays and national newspaper representations of Black males as predators worked relationally to help racialize Punjabi immigrants. Within my analysis, I examined what the limits of immigrants' privacy was in their everyday lives, as their families were placed under intense social scrutiny. From this discussion, I offered a critique regarding the illogical fears concerning White women. From questions related to semi-privacies and semi-publics, I argued geographies of suspicious sexual encounter were considered to be abnormal because of their inability to assimilate to normative ideas about monogamy, masculinity and restraint. Because race relations are critical to the construction of moral panics, even today, this project hopes to drive a deeper understanding about what discourses are successful to draw on the supposed failures of immigrants.

In chapter two, I examine a different arena, public intimacy between friends, co-workers and business partners created by Mexican, Chinese, Punjabi and White transients living in the Imperial Valley. The following chapter, instead, will examine intimacies outside of sexual relations. The intimacies created between immigrants during the 1910s weren't necessarily categorized as erotic, or sexual relationships. Rather, everyday intimacies included friendships and associations where people weren't engaging in sex. Using three trials, involving suspicion of delinquency of two minors, the killing of a border smuggler and the murder of two White business partners, I examine how immigrants went about creating kinships and associations, despite being criminalized. In Chapter two, I demonstrate the complex lives of the individual defendants in order to understand the choices they decided to make to protect other migrants who were similarly

threatened by the law. The following chapter is an effort to recover what little humanity defendants represented themselves during testimony.

Chapter Two

Tracing Histories of Public Intimacy and Dissent in Imperial Valley Courts

Strategies to uncover historical erasures circulated in early twentieth century court trials open possibilities to trace histories of dissent, both within the courtroom and in immigrants' everyday personal lives. What gets silenced in salacious press coverage of murder trials in the Imperial Valley are public intimacies Punjabi immigrants created for themselves, despite being criminalized. In my previous chapter, I examined how sensational newspapers and trials did the work of categorizing Punjabi domesticities to be sexually perverse during the years 1910-1925. I suggested newspapers were spaces where migrants' private sexual lives were represented as cause for public concern. Yet, how Punjabi immigrants' sexualities *came to be* criminalized is a fraction of the historical narrative concerning their private and public associations.

Public intimacies created by Punjabis, Whites, Mexicans and Chinese living in the Imperial Valley in the early decades of the twentieth century created a host of kinships and associations to dissent against racial segregation, state laws banning Asians from landownership and legal restrictions prohibiting Asian immigration. Hidden within court testimonies made by immigrants forced to testify against friends, business partners, and associates, are histories of companionship, solidarity, and evidence that immigrants were willing to take legal risks for one another, despite not having any familial blood ties. Certainly, intimacy was not constituted in sexual or erotic terms. Instead, the intimacies immigrants created with one another allowed for the political possibilities to dissent against adjudication and police enforcement. The trials I've located in the Imperial

Valley during the course of my research help answer these very questions using the recorded testimony of immigrants in the Imperial Valley.

Chapter two, then, is an effort to situate and forefront these very questions to trace public kinships Punjabi, Mexican, White and Chinese immigrants created, despite social and political constraints forced upon them in the Imperial Valley. From the twenty trials I've located at Imperial Valley Courthouse and immigration hearings from the National Archives in Washington D.C., I chose three trials as examples where immigrants were forced to testify against friends, business associates and co-workers. Criminal trials used in this chapter include (1) border patrol investigation involving the death of border smuggler Gregorio Espinoza in 1910, (2) charge of delinquency of two minors accusing Sikh immigrant Bagga Singh in 1919, and (3) the murder trial of Punjabi landowner Pakhar Singh accused of killing two White business partners in 1925. The particularities of each of these cases help identify what was at stake for migrants testifying against their friends, business associates and partners, and the risks these witnesses took to protect themselves, and friends.

What is important, then, about Imperial Valley court trials that supposedly capture intimate, yet public, stories about solidarity and affection between strangers, friends and associates? The importance of these trials is they are one of the few public artifacts available to researchers where immigrants publicly articulate the importance of these meaningful kinships and associations. Many of the immigrants included in this chapter were either illiterate or didn't have access to resources to record the most personal details of their lives. One of the few spaces where immigrant voices were represented, however, is in criminal court cases where they were either adjudicated or forced to testify. Working

within my own constraints as a researcher, I've been attentive to how this knowledge might be useful for researchers to consider not only how intimacy operates outside sex, but to consider how dissent played out in court spaces in the Imperial Valley.

