Title

Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty: Sikh Punjabi Negotiations of Statecraft and Racecraft from Colonial Punjab to Imperial United States

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7fx3m1c6

Author

Kaur, Harleen

Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty:

Sikh Punjabi Negotiations of Statecraft and Racecraft

from Colonial Punjab to Imperial United States

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Sociology

by

Harleen Kaur

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty:

Sikh Punjabi Negotiations of Statecraft and Racecraft

from Colonial Punjab to Imperial United States

by

Harleen Kaur

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Karida L Brown, Chair

Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty: Sikh Punjabi Negotiations of Statecraft and Racecraft from Colonial Punjab to Imperial United States interrogates shifting racial subjectivities of the Sikh Punjabi diaspora across empire, specifically asking why and how have U.S. Sikhs mobilized elements of a visibly Othered identity (turban and beard) in service of the state (statecraft) to obtain belonging via whiteness (racecraft)?

Through a transnational, transtemporal analysis of constructed social relations and strategies of governance, I find that Sikh Punjabis have often been at the forefront of constructing borders of whiteness across the colonial map. Key to this construction has been a mobilization of privileged-caste Sikh men's legacy as a "martial race", a category crafted by the British Empire to justify disproportionate recruitment of border territory communities by claiming they were

biologically and culturally suited for military and police service. Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty utilizes this case study of Sikh Punjabis from Punjab to the U.S. to construct theories of state-making, governance, and imperialism that take seriously the legitimacy constructed for the state through racecraft. The dissertation thus finds that the state socializes racialized peoples into particular roles and responsibilities as a means to carry forward colonial legacies of limited incorporation by constructing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion on behalf of the nation-state.

Crossroads of Belonging, Safety, and Sovereignty places nearly 500 pages of British administrative documents, accessed in two locations of the Punjab State Archives, in conversation with two dozen in-depth interviews with U.S. Sikh advocacy leaders, discourse analysis of U.S. Sikh non-profits' advocacy material, six months of focus groups with young Sikh adults from the midwestern U.S., and Sikh community dialogue on Twitter and Instagram. This comparative historical analysis elucidates how British-crafted categories of political governance and social control continue to be mobilized in contemporary Sikh advocacy projects to address hate crime violence and exclusion from racial belonging.

The dissertation of Harleen Kaur is approved.

Marcus Hunter

Rupa Marya

Teresa Cecilia Menjívar

Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo

Karida L Brown, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

Dedicated to an anti-colonial ardaas and all those who carry it in their hearts:

ਦਿੱਲੀ ਤਖ਼ਤ ਪਰ ਬਹੇਗੀ ਆਪ ਗੁਰੂ ਕੀ ਫ਼ੌਜ।

ਛਤਰ ਫਿਰੇਗਾ ਸੀਸ ਪਰ ਬੜੀ ਕਰੇਗੀ ਮੌਜ।

ਰਾਜ ਕਰੇਗਾ ਖ਼ਾਲਸਾ ਆਕੀ ਰਹੇ ਨ ਕੋਇ।

ਖੁਆਰ ਹੋਏ ਸਭ ਮਿਲਾਂਗੇ ਬਚੇ ਸ਼ਰਨ ਜੋ ਹੋਇ।

delhi takht par bahegi aap guru ki fauj,

chattar firega sees par badi karegi mauj,

raaj karega khalsa aaakki rahe na koye,

khuaar hoye sab milainge bache sharan jo hoye

On the Delhi throne, the Army of the Guru will sit,

The royal umbrella will float over their heads, and they will experience great delight,

The Khalsa will rule without defiance,

The areas and people who are missing will be reunited, those who take refuge in it will be saved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART THREE: Sikh-Centered Methods

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

For a dissertation that was completed more during a global pandemic than not and a graduate school experience that occurred more remote from campus than on, this much is for certain – there would be no dissertation without the mercy of Akaal Purakh and the blessings of Guru Sahib.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

I am grateful to the intellectual community who has guided this project from my first day at UCLA. For Dr. Karida Brown, thank you for reading between the lines I left unsaid, for seeing dreams in me and my work that I had yet to imagine, and for always orienting me to something outside of and greater than ourselves and the University. However, if it was your investment in community that carried me through, it was Dr. Marcus Hunter's imagination that lit a fire in me. From our first one-on-one conversation to my dissertation defense, you have kept the faith alive in Khalistan! In this, I heard a reminder to not confine myself to what already exists or is seen as possible in this world, but to derive and divine a Sociology that can envision future worlds. From both Drs. Brown and Hunter, I hope to carry forward your gift of a Du Boisian spirit and intellect of emancipatory sociology. Dr. Cecilia Menjívar, you taught me how to study the state while centering the humanity of those who are subject to its failings – a truly rare balance. Dr. Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, thank you for giving me a home in Asian American Studies, for showing me how to make real worlds beyond our own, and for always reminding me how much more there is to remember. Dr. Rupa Marya, your work came to me as a blessing that will continue to bear fruit, and to say I am inspired by your commitment to anti-colonial praxis would be an understatement.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the faculty who poured their time and energy into me, especially while having no contractual commitment. Dr. Aliza Luft and Dr. Jeff Guhin, through each conversation and step of the way, thank you for viewing me as a sociologist (and for Dr. Luft, as a teacher) before I had enough faith in myself to believe such was true. Dr. Vilma Ortiz and Dr. Abigail Saguy, your guidance in the earlier years of this program and your encouragement in completing some of my first major milestones made the difference between my staying and leaving. Dr. Nesha Z. Haniff, you know this dissertation would not have happened if not for you. From POA to UCLA, you have been my driving motivation of how to do radical community work within the walls of the University. You inspire me every day, and I dream of carrying forward your visionary work. I am also grateful for the financial support received from UCLA's Graduate Division, Asian American Studies Center, International Institute, Canadian Studies Department, and the Sociology Department for the completion of this dissertation.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

Community happens in countless ways in graduate school. First, my cohort mates, Anthony James Williams, Kali Tambreé, and Josefina Flores Morales. While our paths have gone different ways, I am so grateful that each of yours continued to cross with mine. Ant, thank you for being my thought partner in research, pedagogy, and liberation. So many tough moments would not have been survived if not for your constant support these last five years. Kali, I am so grateful I spent my two years in LA with you; your creativity, your ability to bend the lines of scholarly work, and your capacious intellect continue to inspire me. Josefina, I know for certain I would not have a dissertation if not for our coworking sessions the last several years. Thank you for being my check-in buddy, for cheering me on, and – most of all – for reminding me when it's time to take a break. Outside of my cohort, Sera and Victoria, I love talking critical and radical Asian American and

Sociology scholarship with you and am honored to watch you both producing it. I am grateful for our friendship that has flourished through organizing, writing, and thinking together. Jessica, my literary sister, thank you for taking care of me when I forgot how, and for reminding me what friendship looks like within the walls of the University. To Dr. Rocío García, thank you for being my light in the program and lighting the path out of it, too. Your care and compassion – in research, pedagogy, and relation – have been my nourishment. Two important community groups gave me the intellectual homes that I was craving: UCLA's Memory Studies Working Group (Jen and Ariel!) and Sanctuary Spaces Writing Group (Max, Jackie, Sarah, and Brisa!). Without the interlocutors I gained through these spaces, I would never have created a dissertation that I am proud to call my own.

The other aspect of community is those who hold you up off campus, and I am grateful to have so many. Dr. prabhdeep ji and Dr. Tavleen bhenji, you are my constant inspirations. Both of you are truly honorary members of my dissertation committee. You have built the path I have walked on, fed me in person (café dates with Tavleen bhenji) or from afar (biweekly calls with prabh ji), and kept me assured that this path does have many trees with fruit along the way. Most of all, you reminded me that we always have the ever-flourishing tree of Gurmat guiding us, so we can never truly get lost along the way. Kanwalroop, thank you for being my Kaur sister on campus. Seeing your dastaar from afar never failed to lift my spirits and remind me that we are doing this all for the Panth. Natasha bhenji, Bhajneet veerji, Ajeet Singh, Simer Singh, Kirpa Kaur, Parminder massiji, Pargat massarji, and SPK bhain – you all are my LA family and I miss you daily. (To Natasha bhenji, I am still sad I never really moved in!) You all kept me sane, reminded me how to have fun, to stay connected to my roots and continue to stay grounded in sangat, and to never take myself or school too seriously. I didn't always listen well, but your wisdom, love, and

care kept me alive those first two years and will continue to flourish inside me for years to come. For all eight of you, your love and faith in me kept me nourished in the long weeks between each Sunday divaan. Lastly, my immense gratitude to all the friends who kept calling, texting, only asking how much longer until I was finished every *other* call, sending care packages, coming to visit whenever possible – you all are the MVPs. Carly, Rasna, Carlina, Kamneev, Mohena, Mahi, Baani, Isha, Prince veerji, Damneet, Lakhpreet bhenji, Gabby, Letlhogonolo – thank you for always checking in, even when I forgot to text or call, and not holding any judgement for my long absences in between. Deleska, thank you for keeping me in the "just this": divine love and self.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

For my family, what words could ever be sufficient? harnoor singh, you inspire me each and every day with your commitment to Guru Sahib, to learning, to growing, to questioning, to (re)building. Thank you for always thinking I'm smarter than I am and loving me more than I love myself. Being your older sister gives me the pride to do everything that I do in this world. For my parents, Amarjeet Kaur and Kartar Singh, if I wrote another entire dissertation of thanks, it still would not be enough for all you have done for me. Dad, thank you for not losing patience when I changed my major almost every week of freshman and sophomore year, but encouraging me to do something I would be content with for the rest of my life. Thank you for teaching me to trust my own opinion, even when you didn't always agree with it. Thank you for building a life here as a solo graduate student so that I could have a home when it was my turn to do the same. Mom, thank you for feeding me, for sitting with me quietly on the phone while I rode the bus home in LA, for asking me to explain what I studied (again) so you could explain it to your friends properly, for always thinking the world of me even though you don't realize you are the world for me.