When reading court testimonies in this chapter, my primary concerns are focused at two levels, (1) how migrants testified about their public kinships with other racial groups that were considered less desirable, and (2) how they expressed their dissent in the space of the courtroom by denying alleged events described by prosecutors, employing strategies to avoid criminalization and remaining silent when asked questions that placed their friends in jeopardy by the courts. Given the constraints placed on immigrants testifying in courts, what gets lost in the historical writing about these people's lives is what autonomy they created for themselves. What, if any, dissent did immigrants express in the courtroom? How did migrants translate meaningful kinships and associations from their everyday public lives? What political possibilities does the framing of public intimacies circulated in Imperial Valley courtrooms create for scholars interested in race, intimacy and sexuality?

Making Intimacy Public

Intimacy between strangers, friends and associates has conventionally been associated with eroticism, or sexual relations. Testimony from the three trials I examine, however, provide different insight into the public worlds immigrants experienced in the Imperial Valley. Regina Kunzel, in her work on collapsing categories of sexual difference as uniform, even and modern, situates her analysis of intimacy by broadening her definition of what it meant to be intimate in prisons, reform institutes and rehabilitation

centers.⁶³ Intimate sociability, for Kunzel, included a variety of public relationships, both sexual and non-sexual, where prisoners created their own ethics, codes of conduct and solidarities in the space of prisons. Certainly, sociability in the Imperial Valley for immigrants was less restrictive than the prison institutes Kunzel talks about. By way of Kunzel, I define public intimacies across a variety of categories, including drinking buddies, co-workers, business partners, and haphazard sexual lovers as being part of a larger constellation of what constituted the intimate. For the purposes of this thesis, to be intimate doesn't correlate with sexual partnership. Rather than focusing on the assemblage what defined intimate sexual relations, or for that matter what constituted sex or co-mingling in the early decades of the twentieth century, I use this chapter to consider what possibilities interracial public intimacies between migrants can help historians of race and sexuality to consider alternative forms of public sociability.

Nayan Shah, for example, in his research on Punjabi migrant men's sociability in early twentieth century sodomy trials examines a host of semi-public and semi-private intimacies as sexual encounters.⁶⁴ Building on Shah and Kunzel's work, I use this chapter as an opportunity to disrupt intimacy as a sexual category of analysis. Instead, it appears from the trials I examine there were a host of public intimacies men, boys and women created with one another that weren't sexual, per se. Rather, immigrant sociability during this time took on a variety of associations between smugglers, business partners and friends. While many of these intimacies have already been looked at from a sexual

⁶³ Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 19.

⁶⁴ Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 703-725.

encounter, I suggests there might be even more for us to discover about the political possibilities these friendships created to dissent against racial and sexual policing.

Secrets, Lies, and Protection: The Case of Gregorio Espinoza

Because Chinese immigration to the United States was prohibited in 1882 with the passing of the federal Chinese Exclusion Act, INS officials went to great lengths to patrol neighborhoods, and smuggling routes to prevent Chinese entry in towns like Brawley, Calexico, El Centro and San Ysidro.⁶⁵ The San Diego-Tijuana region didn't resemble the level of security with a border wall. Certainly, the Calexico-Mexicali region had little to no patrolling at the border during this time, besides a small station at the entry point. Still, during this time, the federal agency called INS created what is now referred to as the border patrol. Many of these patrol agents would interrogate detainees at the border to find details about possible smuggling rings in Baja California, where a number of Chinese arrived in Mexico.

In the Imperial Valley, there was little evidence to suggest Chinese residents who had longstanding ties in towns like Brawley and Calexico were deported. However, Chinese faced considerable discrimination by the press claiming the Chinese menace was a nuisance to the Valley. Since immigration authorities couldn't control every Chinese person crossing, INS officials focused on the management of flows of entry. This meant, Chinese smuggling routes needed to be located in order to stop the flow of people coming across into towns such as Calexico from Mexicali.

⁶⁵ Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 8.

Little is known about the public intimacies of smugglers considering the high risks they took to help cross borders illegally. For Chinese immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border in the early decades of the twentieth century, hiring *coyotes* (Mexican border smugglers) helped ensure a safe, but risky, crossing into the United States. The stakes involved were not limited to fears of dying in the desert, but also the legal risks that were anticipated if caught by patrol agents. In this section, I examine these very questions concerning risks and dissent Chinese migrants were willing to take in order to protect border smuggler Gregorio Espinoza killed by border patrol agents during an internal investigation led by the Immigration and Naturalization Services. What started as an internal investigation into the death of a border smuggler turned into a witch-hunt by the prosecution to uncover smuggling routes in Mexico. The significance of this investigation was that it is one of the few public records I came across where testimony from Chinese immigrants was used in a trial. While the majority of this hearing is situated as an interrogation of the four Chinese immigrants caught during the dispute, namely how they came to be associated with Espinoza, there were moments where they dissented against the prosecution by refusing to answer certain questions or denying certain events. Without dismissing smuggling as a criminal enterprise, I'm interested in the cross-racial solidarities Mexican smugglers, like Espinoza, created with Chinese immigrants to work collaboratively against laws that were racially discriminatory, and at the same moment lucrative for Mexican smugglers. What might smuggling, then, at this time suggest about the necessary cross-racial alliances smugglers and Chinese immigrants created with one another in order to carve out a space of autonomy?