I see now why people don't recommend getting married when you have two months until your dissertation defense. Thankfully, my new family members are the most gracious, kind, and open-minded people you will ever meet. To my new family – Arvinder Kaur, Kunwar Singh, Anup Kaur, and Rabir Singh –, thank you for letting me disappear for the first two months of our time together. Especially to Arvinder Kaur, I am grateful for your constant reminders to "get rid of that internalized patriarchal bullsh*t" and stop worrying about how much I am helping at home. You teach me more than you know. For my life partner, Japjyot Singh…you know I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. Your faith in me takes my breath away daily and you couldn't have come into my life at a better time. While most people say graduate school makes them lose their sense of self, you have carried me through these last few years with a love, compassion, and patience that has made me commit to the best version of myself – for the Panth and for you.

ੴ ਸਤਿਗੁਰ ਪ੍ਰਸਾਦਿ॥

While I wrote this dissertation alone, the world I have crafted inside of it is due to my countless community interlocutors. You will come to learn some of their names in the following pages, but many of them are unnamed to me, as well. From the young Kaurs who lined up after my first ever conference presentation to tell me how much they loved what I shared, to the uncles and aunties who thanked me but pushed me further. To the California youth camps and gurdwaras that welcomed me with open arms and the many online webinars and conferences I took part in since 2020. Although I began this dissertation seeking a greater understanding of a global Sikh community, I am not sure my knowledge of such has grown; however, I am certain my love for one has. This work, and all that is still to come, it is all because of you.

ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕਾ ਖਾਲਸਾ ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਿਹ!

HARLEEN KAUR

EDUCATION
2019   M.A., Sociology, University of California, Los Angeles
2015   B.A., English, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

PUBLICATIONS
Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles
Kaur, Harleen. 2020. "Making Citizenship, Becoming Citizens: How Sikh Punjabis Shaped the Exclusionary Politics of Belonging." *Amerasia Journal* 46(1): 107-122.

Kaur, Harleen and prabhdeep singh kehal (equal authorship). 2020. "Sikhs as Implicated Subjects in the United States: A Reflective Essay (ਵਿਚਾਰ) on Gurmat-Based Interventions in the Movement for Black Lives." *Sikh Research Journal* 5(2):68-86.

Book Chapters
Kaur, Harleen. Forthcoming. "Radical Narrative Traditions: Communal Storytelling as a Praxis for Liberation." In *Small Axe Fall Big Tree: The Pedagogy of Action*, edited by Nesha Z. Haniff. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kaur, Harleen and Simran Jeet Singh. 2016. "Guru Nanak and the Foundation of Sikhi." In *Great Events in Religion: An Encyclopedia of Pivotal Events in Religious History*, edited by Florin Curta and Andrew Holt. ABC-Clio.

Kaur, Harleen. 2014. "Moving ~~On~~ Forward." In *Her Name Is Kaur: Sikh American Women Write about Love, Courage, and Faith*, edited by Meeta Kaur and Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh. She Writes Press.

WORKS IN PROGRESS
Kaur, Harleen. Legacies of a Martial Race: Sikh Punjabi Investment and Implication in the Police State.

Kaur, Harleen and Katie Byrd, Nadia R. Davis, and Taylor M. Williams. Small Revolutions: Methodologies of Black Feminist Consciousness-Raising and the Politics of Ordinary Resistance.

Kaur, Harleen. The Im/material, the Intimate, and the Ethnographer: Considering Practices of Ethnography for Racialized Religious Communities.

Kaur, Harleen and prabhdeep singh kehal. Epistemic Wounded Attachments: Recovering Definitional Subjectivity through Colonial Libraries.

Kaur, Harleen and Victoria Tran. Extinguishing Asian Insurgency: The Limits of State-Asian Diaspora Relationality in Contemporary Sociology.

GRANTS
2021-2022   International Institute Dissertation Fieldwork Fellowship, UCLA ($1,550)

2020-2021	Sanctuary Spaces Sawyer Seminar Writing Group, UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy ($1,500)
2020	Graduate Council Diversity Summer Fellowship, UCLA ($8,000)
2020	Institute of American Cultures Research Grant, Asian American Studies Center, UCLA ($6,250)
2019-2020	Graduate Research Mentorship Program, Graduate Division, UCLA ($25,000)
2019	Summer Funding, Sociology Department, UCLA ($2,000)
2019	Research Travel Grant, Canadian Studies, UCLA ($1,000)
2018	Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Program, Graduate Division, UCLA ($6,000)

HONORS, AWARDS, FELLOWSHIPS

2019	Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Department of Sociology, UCLA
2017-2022	Eugene V. Cota-Robles Fellowship, Graduate Division, UCLA ($25,000)
2015-2016	Bonderman Fellowship, Center for Global and Intercultural Study, UMichigan ($20,000)

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

"'Revolutionary Love Has Freed Me More Times Than One': Liberation Praxis Imagined by Sikh Youth." Society for the Scientific Study of Religion annual meeting, Baltimore, MD, November 2022.

"Imperial Racecraft: a Du Boisian framework of Sikh subjectivity." Beyond Militarism conference, University of Cambridge, September 2022.

"Statecraft and Borderwork: Emerging Frontiers of Political and Social Representation in Colonial Punjab." Session on Decolonizing the Sociology of Law: Gender, Race, and the Global South, American Sociological Association annual meeting, Los Angeles, CA, August 2022.

"Saving Empire, Protecting the State: How a British 'Martial Race' Legacy Informs Sikh Punjabi Projects of Belonging in the US." Session on Challenging Legal Heritages, Global Meeting on Law & Society, ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon, July 2022.

"The Im/material, the Intimate, and the Ethnographer: Considering Practices of Ethnography for Racialized Religious Communities." Chicago Ethnography Conference, University of Wisconsin, April 2022. [virtual]

"Intellectual Wounded Attachments: Definitional Recoveries with Colonial Libraries and Epistemes" with prabhdeep singh kehal. American Association of Religion Annual Conference, November 2021. [virtual]

"Statecraft and Borderwork: Emerging Frontiers of Political and Social Representation in Colonial Punjab." New Directions in Law and Society: A Graduate Student and Junior Scholar Workshop; Center for Justice, Law, and Societies; University of Massachusetts, October 2021. [virtual]

"Intellectual Wounded Attachments: Discursive Repair or Colonial Persistence?" with prabhdeep singh kehal. Thinking at the border: Post- and decolonial theory and epistemic injustice, Department of Education, University of Oxford, September 2021. [virtual]

PART ONE

Sikhs of Empire, Sikhs for the Nation-State

Chapter One

IMPERIAL RACECRAFT:

a Du Boisian framework of Sikh subjectivity

> I remember once offering to an editor an article which began with a reference to the experience of the last century. "Oh," he said, "leave out the history and come to the present." I felt like going to him over a thousand miles and taking him by the lapels and saying, "Dear, dear jackass! Don't you understand that the past is the present; that without what was, nothing is? That, of the infinite dead, the living are but unimportant bits?"
> - W.E.B. Du Bois, *The World and Africa* (1947:80)

W.E.B. Du Bois's 1947 publication, *The World and Africa*, examines the European colonization and plunder of the continent of Africa as a necessary contextualization of subjectivities of Black peoples globally. The same year this vital text was published, Sikhs were experiencing the fallout of their own experiences of colonialism: the partition of Punjab, occurring against the independence of India from British colonial rule. Thus, while 1947 marks a critical fractioning point for Sikh Punjabis, who were not formally included in the new Muslim Pakistan nor Hindu-centric India, this experience of partition is simultaneously elided against the celebration of India's independence on August 15th each year. As India increasingly forges its own independent, postcolonial nation, the mourning of Punjab is thrust further and further into history – the exact kind an editor might say must be left behind to come into the present.