If protection for Chinese immigrants meant being hidden, then, Espinoza and other smugglers who ran boarding houses went to great lengths to help hide Chinese from public visibility. When border inspectors Ralph Conklin and William Chadney arrived in Brawley to investigate the possible smuggling of four Chinese immigrants at a nearby ranch, there was little indication that there was a border smuggler accompanying them. Complaints by neighbors of suspicious Chinese men living in a ranch house outside town punctuated Conklin and Chadney's suspicion that a *coyote* was smuggling Chinese through Imperial Valley. At dusk on April 20, 1910, the two agents arrived, opening the door abruptly to catch any Chinese illegal immigrants. Four Chinese men Leung Yick, Ng Bow, Gee Sam and Woo-Lock were eating dinner, as the inspectors barged in stating they were border patrol agents and were called by neighbors about disturbing noises in the ranch house. After questioning the Chinese men, Gregorio Espinoza and his father Juan Espinoza from Baja California were spotted walking up the road with food to bring to Chinese immigrants for the week. When the officers saw the two running away from them to avoid arrest, agent Conklin shot Gregorio in the back five times. In front of his father and the four Chinese men who he'd spent the last three weeks planning passage to the United States, Gregorio Espinoza died at the age of nineteen. Little is known from the transcripts about whose ranch it was, but Chinese men "passing through" the Imperial Valley frequented this particular boarding house run by Espinoza.

Still, the boarding house was located ten minutes outside the main town center and arguably the location was chosen by Espinoza to protect the Chinese immigrants from being seen. The level of policing by neighbors left few alternatives for *coyotes*, like Espinoza, to place Chinese immigrants. Part of this underground secrecy was to maintain

further journeys for proceeding cohorts of immigrants crossing the desert. The collaborative secretcies mobilized by coyotes running “mom and pop” smuggling operations ensured safe passage for Chinese, and a wage earning income for Mexican families. In order to maintain what little dignity they had as transient migrant workers, these men needed to keep certain secrets in order to ensure possible friends, family and others to come across.

The secretcies, or common understandings between smugglers and Chinese immigrants during this time, played out during the investigation as the four Chinese immigrants who were arrested were interrogated. The investigation was initially set up as an internal hearing with a prosecutor to find out whether the killing of Espinoza was justified. The problem is, however, the so-called investigation turned into an interrogation of Chinese immigrants to uncover secret hiding routes that were run by coyotes. When the prosecutor questioned Leung Yick, he publicly attacked him arguing he knew other underground smuggling operations nearby, and could point to other ranch houses where Chinese immigrants were living. Yick responded, “I can’t say. I don’t know very much about this. I’m new to this area and just walked across on my own. It just so happens that I ran across other people in the same situation as me. We never had help from anyone else.”⁶⁶ Without evidence to support whether or not Yick was telling the truth, it’s difficult to make the argument that he felt lost and stumbled across other Chinese immigrants in the same predicament. Still, Yick’s response suggests there was a certain level of secrecy he was willing to honor. Because smugglers and immigrants

⁶⁶ *Gregorio Espinoza*, Case No. 52,810/35, 26 (1910), Records from INS (Record Group 85), National Archives, Washington D.C.

relied on passage routes that were successful by previous cohorts to survive the difficult journey of crossing the desert, it was necessary to keep a certain level of secrecy between these immigrants. The intimacy between these men who were put through such difficult circumstances to cross and then to be kept in hiding meant that they had to trust one another, abiding by a certain understanding that they had a mutual investment in protection.

Dissent, for Leung Yick, Ng Bow, Gee Sam and Woo Lock, played out in a variety of performances in the courtroom. Lying to prosecutors was one strategy to negotiate leverage in courts. Remaining silent was another alternative. When Ng Bow and Gee Sam were questioned about whether they could identify specific towns in Mexico where they met Gregorio Espinoza, or whether they knew the amount it cost to smuggle someone, both witnesses refused to respond. The prosecutors were so angry with the two men, asking the judge to remove the witnesses from the stand. In her research related to court testimony of adolescent youth in Los Angeles, Catherine Ramirez suggests remaining silent was a useful strategy to undermine efforts made by the prosecutor to criminalize friends.⁶⁷ For Ng Bow and Gee Sam, remaining silent against the prosecutors' interrogation meant there was an understanding based on their constraints as foreign men being accused of a crime in the courts, they didn't have the option to speak up. Certainly, not everyone has equitable access to voicing dissent publicly. However, being passive aggressive about the situation and withdrawing from questioning is a moment where these immigrants advocated on their own behalf. The

⁶⁷ Catherine Ramirez, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism and the Cultural Politics of Memory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 103.

dehumanizing nature of this trial, a supposed investigation into the killing of Gregorio Espinoza, was an excuse used by the prosecution to gain access for more information about the smuggling operations in the Imperial Valley. Without the responses needed to criminalize other Chinese immigrants and Mexican *coyotes*, the prosecutions' case was not useful.