Similarly, this dissertation takes a comparative-historical approach contemporary subjectivities of the US-based Sikh diaspora, examining the shifts in conceptualizations of sovereignty that occurred through a century of British occupation in Punjab and the subsequent forced migration through the partition of Punjab into Hindustan (i.e., India) and Pakistan. Molded through the colonial theories of the Sikh "martial race" and erased through the denial of a Sikh state of Khalistan, I draw from Fanonian theories of colonization (1963) to argue that the collective

Sikh psyche continues to be unsettled, and sense of belonging fractured, by the dissonance between being afforded special status in service of the British Raj, the particular harm afforded to Sikhs through partition, and the anti-Sikh violence carried out by the Indian state. In this analysis, I am in conversation with several theoretical frameworks, starting with Charles Tilly's (1985) conceptualization of state-making as eliminating domestic enemies alongside indigenous notions of the colonial disruption of subjectivity-formation. With the inclusion of the latter, I am able to study the embodied trauma of displacement that results from colonialism and how resisters of the state are socialized and constructed into makers of the state (Byrd 2011; Marya 2018). I apply Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995) theorization surrounding silences in the archive – emerging through processes of fact creation, assembly, retrieval, and retrospective significance – to silences in collective postmemory, or the traumatic fragments of past events that live on in the present, seemingly part of one's own conscious memory despite never experiencing such events (Hirsch 1992). Rather than studying Sikh belonging along a linear timeline of historical and contemporary precarity, I use Mark Rifkin's (2017) temporal orientation framework to dissect historic, state-sanctioned violence against Sikhs in colonial and post-partition Punjab while oriented towards ongoing experiences of Sikh unsettlement within nation-state frameworks of belonging (Mankekar 2015). Studying silences in Sikh postmemory that now limit imaginings of Sikh liberation, this project contributes to theoretical knowledge on how hauntings of past trauma are not simply relived but recreated through the present-day rendering of their significance.

Such an exploration is not only crucial to understanding Sikh diasporic processes of identity-formation and belonging, but also provides critical insight into the mechanisms of a racialized modernity through which Self and community are crafted into symbolic categories to the benefit of state function and operation (Bourdieu 1987; Fields and Fields 2012). Answering

the recent calls by scholars to take up and develop a framework for contemporary, global Du Boisian Sociology (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Morris 2015), this paper ventures into the interstices in theorizing on racecraft, the intimate relationships between people and state, and the nuances in institutional belonging. I expand beyond the binary of marking individuals and communities as singularly victim or perpetrator in the global color line (Du Bois 1947; Rothberg 2019). Instead, grounding my analysis in a historical and relational analysis of Sikh subjectivity through British colonization and pursuant migration to and settlement in the United States, this dissertation develops a framework to explore racial subjectivity and responsibility through global histories of power, domination, and struggles for agency. A relational analysis is central to my framework given how British racecraft was deeply reliant upon its ability to create markers of similarity and difference *across* their various colonial projects, and imperial and labor migration also played a large part in overlapping these racial categorizations as colonial subjects were moved through empire for imperial service (Osborne 2014; Rand and Wagner 2012; Streets 2004). Thus, this project will theorize how understanding racism as crafted through imperialism is not only significant to a historical framework for localized social relations, but a transnational and transtemporal one, as well.

More specifically, I will demonstrate the saliency and applicability of my core theoretical offering from the manuscript: imperial racecraft. Imperial racecraft provides an analytical framework to study how, when, and through which means, racial categorization shifts to justify the ongoing production of war, terror, nationalism, and military pride as a tactic of inclusion and exclusion simultaneously (Fields and Fields 2012; Kumar 2020; Mills 1997; Nopper 2020). The framework does so by grounding itself in both contemporary and foundational sociological literature which put forth that (1) modernity is constructed by racial and colonial capitalism and

(2) imperialism is primarily a tactic of capital accumulation (Du Bois 1947; Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Tilly 1985). For this project, imperial racecraft is useful for making sense of the through lines from colonial administrative strategies to contemporary state politics and community advocacy. In three particular ways – relevant to this and future projects –, imperial racecraft offers a framework for (1) studying racism, empire, and subjectivity-formation through multiple and simultaneous histories, locations, and memories; (2) refusing to occlude that racialized and precarious communities have played vital roles in building empire through tactics like policing and surveillance which subjugated them concurrently; and (3) making clear that state justifications for racism are constantly shifting to protect the status quo and power hierarchies which benefit the state. In one way, then, imperial racecraft is an examination of how racialized, colonized peoples are both enabled to and limited from enacting agency within the nation-state framework, based on historical categories through which they also gain power. With this, the dissertation contributes to literature on subjectivity-formation, racecraft, and statecraft by considering how community-led negotiations of inclusive and exclusive boundaries are institutionalized into mechanisms of the state, yet again.

SIKHI & SIKHS, FROM A BEGINNING

Historical narrativization, or saakhis, are central to Sikh praxis. In learning their history, Sikhs gain a glimpse into how to practice Sikhi through various lived examples, rather than creating Sikhi as a solely textual practice that can be siloed into one interpretation. By learning Sikh history, young Sikhs learn of the Sikh Gurus, who founded and embodied the traditions themselves; a crucial lesson that the enlightened live among us, and we all are capable of such divine lived practice. As a result, Sikh history immediately translates into a framework and implication for contemporary and future Sikh action. One community interlocutor, Rubin Paul Singh, shared in

an interview, "As a history teacher, I'm always pointing to PowerPoint slides of what great things Sikhs did in the late 1800s, early 1900s. My hope is that my great-grandchildren are not pointing to the same slides." Telling saakhis, a primarily oral tradition, contemporary Sikh practices emerge from the collective interrogation and reinterpretation of historical events through the ongoing relevance to living Sikh bodies. I say this to also note that the following narrativization will have its own emphasis relative to this project; rather than view these as shortcomings, I consider the nuance in different Sikh histories as a useful signifier of the stakes and relative positions of power from which they are told. Such an understanding of Sikh historical narrativization also has implications for the methods I use for this project: state archives in Punjab alongside community narratives collected through semi-structured interviews and virtual ethnography.

The archive has been contested as a space of knowing and unknowing by scholars across disciplinary lines. Achille Mbembe (2002) theorizes the archive as an actor of the state, since the archive works to construct collective memory within a physical entity owned by the state. Conflict archives, however, have functioned to "take on new meaning," as records "initially used by the state as a means to control citizens and quell opposition…can become the evidence used by victims and their relatives for the purposes of accountability, memory making and truth seeking" (Wisser and Blanco-Rivera 2016:126). Doing so forces the archive to reckon with contemporary ramifications of that past – engaging in an ongoing process of discursive knowledge production and the self-reflexivity of present moments speaking to historical "pre-conditions" (Hall 2001). Still, conducting the archival spatial and temporal politic as one for justice, one must consider what is not there or, more significantly, what is left out. As Saidiya Hartman asks us, "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?" (2008:3). More particularly, how do we grapple with being completely unprepared to confront a reality whose

history has not been adequately documented nor articulated (Foner 2003), or those whose traces and connections must be re-established through our engagement with the archive (Lowe 2015).

As such, the synthesizing of commemoration and archive is critical to develop a historical narrative that is neither content with silences in the archive nor the tensions of historical narrativization (Trouillot 1995; White 1987). In his transformative work on oral history as a method, Alessandro Portelli made clear the necessity to include oral narrative in research methodology:

> Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did…*Subjectivity is as much the business of history as are the more visible 'facts.'* What informants believe is indeed a historical fact (that is, the fact they believe it), as much as what really happened. (1991:50, emphasis mine)

Alongside this notion of what informants believe, there is the important contribution from memory studies on making sense of what we have not experienced directly, and yet very intimately know. This comes from Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (2012). While originating out of Holocaust Studies, postmemory has great implications for state and structural trauma of vast proportions, both in filling intentional and accidental gaps in archival data, as well as understanding the structural implications for past moments of state formation in the present. This exploration in memory studies and trauma will be key in understanding how collective memory that retains histories of colonization and racism impacts current tactics and definitions of what it means to belong, through or outside of the nation-state. By situating archival data within contemporary narratives of state formation, colonization,

and racialization, I aim to provide a full context of the power and oppression being exacted upon the memories being preserved and erased.

Sikhs before the British: Origins & Transformations

From 1469 to 1702, Sikhi was manifested through the teachings and practices of ten living Gurus, whose wisdom countered Brahman traditions of casteism and global practices of sexism and misogyny. Rather than rely upon categorical identities of discrimination and devalued lives, the Sikh Gurus instructed that all life was created from the same jot (light) and emerged from one creative force: Vaaheguru, the great universal teacher. A force beyond description or containment, Vaaheguru is the energy with which all Sikhs are instructed to re-merge within their lifetimes through a devotion to this notion of Oneness and inherent lack of division amongst *all* living creatures; this also means rejecting a humanist perspective as too restrictive and reiterating a human supremacy of sorts. Over these two-and-a-half centuries, the Gurus shared a message of Oneness by traveling and speaking with various spiritual and political leaders, as well as with those without power. The Gurus, through multiple saakhis, are shown to have prioritized one's actual virtues or ethical practice over the appearance of goodness or morality that a person might appear to embody. This often led to a rejection of worldly power status quos, which had detrimental effects; both the fifth and ninth Sikh Gurus were martyred by the Mughal Emperors of their times. Even Gurus who were not martyred often faced the wrath of state and imperial authorities, such as being jailed for months at a time or waging ongoing battles against Mughal forces significantly larger than the entire Sikh community at the time.

Outside of simply producing knowledge or wisdom around the practice of Oneness, known as Gurmat, the Gurus were known for creating institutions to put such practices into place. The gurdwara, literally the door to the Guru, was one such place where Sikhs gathered to receive,

discuss, and learn Gurmat and practice such teachings through institutions like langar. Langar resisted Brahmanical notions of purity and social segregation by requiring all community members to sit on the ground and share in a community-made meal, a practice carried out in Sikh spaces to this day. Sikh Gurus created cities, social practices around key transition moments in life (birth, death, marriage), and transformed Sikh practices into maryada (lived discipline) without a rejection of living in relation to family and community (grist jeevan). The Gurus gifted their sovereign Sikhs these messages in the form of Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, the eternal Guru of Sikhs since 1708. Guru Granth Sahib Ji is made up of 1430 angs (limbs) of transcendent poetry, writing, and reflections of Sikh Gurus and other mystics to reflect the universality of Oneness, thus demonstrating the embodied notion of living Guru through shabad (divine word) Guru.

In brief, from 1708 until the mid-1800s when the British reached Punjab, Sikhs experienced the fall and rise of political and social capital over Punjab. Sikh misls, literally translating to "a file" but meaning the Sikh states of the late 1700s, were the primary political construction of Sikhs at the end of the Mughal Empire. Eventually, one misl rose to power and became the monarchical empire of Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh, through his political negotiating prowess, would expand his territory from Punjab to Afghanistan all the way to Nepal (shown in map below). This was the state of Punjab upon the arrival of the British East India Trading Company in 1845, when the First Anglo-Sikh War was fought.

From Final Enemies to First Defenders of the British Raj

In conquering the entirety of the Indian subcontinent, the British needed to secure all borders in order to have a successful rule; a large part of this was the western border with modern-day Afghanistan. Prior to British colonization, this region was held by a monarchical empire led by

Ranjit Singh from 1799-1849.[1] Ranjit's desire to establish parity, and in many cases superiority, to British East India officials as they captured the subcontinent led to intricate relations of courting, trading, and gendered politics of power between his empire and the
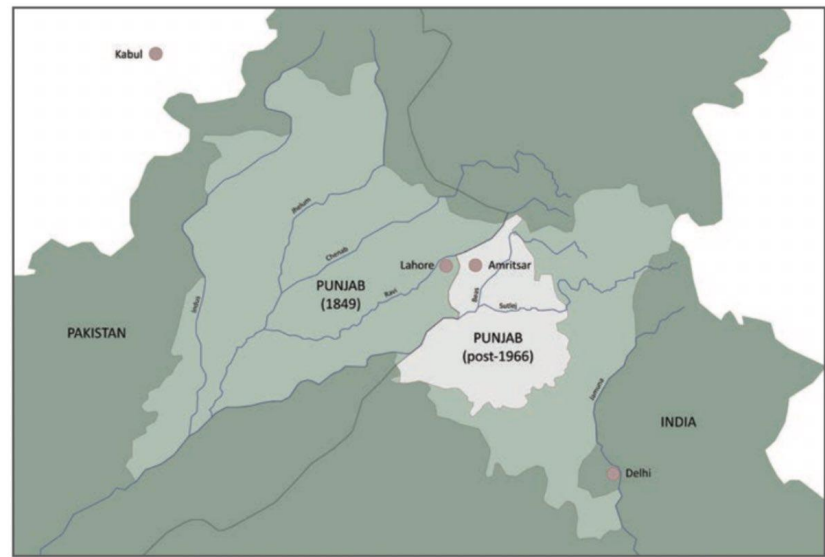
Today, Indian Punjab (in white) is less than a third of the size of the original Punjab when it was annexed by the British in 1849 (in light green).

Figure 1.1 - Digital map of pre-colonial versus post-partition Punjab.

trading company until his death in 1839. After his death, Ranjit's desire to build friendly relations allowed for the British to infiltrate his kingdom and impose patriarchal standards on who could rule, which greatly weakened the kingdom as they had built up an empire through the political prowess of many queens and princes alongside Ranjit Singh as king (Atwal 2020). As a result, the empire fell to in-fighting, largely occuring due to British infiltration of their ranks, which eventually weakened the rule enough for British conquest in 1849 through a defeat in the Second Anglo-Sikh War. This was the final region conquered in British colonization, thus completing the project for a full British India and control of the subcontinent. The Sikh Raj, holding this position as the final enemies of the British empire, initiated a particular subjectivity of simultaneous reverence and fear. Bearing witness to Sikh martial ability, and also requiring its shortcomings in order to realize British colonial vision, intertwined Sikh ability, power, and identity with British

---

[1] For the sake of establishing the positionality of Sikhs in the decades leading up to and entering a state of subordination by the British, I attempt a brief summary of this history that is significantly more intricate and nuanced than what this project can allow space to discuss. More detailed historiographies can be found in Atwal (2020) and Singh (1963).

ideals of conquest, superiority, and royalty. The ongoing battle to return the Koh-i-noor Diamond to India – contained in the Queen of England's crown and entered into British possession during the fall of Ranjit Singh's empire – is one of many examples of how British conceptualizations of demonstrating power and luxury emerged through their final stage of Indian conquest through the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

This entry of Sikhs into British consciousness as the final enemies to the realization of a British Raj, or the last stand of a pre-colonial India, allows us to consider how Sikh incorporation into the empire was formulated. The British Empire, in annexing the Sikh Raj and acquiring that land in its territory, now faced the Durrani Empire and its allies in Russia. This required building a solid border and community of defense against the Durrani Empire, and who better to do it than the martial race of Sikhs who had held their resolve and demonstrated "distinguished gallantry at the siege" of their lands by the British (Mazumder 2003:9)? By incorporating previous *targets* of war-making efforts into the empire, the British were able to extract the resources and skills available in Sikh communities, now for the case of protection – both of the empire and its resources and promised protection to Sikhs from other enemies (the breaking of this promise would lead to anti-colonial radicalization later on). Renegotiating relationality to extraction, protection, and war-making was crucial to the state-making process of the British Empire, and thus deeply relied on Sikh psychological buy-in to create the empire through its labor and lack of further resistance.

Even stronger Punjabi-British, and thus Sikh-British, relations manifested through the creation of Punjab as the center of British martial defense, in order to protect against a potential Russian invasion from the northwest. As the British strengthened their base and control over what was then called the North West Frontier Province, they also engaged in state-making through protection that benefitted Punjabis: "The building of roads, railways, and telegraph lines, and the

construction of cantonments, were all the result of purely military need, but their incidental consequence was to create an economic infrastructure" (Karuka 2019; Mazumder 2003:4). This economic infrastructure would not only provide infrastructural benefits to Punjabis (for the time being), but, because of the great influx of need for military service in the region, the financial benefits of military service began to pour into rural areas in Punjab. This provided Punjab's Sikh majority with financial wealth on a scale they had never experienced, which thus facilitated continued support for colonial rule and imperial service (Mazumder 2003). As this continued to build into a disproportionate reliance of the British rule on Punjabi Sikh military forces, "the state was willing to compromise [on certain policy decisions] in order to prevent unrest in militarised districts spreading to the army" (Mazumder 2003:5), or incorporation and identity modification into the military as Imy (2019) argued. Some scholars argue that this seemingly poised strategy actually demonstrated the deep-seeded anxiety, fear, and insecurity about the strength and power the empire could maintain to control "native" troops, which later emerged through extreme violent physical and mental suppression of anti-colonial organizing in Punjab (Condos 2017). Given the precarious and intricate reliance that the British built on Sikh bodies and Sikh investment in their rule, a central guiding my research is, why did Sikhs not resist or restrain British colonial powers in Punjab on a large scale? While there are many ways to pursue this broadly-significant puzzle of colonizer-colonized relations, imperial racecraft makes sense of these questions through the colonial mechanisms that weaponized Sikh loyalty to the British and continue to take shape in Sikh investments in power and privilege today.

British Raj & the Sikh Martial Race

Du Bois's work on the color line grounds the production of race in a colonial, capitalist, *globalized* endeavor to create ideologies that could be rationalized for the sake of securing wealth and power

on an individual and collective level (1903, 1920, 1940). These ideologies are not self-sufficient nor simply imagined; they are *crafted* continuously and meticulously based on historic and national topographies, acted upon again and again, until they are built into a structural reality of vivid truth (Fields and Fields 2012). Connected through a "transnational white polity, a virtual community of people linked by their citizenship in Europe at home and abroad", the racial contract of whiteness establishes historic and ongoing processes of categorical belonging that emerge as our present "racialized modernity" (Itzigsohn and Brown 2020; Mills 1997:29). Deconstructing this racialized modernity as it manifests through governed social relations requires a historical analysis of the construction of these categories and the ways the state benefits by creating them (Hammer 2020; Kumar 2020). In his later work, Du Bois argued that historical processes of racecraft have been subsumed by the historical narrative written by Western, white, male historians to sustain contemporary power relations between Western nation-states and the theories of innate white superiority (Du Bois 1947; Trouillot 1995; White 1987). Contemporary historians also acknowledge how scholarly productions of historical narrative, originating out of Europe, have always been tied to the nation-state and called upon to increase patriotism; having an uncritical, celebratory view of the role of history ignores such motivations (Foner 2003). Du Bois's later work provides a helpful guide to develop a framework for interrogating the entanglements of racecraft and statecraft as they emerge in sociological and historical inquiry. In interrogating the implications of European colonization in his time, Du Bois articulates a narrative historical method that requires unearthing the agency of state and community actors in the past to understand their descendants' contemporary struggles for belonging and equal recognition (Du Bois 1947).