The particularities of the Gregorio Espinoza incident suggests there were certain taxonomies at play, in the space of the court. Prosecutors, hoping to capitalize on the vulnerability of the four witnesses as foreign Chinese men defamed Espinoza to be a criminal mastermind who orchestrated a whole enterprise on the vulnerability of these men. When Woo Lock was questioned, he refuted many of the claims suggested by the prosecution, namely that he was a victim of extortion by Espinoza. Woo Lock argued, "no one took anything from me that I wasn't willing to give. The Mexican never hurt us, never treated me bad, and treated us well. Why he was killed, I'm unsure."⁶⁸ Woo Lock's testimony is perhaps one of the few cases where dissent is explicit in the courts. Whereas earlier testimony by Leung Yick, Ng Bow and Gee Sam were primarily refusal to answer questions or deceptive, Woo Lock's testimony was obvious. The bonds these men created with one another might have motivated Lock's such overt response. When Gregorio Espinoza was shot, there was little attention to the fact he was bringing food to the Chinese immigrants. Since there were intimate bonds created between travelers, it created generative questions about what their discussions, dinners or conversations might

⁶⁸ Nayan Shah, "Between "Oriental Depravity" and "Natural Degenerates": Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005), 706.

have been. Dissent expressed in the space of the courtroom suggests the intimate ties that bounded these men together to face such hostility in towns located in Imperial County.

Even though several witnesses saw Ralph Conklin and William Chadney kill Gregorio Espinoza, the court ruled the shooting to be an accident. Conklin and Chadney were not reprimanded and were placed back on duty one week after the verdict. The so-called internal investigation to find whether the shooting was justified was an excuse by INS officials to gather information about possible leads to prevent Chinese from entering. The tragedy of the Espinoza case was the courts used the auspices of an investigation to legitimize the killing of a young Mexican smuggler.

Kinship, Cross-Racial Ties and Spatialities of Dissent

In this section, I examine the Bagga Singh trial, a middle-aged Punjabi migrant worker accused of soliciting alcohol to two underage White boys. The Pioneer Boarding House where Singh and other Sikhs lived during the peak harvest season in El Centro was a place of refuge for many of these men to console one another. Racial hostility targeting Sikhs led to a variety of social exclusions including segregated housing and saloons where migrants congregate to socialize in the town center. Homosocial spaces, such as ranch houses, board rooms and alleyways where Punjabi, Mexican and Chinese men would congregate in public spaces became sites of suspicion whenever impressionable young men would gravitate towards these areas. Historian Nayan Shah, in his examination of sodomy trials involving Punjabi males and White adolescents in Northern California, argues what constituted suspicion was widely based on arbitrary

police enforcement.⁶⁹ Moral panic concerning poor White boys soliciting themselves for prostitution was a common fear in spaces where predominantly migrant males lived. While Shah's analysis focuses on the spaces that get mapped as suspicious based on what constitutes a non-normative relationship, I situate this trial involving the delinquency of two White male sixteen year olds. I argue Singh's trial is useful not only to tell us what spaces and bodies during this time were considered criminal, but also to examine what dissident behaviors migrant workers, including young White male adolescents used in the space of the courtroom to protect themselves from further adjudication. Thinking of Singh's trial as an artifact of migrants' everyday kinships suggests court transcripts might tell us more than just the processes of criminalization. In fact, trials such as Singh's involving intimate relations between young adolescents and migrant workers makes me consider the usefulness of criminal trials to articulate what migrant workers' everyday lives looked like.

Two weeks prior to Christmas in 1919, Bagga Singh was taken into custody by Officer J.C. Lane for contributing to the delinquency of two White male minors Ulysses Hudson and Edgar Ellis. The two transient White boys were followed into the Pioneer Boarding House, where Lane and two other White men from the local bar approached the door. Placing his hear to the door, Lane heard a series of conversations taking place between Singh, Hudson and Ellis. During his testimony, officer Lane stated:

⁶⁹ Nayan Shah, "Between "Oriental Depravity" and "Natural Degenerates": Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 715.