The British construction of the martial race is one such project of racecraft that requires extricating the agency of actors to understand the project's full transnational and transtemporal

implications for colonial statecraft. British makings of a martial race were not unique to India but were utilized across their colonial regime to identify Indigenous communities' roles in the colonial state in a "scientific" manner, perhaps an extension of the racial illogics that were used to justify chattel slavery and the transatlantic slave trade (Edmondson 1976; Rand and Wagner 2012). British discussions of the utility of Sikhs, such as Major-General George MacMunn's analysis that a Sikh man's "slow wit and dogged courage give him many of the characteristics of the British soldier at his best" (1911:139–40), illuminate the ways in which British colonial racecraft was as much a project of forcing British ideals of masculinized power onto the martial races as it was a project to construct British notions of power, gender, and race through colonial rule (Condos 2017; Streets 2004). Some scholars even argue that the main profit of the martial theory is that it helped Britishers make sense of why Sikhs seemed so relatable, and also civilizable, which is what truly led to the eventual historical narrativization that Sikh Punjabis were Aryan race descendants, allowing even further proximity to colonial power (Jakobsh 2003). It was through the project of martial race and these strategies of incorporation of Indigenous communities into imperial forces that the British built their power, and also the site that they attempted to stabilize their rule over a diverse range of cultural and religious communities (Imy 2019). While the British Raj might not have secured a permanent colonial state in India through this project, it did successfully embed tactics of colonial racecraft into local, postcolonial subjectivity: "In fixing martiality as an effect of race and history, the British were able to negate their role in the making of India's martial subjects and disguise the interests vested in such a project" (Rand 2006:15). Constructing a historical analysis of British projects of racecraft requires recontextualizing this limited imperial incorporation of non-white, Indigenous identities into a British conception of colonial power – again, a form of imperial racecraft.

Colonization disrupted Indigeneity and belonging by refiguring the category of the 'Indian' and 'native belonging' as discursive tools of empire to envision belonging through settler-coloniality, which manifested through violent supremacist orders and the resulting trauma of theft of land, resources, and lives (Mamdani 2020; Marya 2018). Through successful theft and implementation of colonial power, colonial states could then expand both into the conquered territories, as well as surrounding regions, through the secondary project of imperialism (Byrd 2011). Although most strategies of colonization concentrated on violent subjugation of "the natives", British imperialism provides a unique case in that it made use of Indigenous communities in large numbers; this meant British colonial power depended upon employing a large majority of Indigenous community members to enact the violence required to establish and maintain colonial rule (Mazumder 2003; Rand 2006). In order to do so, British colonial tactics accounted for local social hierarchies (e.g., caste system in India) to further British ideas of masculine physical strength, which then allowed the British to deeply engrain a sense of loyalty to the Crown by rooting the honor of imperial service on notions of biological and cultural identity (Osborne 2014). Utilizing already-existing hierarchies and systems of power allowed colonizers to capitalize on the logics of oppression that were already legible in order to establish their own rule.

Scholars of south Asia argue it was primarily "Punjab's frontier location with relation to Afghanistan and the display of Punjabi loyalty during the Sepoy Uprising of 1857 [which] influenced the shift of the Indian army's recruitment centre to this province, political expediency was soon welded to Victorian racial ideology" (Das 2018:76). I take Das's postulation as a representative process of imperial racecraft, in which British motivations for capital accumulation through expansion of territory was also deeply invested in crafting local ideologies of race through existing social hierarchies, such as caste, gender, and religion versus secularity. Considering the

central role of imperialism and war-making to the solidification of the state (Tilly 1985), the simultaneous establishment of who is being protected against whom occurs through the explicit identification of social groups and categories which previously might have been implicit (Bourdieu 1987). This symbolic production of power is enacted through "objective institutions," which are able to take proximities in social space and transmute them into an ideology that is disguised as the logics of social relation (Fields 1990). These intertwined and circuitous processes of statecraft continue to reify the state's imagined communities, immersing the state in a constant process of becoming through bureaucratic and administrative formalities for the sake of protection against perceived and constructed violence (Anderson 1983). Statecraft plays out as a bureaucratic sleight of hand, disguising and submerging the violence the state is enacting through the creation of symbols, ideologies, and perceivable objective truths. The pervasiveness of these ideologies is demonstrated in the historical reality that British makings of a martial race were not unique to India[2], but in fact were utilized across their colonial regime to apply white logics and methods to identity markers in a "scientific" manner (Edmondson 1976; Rand and Wagner 2012).

Further, the martial racialization project served to develop a relationship with the colonizer on the basis of imperial service, or state creation through war (Tilly 1985). By making colonized people feel as if they had a stake in the new state that was being created, particularly smaller communities who were left out of this process previously, it gave these communities the feeling they were gaining some aspect of belonging, power, or agency through imperial service. However, this did not eliminate all potential contradictions of identity construction. In her 2019 book *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army*, Kate Imy explores the construction of these martial race communities and how individuals negotiated the incorporation and modification

---

[2] Nor are they unique to the British Empire; the U.S. continues to target Latinx communities to carry out border patrol and poor Black and brown communities for their police and military (Miller 2014; Nopper 2020).

of their religious identities into the racial logics of the British Empire. According to Imy, "Most colonial officials believed that stabilizing identities within the military would eradicate the tensions of religious and racial difference, creating a perfectly ordered imperial state. Soldiers, in turn, navigated changing imperial policies and shifting anti-colonial strategies to cope with – and extract privileges from – the conflicting agendas of imperialism and nationalism" (2019:15). Imy argues the failure of the British Raj came through their inability to maintain permanent rule through military incorporation, and I expand on her work by demonstrating the success of this subjectivity formation was realized in extracting a particular image of Sikh identity to protect the long-term colonial project by converting rivals of the state into makers of the state. Examining the colonial logics of this process of subjectivity formation is a required prerequisite to understand the resonance it continues to hold with the Sikh (individual and collective) psyche.

Between 1847 and the early 1900s, a few concurrent processes occurred to shape the nature of British-Sikh relations moving into the start of World War I, and thus a desperately increased need to rely on Sikh forces abroad. One is that there were Sikhs who had returned from abroad with a new political framework, most notably that of the anti-colonial Gadar Party, and were ready to sow the seeds of this uprising throughout Punjab to disrupt the close ties between the colonizer and colonized (Gill 2014; Mazumder 2011; Singh 2017; Sohi 2014). The second is that there were also local tensions that had arisen as the British continued to negotiate a false generosity (Freire 2014) and colonial mutuality through policy, infrastructure, and limited power (Mazumder 2011). Thus, the early 1900s started to mark a shift in British-Sikh relations that required much more direct management and strategic challenging of Sikh resistance, so as to maintain the loyalty that had been developed over the last several decades while also quelling the anti-colonial resistance from within the same community. In other words, the British needed to apply their infamous divide

and conquer tactic in a more nuanced way – within a religious community, unlike the larger community divisions they had previously devised. Such a tactic unfolded violently as the British rapidly exited India to repair the wounds of World War II losses of capital.

Partition: Sikhs left behind

In the wee hours of August 15, 1947, the air across Punjab crackled as the roaring body of the partition border spread its limbs arbitrarily across green farmland, rushing rivers, and intermingled people. Out of these Punjabis, Sikhs woke up an uprooted people – or perhaps did not sleep, sensing the imminent arrival of displacement. Given no portion of the independence deal that the British struck with Hindu and Muslim political leaders after their century-long colonial rule, Sikhs went from dreaming of their own nation-state of Khalistan to being left with a fraction of their original land (Jamil 2016; Sandhu 2012). While many communities were slighted as regional nation-states became the solution for a post-colonial transition of power, the pain for Punjabis was immediate: Punjabi land was partitioned to create the new India and Pakistan, leading to massive displacement and communal violence[3] (Jawaharlal 2015). An agricultural basket and land of five rivers was reduced to a divided wasteland overnight as Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu Punjabis were forced to leave their land, possessions, and even loved ones behind to lurch into a new country in one of the deadliest mass migrations in human history (Dalrymple 2015).

    While Tilly's (1985) framework has largely been used as the normative framework on state formation since its publishing, scholars have recently broadened Tilly's framework through more nuanced definitions of territory to consider non-European states and regions (Kaspersen and Strandsbjerg 2017). However, even prior to this, scholars from the Global South and Indigenous studies have long theorized historical formations of community identity through relation and

---

[3] A term still used in India to define violence along religious boundary lines, generally identified in the mainstream as rioting.

locality rather than territorial boundaries developed through conquest or violence. Through this framework, scholars consider how colonization, in developing the modern, Western nation-state, did so for the purpose of expansion in order to construct Self in opposition to the Other (Glissant 1997). Given these co-productions of subjectivity of the state and its chosen citizens or subjects, frameworks of state production that do not interrogate how colonization operates as an ongoing force upon and through statecraft remain incomplete as they perceive contemporary nation-states as removed from historical relations of colonial dispossession (Hammer 2020). Instead, by centering how communities from the Global South understand relational locality in the history and present, this chapter points to undertheorized and underrecognized pathways for conceptualizing the state outside of colonial frameworks (Shani 2005).

The following decades would be no more generous to the newly formed Indian state of Punjab, significantly smaller than before, nor to Sikhs. Upon British departure from Punjab, its rich agricultural resources were immediately taken advantage of by the Rockefeller-led Green Revolution in the 1950s and '60s, which industrialized agriculture and crop, destroying Indigenous crops to benefit global capitalism through companies like Monsanto (Shiva 2016). Thousands of Punjabi farmers have committed suicide, unable to get out of the debt caused by the infrastructure, pesticides, and agricultural policies that the Green Revolution forced them to take on (Kaur 2011). Ironically, this capitalist violence has also been obscured as inter-community ethnic conflict, which in actuality has been pervasive anti-Sikh violence carried out by the Indian government throughout the late 1900s. The legacies of colonization and "divide and conquer" politics initiated by the British continued on after their formal departure, reaching a violent climax with Operation Blue Star (June 1984), Operation Woodrose (June-October 1984), and Operation Black Thunder I (April 1986) and II (May 1988), a multi-stage Indian government plot to silence anti-government

resistance from Sikhs, which resulted in the mass murder of an estimated eight thousand Sikhs from June 1-10, 1984, and ongoing violence and disappearances to follow in years to come (Axel 2001; Chopra 2010; Devgan 2018; Kaur 2015, 2019; C. K. Mahmood 1996; Walia 2014). The intentional targeting of visible Sikhs and Sikh identity during these years has been well-documented. In particular, there was a focus on amritdhari Sikhs[4] due to their embodied commitment to Sikhi, which included the donning of personal weaponry. An Indian army letter found after the 1984 attacks went so far as to declare amritdhari Sikhs as outright dangerous and a threat to national security (C. K. Mahmood 1996). This narrative became embedded in public discourse, leading to the belief that Sikh collective resilience, particularly through the physical expression of sovereignty, was the direct cause and validation for the attack on Sikhs. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter One, the strategic interrogation and construction of a state-abiding versus threatening Sikh identity began much earlier with British colonization of Punjab. Thus, the targeting of a visible Sikh personhood, and fears of such targeting, is not unique to the diaspora but has its origins in a much more intentional and pointed attempt at neutralizing and incorporating Sikh identity and bodies into a British and then postcolonial Indian national identity.

As cooperating makers of the state through their economic, political, and social contributions, Sikhs view their diasporic success as a response to this historic and ongoing oppression, state violence, and denial of freedoms by the Indian state. As Indian government-led anti-Sikh violence peaked in the 1980s, the Sikh community experienced unsettlement both in India and abroad as they were displaced amongst nationalist frameworks of belonging that "left

---

[4] Amritdhari Sikhs are those who have pledged themselves to Sikh ideology and sovereignty through Khande ki Pahul or Amrit Sanchaar, the initiation into the order of the Khalsa, or sovereign Sikhs. Receiving Amrit requires the maintenance of a visible Sikh identity (kes, unshorn hair to respect natural & divine life; kanga, comb to maintain said kes; kara, an iron bracelet historically used as a weapon in battle; kirpaan, sword to protect the Sikh tradition of physical readiness and promote radical notions of people-driven justice; and kachhera, long underwear to maintain modesty and discipline), as well as the daily practice of Sikh philosophy through meditation, service, and a commitment to realizing Oneness through practice of Gurbani.

Sikhs behind" on the spatial and temporal margins of belonging (Mankekar 2015). Rather than reconciling their injustices as the indigenous peoples of Punjab in relationality to that land (Glissant 1997), Sikh Punjabis have become settlers on stolen lands, making themselves into "implicated subjects" (Rothberg 2019) in the long legacy of empire building. As such, Sikhs, like other racialized communities, have invested in colonial pathways of security through the nation-state model, whether in the diaspora or as a separate Sikh state of Khalistan, as the only path to belonging (Shani 2005). Meanwhile, experiences of Othering have birthed projects focused on neutralizing the threat of a visible Sikh identity by arguing for inclusion based on shared ethical values, catering to historically white, Christian definitions of morality (Wynter 2003). From the colonial racialization of Sikhs in Punjab to their utility in the British Imperial Forces and subsequent British colonial projects, these connections both shaped the migration of Sikhs out of Punjab and contextualized their entry into the Western world.

Sikhs in diaspora

In understanding the continued function of racecraft as Sikhs migrated to the United States, analyzing the United States' role in tying citizenship as a global system of exclusion to definitions of race is critical. Within the U.S., the definition of white was written and rewritten to determine who could legally belong in the United States as a free capital-owning person based on ideologies of race rooted in false biology (Glenn 2011; Ngai 2014). However, the tactics used by the legal system to define whiteness also shifted to accommodate the changing visible racial landscape of the U.S. In 1923, the Supreme Court made a remarkable reversal of science and nature in defining legal whiteness between the Ozawa and Thind cases; while all cases until Thind had been rooted in a scientific and genetic definition of whiteness, Thind's was the first that relied on the obvious physical markers to deny the privilege of whiteness (Haney Lopez 1996). Despite qualifying for

citizenship through U.S. military service, the judge argued Thind would not be clearly identifiable as a white man to the common American due to his hypervisibility as a Sikh man with a turban and beard. This legal decision to mark whiteness through culture and visuality incorporated Asians as ornaments to whiteness for selective inclusion (Cheng 2019). Nearly a century later, the Thind case still maintains far-reaching ramifications for the resonances of citizenship-based exclusion because of its ability to set precedent for binding U.S. racial ideology to citizenship. It also demonstrates the transnational, transtemporal implications of domestic statecraft: the results of Thind's case denied citizenship for all immigrants from India until after World War II and, today, India is eliminating pathways to citizenship for Muslim and Indigenous residents of the nation (Omi 2001; Shankar 2020). With this linkage of race to citizenship being legally constructed in the United States, boundaries of inclusion for immigrant communities, particularly Asian Americans, has largely depended on how these communities' fight to make themselves part of the state; historically, these efforts have reified the global color line and U.S. racial ideology (H. Kaur 2020; Prashad 2001; Shah 2012).

Knowing these categorical choices is critical to understanding the resonances these decisions have in the present, and across empires. For instance, after the U.S. used the 1965 Moynihan report to create a policy narrative of 'correcting' the community behavior of poor Black Americans through 'proper' socialization, over policing and anti-crime policy became the normative state strategies to address structural exclusion rather than address root causes of racialized poverty. Studying the racialized histories of military enlistment in the U.S., then, demonstrates how the targeted recruitment of Black men functioned as "a form of crime control via social uplift and as a disciplinary tactic against Black rebellions" because it "removed potential rioters from the streets and then sent them to Vietnam" (Nopper 2020). Tracking similar intimacies

of racecraft and statecraft through the archive on Sikh Punjabi imperial incorporation (Lowe 2015), which are simultaneously manifested through ideologies around gender and masculine power, have deep implications for both U.S. domestic and international policy and must be studied as entangled processes to comprehend the depth of the state's mutualistic relationship with social boundary formation.

Given the dominance of the intertwined social processes of racecraft and statecraft in the twentieth century, nation-states construct access to democracy and citizenship upon loyalty to the common project of internal exclusion and shared enmity of the Other (Marx 1998; Said 1978). Thus, while racialized immigrant communities previously contested access to *legal* citizenship, the ongoing battle for *cultural* citizenship is one of visceral non-belonging experienced through the denial of the full privileges of an insider (Beaman 2017). While the anxieties around this lack of belonging manifest in emotions, experiencing a lack of belonging becomes politicized as communities negotiate the politics of belonging daily through social locations, identities, and ethical and political values (Yuval-Davis 2006). Yet, literature on statecraft and empire-building often fail to address how these experiences of Othering are rooted in maintaining a respectable (white and Christian) notion of morality that is integral to the projects of colonialism and imperialism through the secularly-constructed nation-state (Du Bois 1940; Wynter 2003). These battles for belonging and inclusion are all made most legible through the body of the visible, or even hyper visible, religious Other (e.g., the Sikh turban and beard) because the visibilized identity serves as an obvious marker of difference to establish what can and should be declared as similar enough for inclusion (Puar 2007). Imperial racecraft attempts to make these nuances clear by measuring the capacity of the state to transform its own needs for survival, power, and control into perceived needs of the community for belonging, safety, and security.

This dissertation will follow these integrated processes of statecraft-racecraft to explore fruitful connections between colonization, imperialism, citizenship, and Self. In doing so, it will aim to better understand the role racecraft and statecraft have played in (1) institutionalizing communities into structural roles on behalf of the nation-state and (2) defining their distance from those who are deemed normative citizens. This is particularly relevant to understand ontological and phenomenological rejections of identity – particularly for hyper visible communities – as it can inform how the identity-formation process occurs in reaction to and collaboration with the state's agenda. By grounding the conceptualization of the nation in colonization, which then impacts how state institutions are made and remade, the proposed project explores how social actors participate in systems of power and domination that only offer a limited incorporation into the state. In doing so, it asks how the residues of colonization are embodied not solely in institutional structures, but also institutional actors who are often unilaterally oversimplified into victim-victor binaries of these histories.

The dissertation will unfold as follows. Part One will explore the framework of imperial racecraft, first in colonial Punjab from the late 1800s through early 1900s and second in the contemporary United States. Chapter Two uses British archival documents to demonstrate the simultaneous illegalization of Sikh practices of weapon carrying alongside the construction of Sikhs as a martial race to justify increased recruitment, a key example of imperial racecraft. Further, it outlines the complicity of Sikh political elite who were central to transforming Sikh historical narrative into one that was militant in a way that supported empire and imperialism, rather than the taking up of arms to dismantle such concentrated bodies of power. Chapter Three builds from such a parallel narrative, jumping to the early 2000s in the US, where Sikh advocacy organizations draw upon a history of Sikhs as a martial race to challenge the exclusion of Sikhs

from the contemporary US military and policing apparatus. In doing so, the chapter argues that such campaigns for Sikh inclusion into US imperialism construct a limited vision of which Sikh deaths are worthy of collective mourning by constantly resituating Sikh life through its proximity to the state, thus reifying an anti-Black articulation of morality, value, and empathy.