I was informed by some one on the street that there was a Hindu down at this place that was trying to get boys to go in the room and drink, and I went and looked up Mr. Parrish and this officer, and told him we had better go down and investigate...I came along behind listening and I heard a noise in one room and I stopped, and the door was partly open, it seemed to be latched in some way on the inside, but was so sprung in a way I could see in the room, and I looked in, and I seen this man standing with his back against the wall like this, Bagga Singh, and he was reaching his arm out like that for something and I could not quite see his hand, but at the time this young man here stepped over to a little table and come right in view. Ellis and Hudson held a bottle of whiskey in their laps and Singh smoked a cigarette at the other end of a smoky dim room.⁷⁰

The suspicion of a Punjabi man attempting to lure two White men into his room placed inter-generational relationships between young men and foreign migrant workers, such as Singh outside the realm of what was considered natural. Questions come to mind reading this transcript, including who was the person that took the initiative to say, “hey, look over there!” Situated within a larger registry of placing these boarding houses as places of vice, where gambling and illegal drinking were taking place. The alcohol on Singh’s breath and lips was evidence enough for the jury to convict him for attempting to induce intoxication and teach two White boys delinquent behavior. The problem for the prosecution, however, was arranging a strong enough case that Singh had ulterior sexual motives for getting the two boys drunk, or at least imply that there was some larger plan to get the boys in his room alone for sexual favors. Blamed for initiating inappropriate behavior by calling the two White boys in his room suggested there was something morally corrupted about Singh.

Early in the court testimony, the two boys were called for questioning. Although Singh was never officially accused of sexual misconduct with the young boys, the

⁷⁰ *People v. Bagga Singh*, Case No. 786, 8 (1919), Records from Imperial Valley Court.

interrogation that proceeded within the trial primarily focused on how the young men met Bagga Singh, why they would even consider joining him for a drink in his room, and whether their relationship was an indication of something that might have not been disclosed in the initial report, but could be revealed in front of a jury. When Ulysses Hudson was called to the stand, the questions were specifically geared towards how close in spatial proximity Singh was to the boys in the room, the arrangement of furniture and a rather awkward moment for the teenager when he's asked whether Singh had his clothes on or off, whether he was lying on the bed, and even to the closest description if they shared the same bottle.⁷¹ Little is known about Hudson, or the extent of his relationship with Singh. However, in the trial testimony, Hudson went to great lengths to refute any suggestion of sex in the hotel. Possibly startled by the insinuation that he engaged in sex with a foreigner, or any male, Hudson was adamant that nothing happened besides just three guys, in his words, "looking to have a good time."

Nowhere in Singh's trial does the sheriff or the prosecution accuses him of enacting *falatio* (oral sex) or buggery on either of the two boys. Unlike the sodomy trials where Punjabi and Chinese men were accused of crimes against nature in the early twentieth century that Shah explores, this trial is a bit different because there are moments where sex acts are implied, but never confirmed.⁷² The problem for the prosecution in Bagga Singh's trial is they might not have had the language, discourse or even ways to represent what constituted sexual misconduct, how it went about, and what "it" might have even looked like? Sexuality, as Regina Kunzel suggests, quite

⁷¹ *People v. Bagga Singh*, Case No. 786, 8 (1919), Records from Imperial Valley Court.

⁷² Nayan Shah, "Between 'Oriental Depravity' and 'Natural Degenerates': Spatial Borderlands and the Making of Ordinary Americans." *American Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2005): 705.

beautifully, in her analysis of same-sex cultures in prisons, argues the ways in which the state has categorized homosexuality, or even same sex relations has been uneven, anything but uniform. What gets constituted, as the intimate, as Kunzel suggests, is part of a larger ensemble of how gender and race get played out at certain moments and what scientific knowledge makes it possible to even have a language to describe certain sexual behaviors in modern American history.⁷³

As Kunzel writes, even state officials by the end of the nineteenth century had a difficult time articulating what homosexual sex was in official prison records. Being unable to articulate what something is places these intimacies outside a category of what is possible, made obscene. Obscenity, then, becomes not only what is silenced in historical records, but is made illegible. If historians of sexuality concerned with how categories of difference come to be produced, there has to also be a concern with how language, adaptability and social norms to talk about sex publicly is part of a push to think about sex uniformly, making the way in which we've come to associate what constitutes normative sexual behavior.

Hudson and Ellis going up to Singh's room willingly might have been just what Hudson stated, "a few guys having a good time." Translating intimacy as somehow universally moving towards so-called meaningful relationships isn't always the case. Rather, if we over romanticize these relationships and how people to come associate with one another under such difficult constraints during a time of racial hostility, then we undermine the potential gravity of sharing a bottle of whiskey might have meant for men

⁷³ Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 15.

like Singh. Punjabis, already placed outside the category of what was normal by living in one room boarding houses with other Asian men sometimes had limited options about who they could befriend and associate with. Calling over the two white boys to his boarding house room might not have been so much about sex, but more about sharing the bottle of whiskey and having mutual camaraderie with these two transient boys, who knew what it felt like to be poor, transient, and without family. The familial ties migrant men created in boarding houses with one another during this time creates an avenue by which we begin to think about what public intimacies in the Imperial Valley might have felt like.