Part Two moves towards understanding how such projects of imperial incorporation shape belonging as a project of nationalism by tracing Sikh exclusion during partition and as diaspora. Chapter Four, a slightly revised version of my *Amerasia* publication, analyzes the transformation in US-based Sikh organizations' advocacy work from right after September 11, 2001 to a more recent flashpoint, the 2012 Oak Creek gurdwara shooting. In this analysis, the chapter demonstrates that, while post-9/11 advocacy was marked by a desire to make Sikhs visually familiar through education and awareness campaigns on Sikh embodied practices, the post-Oak Creek advocacy transformed into something of a moral project, where Sikhs needed to be demonstrated as morally similar to US secular-Christianity in order to overcome white supremacist violence. Such a transformation also makes sense of the project of imperial incorporation as one of advocacy, where Sikhs can be both visibly and morally similar if incorporated into US imperialism. Chapter Five engages a comparative-historical analysis of Khalistani discourse of belonging, examining how the denial of Khalistan in the past alongside subsequent Indian state-led massacres of Sikhs has sutured Sikh belonging to the nation-state framework. In response, then, Chapter Six utilizes the discussions and reflections from a self-created six-month Sikh youth consciousness-raising program to demonstrate alternate imaginings of Sikh liberation derived from an engagement with Gurbaani, Sikh history and disciplined practice, and global frameworks of liberation.

Finally, as a bonus of sorts, Part Three contains Chapter Seven, which theorizes a community-centered practice of ethnographic methodology particular to racialized religious communities in the US. Articulating a framework of gurdwara space-time, in collaboration with Sikh artist Simranpreet Anand, the chapter draws upon my early experiences attempting to carry out ethnography in the gurdwara for this dissertation and the resulting tensions. It shows what we can learn from contextualizing these tensions through dynamics of state surveillance and racism rather than minimizing them through binaries such as insider-outsider effect. I close by offering new frameworks of ethnographic research produced in community through embodied practice.

Chapter Two

STATECRAFT and BORDERWORK:

Emerging Frontiers of Political and Social Representation in Colonial Punjab

> The British noted real cultural differences among colonized people and even asked them how they identified themselves. The genius of the British was not in inventing differences to exploit but in politicizing real and acknowledged differences by turning them into legal boundaries deemed inviolable and predicating security and economic benefits on locals' respect for these boundaries….A more apt name for this project is define and rule…
>
> - Mahmood Mamdani, *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*
> (2020:13–14)

After two consecutive Anglo-Sikh wars from 1845-6 and 1848-9, the British East India Trading Company successfully annexed Ranjit Singh's kingdom, initiating the colonial government of Punjab (Atwal 2020). Over the course of these two wars, Sikh soldiers impressed the British with their capacity and skill for battle, a notion remarked upon in autobiographies of lead commanders. For instance, Major-General George MacMunn reflected a Sikh man's "slow wit and dogged courage give him many of the characteristics of the British soldier at his best" (1911:139–40). Understanding the colonial utility of Sikhs, as subjects who mirrored British values, illuminates how imperial racecraft manifested a dual process of forcing British ideals of masculinized power onto colonized communities and constructing British notions of power, gender, and race through colonial rule (Condos 2017; Streets 2004). Scholars of south Asia have noted how a desire to "recapture the masculine body" emerged through a institutional regulation of Sikh Punjabi men and their capacities for physical and mental discipline, where even Sikh-specific college-level sports education became a site to capitalize on "'the highest degrees of physical efficiency to be found in Oriental races, or, indeed, in any races of mankind'" (Brunner 2018:35, 44–45). In the

case of Sikh Punjabis, traditions of individually bearing arms, alongside physical and mental readiness for battle, eventually led the British Raj to construct Sikhs as a 'martial race' – a colonial logic which claimed specific south Asian communities, particularly those living in constructed British Indian border territories, were biologically and culturally suited for military service.

Sikhs made up 22% of World War I recruits from Punjab despite being only 12% of the population (Das 2018), which has resulted in ample scholarship on the Sikh martial race in studies of British India. Thus far, however, such scholarship has focused on discussions of Victorian gender and racial ideology, overlapping imperial strategy across the British Empire, and subjectivity-formation through colonial rule (Roy 2013; G. Singh 2014). This work has transnational implications, as British ideologies of a martial race were utilized across their colonial regime to identify local communities' roles in the colonial state in a 'scientific' manner (Osborne 2014; Rand and Wagner 2012; Walker 2012). In theorizing on ideologies of racism, this scholarship is similarly useful to map how race has been constructed through various regimes of subjugation simultaneously, and in reference to each other (Du Bois 1947; Edmondson 1976; Fields and Fields 2012). Some scholars argue that the main profit of the martial race theory is that it helped Britishers make sense of why Sikhs seemed so relatable, and also civilizable, which led to the eventual historical narrativization that Sikh Punjabis were Aryan race descendants, allowing even further proximity to colonial power (Jakobsh 2003). Through martial race categorization and other strategies of incorporating south Asian communities into imperialism, the British built their power and attempted to stabilize their rule over a diverse range of cultural and religious communities (Imy 2019). While the British Raj might not have secured a permanent colonial state in India through this project, it did successfully embed tactics of imperial racecraft into postcolonial subjectivity: "In fixing martiality as an effect of race and history, the British were

able to negate their role in the making of India's martial subjects and disguise the interests vested in such a project" (Rand 2006:15).

This chapter builds on this foundational scholarship to highlight how the British merged tactics of governance and military recruitment across empires, the consequences of which continue to play out in contemporary empires and postcolonial nation-states. Utilizing British administrative documents from the Punjab State Archives in Chandigarh and Patiala, I examine two significant and simultaneously-occurring colonial administrative processes: (1) focused recruitment of amritdhari[5], caste-dominant Sikh men into the British Imperial Forces and (2) the regulation of sovereign Sikh identity, particularly the personal donning of weaponry. While the former has been detailed in significant scholarly literature thus far, my encounters in the Punjab State Archives illuminated these two legal processes as crucially linked, if not interdependent. Studying these linked processes in colonial state formation and racecraft builds a framework to understand Sikh subjectivity and belonging as shaped by racist ideologies of the British Empire, while also illuminating the role that Sikh subjectivities played in fortifying both political and social borders. I utilize frameworks of comparative-historical sociology to ground ongoing shifts and choices in subjectivity-formation within the racist, colonial regulation of Sikh identity. In my analysis, I explore the following questions: (1) how do members of a colonized community differently construct, perceive, and enact agency through their interactions with the empire?; and (2) when and how are state structures and institutions mobilized to enact acceptance or deny entry for

---

[5] Those who have pledged themselves to Sikh praxis and thought by receiving Khande ki Pahul through an Amrit Sanchaar, the initiation into the order of the Khalsa, or sovereign Sikhs. Receiving Amrit requires the maintenance of a visible Sikh identity (kes, unshorn hair to respect natural & divine life; kanga, comb to maintain said kes; kara, an iron bracelet historically used as a weapon in battle; kirpan, sword to protect the Sikh tradition of physical readiness and promote radical notions of people-driven justice; and kachhera, long underwear to maintain modesty and discipline), as well as the daily practice of Sikh philosophy through meditation, service, and a commitment to realizing Oneness through practice of Gurbani (transcendent poetry, writing, and reflections of Sikh Gurus and other mystics to reflect the universality of Oneness).

racialized communities? I posit that British colonial statecraft was as much a project of *political* border creation and maintenance – through the production of a clear, bounded, and ever-expanding British empire – as it was *social* border creation and maintenance – through regulation and policing of social hierarchy based on constructed identity categories. Analyzing the case of the Sikh Punjabi 'martial race' and other conceptualizations of Sikh Punjabi subjectivity during British colonial rule, I contribute to sociological literature on symbolic and physical violence, statecraft, and racecraft by demonstrating the work done in constructed border zones to develop and legitimize the state through the establishment of social borders, such as race, religion, gender, and caste.

Additionally, the chapter offers the foundation for a trans-temporal application of imperial racecraft. As I will show in Chapter Two, these same social categories are still foundational for legal constructions of inclusion, exclusion, and incorporation within contemporary US-based Sikh civil rights projects, as well as measures of value for US-based Sikh life. These delineations of political and social boundaries are shaped by remnants of the British colonial project, which did not actually fail upon its rapid evacuation from India but left spectral confines within which future political work was fated to take place – even within the diaspora. To reckon with the tensions in postcolonial political projects, we must first contend with how contemporary state-civilian relations have emerged from the frameworks that the British left behind (Maan 2005). Following Mahmood Mamdani's (2020) argument that the nation-state was born out of colonialism, this chapter demonstrates the central role that Sikh embodied practices of sovereignty – e.g., individual weapon-bearing practices –, played in the British Raj's need to construct a monopoly on the legal use of physical force (Weber 1919). It also studies the lasting effects of the Sikh elite's rejection of these practices as sovereign for the sake of "security and economic benefits" (see epigraph). This historical, relational analysis elucidates how colonized peoples' relation to the state, as a

project around accurate recognition and representation, results in adaptations of state productions of social control as mechanisms for self-advocacy and inclusion (Coulthard 2007; Spade 2015).