The court never confirmed the prosecution's suspicion about whether something sexual between Singh and the two White boys occurred in the Pioneer Rooming House that afternoon. Still, Singh's character was called into question by the fact he invited two White adolescents in his room for a drink. The charges against Singh were for intoxicating and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Even though the prosecution inferred Singh took advantage of the two boys when he got them drunk, there was evidence he offered drinks to them. The minors were also taken into custody and sent to Juvenile Courts after Singh's trial, where they were fined for drinking and later released. Singh, however, was found guilty the Imperial Valley court, where he faced a sentence of two years in jail and a fine of \$700. The gravity of Singh's punishment appears the prosecution and the jury was preoccupied by appearance that a sexual tryst could have occurred when two White adolescents decided to visit the boarding house of a complete stranger.

Conflict, Murder and Solidarity

In the late afternoon on April 1, 1925, Pakhar Singh killed his two white business associates Victor Sterling and John Hager. During an altercation on his Calapatria lettuce farm, Singh picked up a revolver shooting Hager and Sterling multiple times in front of his Mexican pickers. The dispute was fueled by questions of land title ownership over the lettuce farm, when Hager and Sterling threatened to take Singh's land. By this time, in 1913 the California Alien Land Law prohibited men like Singh from owning property, and the two White men attempted to agitate him that evening by threatening to steal his land. This section, then, will focus on the trial proceedings that occurred during Pakhar Singh's murder case. What I find interesting is over ten Mexican workers testified before the courts about what they witnessed that evening and their intimate relationship they created with Pakhar over the course of their work for him as lettuce pickers. Thus far, I've examined associations and intimacies between friends, smugglers and supposed criminals, however, the business arrangements in Imperial Valley between bosses and workers were perhaps some of the most intimate, and common experiences between immigrants in the Imperial Valley. Predominantly an agro-based economy, it'd be difficult to imagine talking about immigrants' everyday kinships without the formidable bonds they created with their employers. In this section, I argue dissent and acts of autonomy occurred in a variety of forums between Whites, Punjabis and Mexicans on the lettuce farm that evening. I then examine what possibilities we might mine from the Pakhar Singh trial to find what formidable ties allow immigrants the possibility to dissent collectively.

When Mexican laborers working on Pakhar's lettuce farm were asked to testify before the courts about their association with Pakhar and what they witnessed the evening Sterling and Hager were killed, they testified about the longing dispute between the two White men and Singh. Candelario Iguerra, a lettuce farmer on Singh's ranch, argued, "the two White men came more than once and kept it up. They kept coming, making him angry and then would leave. There was a fight over who was the landowner, but I worked for Pakhar. Pakhar lettuce, the lettuce belong to Pakhar"⁷⁴ With little recourse, many of the men understood Singh's frustration. Singh was already categorized as a foreigner by cultural and social standards, and legally he had no rights to property ownership. For men like Iguerra, Singh's agitation was part of a larger dispute that was taking place across California over land titles. Iguerra's testimony suggests, however, that given the hostility placed on Singh at the time, it's difficult to imagine how anyone would react to the type of violence enacted against him, at a time where South Asians had little recourse or protection from the law. Although Singh later publicly testified that he was protecting himself from the two White men, it appears the Mexican immigrants living and working on Singh's ranch could at least comprehend Singh's vulnerability. From the trial transcripts, it's difficult to decipher the extent of Singh's relationship with his Mexican male laborers. However, it appears that these men were well versed in the conflict between Singh, Hager and Sterling. Quite possibly, the conflict could have been known through the rumor mill on the lettuce farm, but it appears that given the willingness of

⁷⁴ *People v. Pakhar Singh*, Case No. 14575, 14 (1925), Records from Imperial County Court and Riverside County Court.

these laborers to testify with such a deep sincerity that they might have felt an affinity towards Pakhar Singh.

Part of this affinity, or friendship displayed towards Singh in his trial, was exhibited at multiple levels, both by defending his actions, but also by refuting accusations by the state prosecutor. For example, when Francisco Torres, a laborer at a nearby camp working for four days on Singh's ranch was questioned about Singh's public drunkenness, he stated, "I can't imagine so. I've been working there four days, but never seen him take a drink."⁷⁵ In an effort to present Singh as an uncontrollable drunk who couldn't manage his alcohol abuse, the prosecution went to great lengths to ask questions from each of the Mexican laborers as to whether Singh was drinking that evening. Every witness who testified to seeing Singh kill the two White business associates argued against any suggestion that Singh was drinking that day. While most of the laborers didn't deny seeing Singh kill the two White men, and perhaps Singh wasn't drinking that day, it appears that despite such great efforts by the prosecution to find Singh to be morally corrupt didn't translate into the testimony that was given by Mexican immigrants. It might have been easy to argue for these Mexican laborers that Singh was a morally depraved individual who was not only a salacious killer, but also a man who had an alcohol problem.

The public intimacies created by men like Singh and his Calapatria lettuce farmers suggests there were a multitude of relationships in the Imperial Valley between business partners, workers and associates. These associations, sometimes fatal, were not

⁷⁵ *People v. Pakhar Singh*, Case No. 14575, 14 (1925), Records from Imperial County Court and Riverside County Court.

always friendly. While this section was an effort to examine how immigrants went to great lengths to support associates and business partners who they built intimate ties with, there is little evidence from these trials that suggested Singh was an abusive employer to the Mexican farmers. Retribution for years of possible pay grievances, or perhaps disputes on the farm between laborers and bosses could have come up during the course of the trial by Mexican immigrant laborers who had a lot at stake. Still, not once in the trial did any of these immigrant laborers suggest that Singh was a difficult boss. Instead, when prosecutors asked how Singh treated them individually prior to the murder of the two White men, many of the Mexican laborers stated simply how Singh was like other bosses, typical, and stayed out of the way for the most part. Given the description portrayed by the prosecution, we can almost imagine Singh to be a tyrant on the lettuce farm. From these few moments in the murder trial, where immigrants publicly testify about the future of their former boss, it's difficult to imagine that they weren't concerned for his welfare. Intimacies across a variety of associations created in the Imperial Valley by a labor economy that required large flows of people coming in contact with racial groups that were sometimes unfamiliar, suggests there was an extraordinary mixing of people that allowed for the possibility to create friendships, associations and kinships. I'm not suggesting laborer-boss hierarchies were not present on the lettuce farm in Calapatria between Singh and his workers, but I'm interested in the possibilities these associations might have created in forming unlikely alliances placing Punjabis to be less desirable.

Dissent for the men who testified in Pakhar Singh's trial took on a variety of forms. Yet, despite their efforts Singh was found guilty by Imperial Valley court. The

difference with this case, however, was this case was eventually taken to the appellate court where Singh was retried on the basis he didn't receive a fair trial by an all White jury. Singh's attorney argued racial discrimination and hatred of Hindu farmers by White proprietors guaranteed he wouldn't receive a fair trial. The case was eventually moved to Riverside County, where Singh's case was eventually overturned and he was released.

Conclusion

Chapter two was an effort to examine the inter-racial intimacies created in the Imperial Valley. While much of my concern focused on competing levels of dissent in the space of the courtroom and in everyday life, Punjabi, Mexican, Chinese and White migrants employed a variety of political strategies to undermine prosecutors' claims in the courtroom. I use these trials as an opportunity to examine the political possibilities these alliances created to combat racial oppression through the creation of intimate bonds and associations. Intimacy, as I suggest was not necessarily a sexual relationship for many of these workers. Despite efforts by prosecutors to portray witnesses as possible victims of their friends or associates, many of these immigrants made conscious decisions not to engage in the project of criminalizing their friends. Instead, many of the witnesses withdrew, denied or even silenced themselves from further criminalization of their most intimate partnerships.

Afterward

When Sarah Johnson called 911 to report an unidentified intruder and shooting in her parent's Bellevue home on September 2, 2003, Idaho police suspected the White teen's nineteen-year-old Mexican boyfriend Bruno Santos was responsible for the murder of her parents. Still, police efforts to charge Santos were not enough and he was eventually released from custody. After reviewing forensic studies of the crime scene and inconsistencies in the White teenager's story, Johnson was convicted of murder in the first degree of her parents Diane and Alan Johnson. According to Johnson, her parents were disgusted by her romantic relationship with Santos, an alleged drug user and illegal immigrant from Mexico. The salaciousness of a White teenager engaging in lewd romantic relationship with a young Mexican man who supposedly manipulated her into killing her family was sensational enough to catch national headlines.⁷⁶ Johnson's defense attorney, Mark Radar, portrayed the sixteen-year-old White girl to be naive, manipulated by Santos to plot against her family. How could an innocent White girl from Idaho's suburbs kill her parents without being manipulated by her Mexican male lover? Although Johnson was officially accused of murdering her parents, the subject of Santos' character as a nefarious sexual partner, drug user, and high school drop out entered into a larger racial discourse about the suspicious sexual affairs of Mexicans residing in America. Certainly, the particularities of Johnson's trial appear to be an isolated episode of random youth violence, however, the media and defense attorney's representation of her Mexican boyfriend as a predator is critical to the research questions put forth in this

⁷⁶ "Santos' American odyssey ends: Johnson boyfriend deported to Mexico for second time," *Idaho Mountain Express*, March 30, 2005.

thesis. Johnson's trial is a caveat into the historical case studies analyzed in this thesis to demonstrate how interconnected race and sexuality are to the formation of racial subjectivity in criminal law and media representations, even today.

One hundred years prior to Johnson's trial, Punjabis living in the Imperial Valley were accused of similar acts of violence against Mexican wives, business partners and haphazard lovers. The difference, however, was Punjabi men in the 1910s were classified to be sexual predators in relation to popular media representations of Black men as pedophiles, rapists and serial killers. Because Johnson was categorized as a White adolescent female, her alleged crime was considered a fluke mishap of misguided love. For Rullia Singh, Gaudet Singh, and Pakhar Singh, violent behavior was anticipated from men who were classified by media to be serial predators. Newspaper coverage in borderland towns, such as the Imperial Valley circulated news about these trials as evidence to classify Punjabi domesticities to be spaces of suspicion. Sexuality, as I argue, is interconnected to systems of racial classification working to discriminate against racial minorities.

Two questions I consider central to my thesis include (1) How were categories of racial difference concerning Sikh men reorganized under sexual terms in relation to Black-White relations in the 1910s? (2) What might court trials in the Imperial Valley suggests about the legal risks Chinese, Mexican and Sikh immigrants were willing to take to protect friends, business associates and kin? The trial proceedings worked to create moral panic in border spaces. Racial anxieties marked Sikh immigrant homes, in particular to be violent, if not lewd, dens of sexual behavior. Knowledge production about Sikh families took place in the courtroom as judges, lawyers and witnesses testified

about immoral behavior in the home. The panic generated by newspapers covering these stories further intensified already held suspicions of transient immigrant men living in close spatial proximity to White families.

The salaciousness of domestic violence as cause for public concern echoed representations of Black male violence in public space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Specifically, popular representations of Black men seducing White women were a constant fear unfolding in plays such as *The Clansmen*. The popularity of these culturally iconic melodramas demonstrated there was an accepted fear in American society about the possibility of White women's vulnerability to Black men. When reading about *The Clansmen* in newspapers, I was initially surprised to find such enthusiasm from residents in San Diego and the Imperial Valley. Border towns, after all, didn't have a large enough Black male population to incite White women's hysteria about being alone in public space. The play, coupled with salacious stories covered by newspapers about Sikh men involved in domestic assaults, worked to classify other racial groups within the framing of a Black-White binary.

The relationality of race creates different possibilities to consider how people in the late nineteenth century made sense of their world according to categories that were already familiar to them. Along those lines, areas of research I intend to pursue in the future will be to interrogate how Mexican subjectivity was produced in relationship to Black masculinity and Asians living in the same border region. Reading the particularities of the court trials involving South Asians made me realize there was a significant voice absent from the trials, namely the victims, and perhaps the sources I strategically decided to use didn't allow for different possibilities for alternative voices,

including the Mexican victims who were represented in court cases by lawyers, judges and family witnesses. What possibilities would a discussion concerning representations of Mexican femininity/masculinity look like in the early twentieth century? What would representations of Mexican femininity and sexuality look like if analyzed in relationship to Blacks and Asians? For example, the Johnson case in 2003 is evidence further interrogation needs to be supported about the popularity of salacious crimes that continue to get newsworthy attention representing Latina/os to be hyper-sexual and nefarious criminals. Because current representations are not always linked to past racial discriminations of Blacks, Asians and even stereotypes of Latinos that change over time, it's easy to disregard how categories of racial/sexual difference are related.

Even though courts suggested many of migrants lacked morality in the 1910s, within these testimonies, there is evidence that people were building their own systems of ethics outside the governance of police officials, judges and lawyers. Re-reading trials to find glimpses of humanity when immigrants were represented as animals was challenging. However, the richness of these stories point to the contradictions present in defendants' everyday lives. On the one hand, there were representations of immigrants being violent. Yet, in the same text, there were references to people refusing to answer questions because they didn't want to get their friends in trouble. The extent to which Punjabis, Chinese and Mexicans were willing to go meant there was a great deal of affinity for one another.

The reason I dedicated the second part of my thesis to examining everyday kinships was because I was frustrated by the lack of humanity represented in court trials and newspapers. When dealing with alleged criminals committing acts of murder, it's

easy to turn them into monsters. I became curious about the everyday lives Punjabi, Chinese, Mexican and White transients created for themselves by dissenting. Because many of these relationships were categorized to be pathological, courts and INS officials went to great lengths to find out information about why these migrants were so willing to put their own safety at risks in order to honor mutual friendships. By building kinships with one another they were able to recover some level of autonomy over their lives.

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