Entering the colonial archive

Prior to discussing the archival data, I find it necessary to ground my findings in theories of colonial archival research and the realities of pursuing such a method in contemporary India. To enter any archives in India, one does not need to apply for a research visa, which is reserved for researchers working with living human subjects. Instead, according to the National Archives of India (NAI) website, "foreign nationals are required to submit a letter of introduction from their diplomatic mission in addition to a letter of introduction from their sponsoring University/Institution" to gain entry to the archive. While the NAI website offers "Form 8" as the application form, there is no further guidance on how to proceed (Govt. of India n.d.). Regional archives, like the Punjab State Archives, do not have websites with details about access. Through multiple Google searches, I eventually stumbled upon detailed instructions from another researcher of south Asia who offered their own experiences on archival access in the NAI through a notarized form (Logan 2016). Before leaving for Punjab, I acquired an original signed note from the Sociology department on UCLA letterhead regarding the legitimacy of my research and need for archival access. Upon arriving in India, I planned an extra day to visit the US Embassy, where I had made an appointment with American Citizen Services to notarize my completed Form 8. After about a two-hour visit, I left with the form and $50 fewer.

The main location of the Punjab State Archives is in Chandigarh, a capital city begrudgingly shared by Haryana and Punjab in the aftermath of partition. During my time in Chandigarh, I stayed with my youngest mama ji (maternal uncle) and his family. Living in Sector 22-D, near busy commercial strips and a brand-new, oddly-placed Starbucks, the forced logics of

the city – planned by famous French architect Le Corbusier – add another layer of sensation on top of the noise and smell which makes Indian cities feel so abundant. For my first trip to the Archives, my mama ji insisted on traveling with me and bringing my mother along. Later, I was grateful for his paternalism, as my graduate training had not prepared me for the informal codes of archival research outside of imperial metropoles.

Scholars of the colonial archive make clear that the colonial archive must be understood for its particular functionality as an object of governance, now developed into a source of study (Hall 2001; Mbembe 2002). Because of this, the colonial archive in particular represents a certain form of colonial relationality through its physical structure, which often predetermines the relationalities which can or cannot be traced through its remaining files (Lowe 2015; Stoler 2010). Further, the colonial archive puts forth an epistemological frame that binds ongoing subjectivity formation to colonial logics through its function as a permanent referential source (Arondekar 2009; Mudimbe 1988). Archival approaches like critical fabulation (Hartman 2008) intertwine research with narrative to exhume the silences in the archive (Trouillot 1995).

My time in the Punjab State Archives was marked by the unstructured structure, the messy formality, by which many postcolonial nation-states are known. Over two months, I was frequently told that archival files I requested were lost, damaged, or disappeared by the remnants of colonial infrastructure. In other words, given the inability of the remaining colonial infrastructure to protect these old documents from the elements – in India, most notably, monsoon season and endless summer humidity –, there were files that had been destroyed and thrown away over time (Hoskins 2013). This represented a slow destruction of evidence of the violence of colonial governance that continues to play out in the contemporary nation-state (Fanon 1963). Further, easy access to the archives was dependent on language skills (I speak, read, and write Punjabi), local camaraderie

(my uncle and mom swapping childhood stories with the archivists for my entire first "visit"), some lucky Google searching (no online record of access to these archives; thankfully, the archivists went with the process I made up), and immense patience as lunch and tea breaks frequently slowed my ability to request documents, documents I wanted no longer existed, and I perused through impossible to read archive logs and files as seen below. Understanding the files in the Punjab State Archives through a sort of half-life decay model – a molecular model of decay for radioactive atoms that are exponentially decreasing in their already discrete entities – makes

clear the formation of the colonial archive as one that is simultaneously ensuring its vitality through the validity of the state, while also erasing the logics of state formation that are held within. These theories of archival production (Stoler 2010), rather than excavation, are central to understanding the colonial production of social boundaries for political border formation and regulation that I will lay out below.

Figure 2.1 - Image of archival file log from Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh.

Glimpses from the Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, Sector 35-D - July 2019
[Figures 2.2, 2.3, 2.4]

top left: walk to the reading room, bottom left: reading room, bottom right: archivists' room

Suturing Sikh loyalty to the Empire

To contextualize the dynamics of hyper-focused Sikh recruitment into the British Imperial Services during World War I, and, subsequently, World War II, we must start a few decades earlier to understand recruitment tactics as a reaction to the 1857 Sepoy Uprisings and resulting colonial anxieties. While the exact motivations for the uprisings continue to be contested, most scholars agree that it was a combination of discontent with British administrative decisions around economic and social benefits for the colonized, as well as the British's disregard for traditional practices of religion and culture – particularly with respect to Hinduism and Islam. As a result, Hindu and Muslim soldiers largely revolted en masse, while Sikh soldiers' participation was more mixed – in part because they still felt resentful to the largely Bengali soldiers who had helped the British capture the Punjab kingdom just eight years prior. As such, Sikh soldiers are mostly documented as not having joined the uprisings, but instead protected the British as freshly-minted imperial soldiers (Majumdar 1963; Mediratta 2012). Thus, while the uprisings represented the British Raj's first major moment of betrayal, it also was marked by noted loyalty that continued to shape tactics of imperial racecraft in the decades to come. As a result of the uprisings, and the fear of another such event taking place, the British Raj exercised their monopoly on legitimate violence through the passage of the Indian Arms Act in 1878, which prevented all Indian nationals from manufacturing, selling, possessing or carrying personal firearms, outside of those for military service. As a result of Sikh loyalty during the Sepoy Uprising, continued regulation around appropriate soldierly behavior became an opportunity to repeatedly suture Sikh loyalty to the British Empire over the decades to come.

For instance, on October 6, 1904 – nearly 50 years after the uprisings –, the Military Department issued Resolution 2773-F to grant or raise the pension of those soldiers 65 years or

older who were in possession of a Mutiny Medal. In 1868, the medal had been extended to "anyone who'd born arms or been under fire – including members of the Indian judiciary and the Indian civil service, who also became embroiled in the fighting" (Warwick & Warwick Auctioneers of Collectables n.d.). The decision to reward civil servants, mainly Britishers, for bearing arms had great precedent and implications for a project of imperial racecraft, given the simultaneous efforts by British colonial administration to illegalize the agency of locals to bear arms outside of military service. However, this pension bore fruit for Sikh soldiers, too, as the archive shows the recommendation of a retired Sepoy from the 1st regiment's Sikh infantry for special pension "in recognition of his services during the Mutiny" as late as January 1913 (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 9994/4). The timing is significant given the drastic increase in Sikh recruiting that would occur during World War I, only a year later.

An additional effect of the uprisings on Sikh recruiting was the specification of religious commitment as a tool for selection. As the uprisings are rumored to have been motivated by feelings of religious persecution from Hindu and Muslim soldiers (Mediratta 2012), the British learned to avoid future potential conflict with local religious beliefs by ensuring this became a core part of their recruiting tactics. This also became a method through which they could "reward" Sikhs for their loyalty. In pursuant recruitment of Sikhs to the British Imperial Forces, only amritdhari Sikhs were allowed to enlist, or those who had taken on the fullest physical embodiment of Sikh practices, which the British saw as representing significant discipline and thus useful values for crafting good soldiers. However, recruiting tactics also utilized the caste system, which Sikh praxis stands to abolish; in distinguishing who was worthy of becoming an imperial soldier, the British largely limited the role to caste-dominant Jatts, commonly landowners, who they saw as more representative of the biological strength and discipline of soldiering (Singh 1966). These

conflicting logics of incorporation and modification continued to drive the creation of the British imperial soldier's identity: "As early as 1879, the Eden Commission Report noted that 'the Punjab is the home of the most martial races of India and is the nursery of our best soldiers'" (Das 2018:76). Political expediency fed an argument for the protection of the Crown to be rooted in racist ideology built upon local social hierarchies. Through the ways the British made their colonial state in Punjab, it is clear they were well-aware of the precarious dependency they had built on a people that could subjugate and bring down their rule at any time (Condos 2017). Given the precarious and intricate reliance that the British built on Sikh bodies and Sikh investment in their rule, studying the colonial mechanisms of statecraft and racecraft which welded Sikh loyalty to the British – what I call imperial racecraft – are useful to understand how social boundary-formation was a critical project of British colonial administration.

Developing a logic of regulation: legal precedence and procedure

After the experiences of Sikh soldiers during the uprisings and in preparation for a greater need during World War I, the British were attempting to court a deeper Sikh loyalty to serve recruitment. However, as a result of the Indian Arms Act, tensions rose over the following decade as cases of amritdhari Sikhs being arrested for carrying kirpans became increasingly common. As detailed in footnote 1, kirpans are swords worn by amritdhari soldiers; however, the tradition of bearing weapons has a long history for Sikhs. Kirpan comes from two Persian words, kirpa and aan, the former meaning compassion and the latter meaning dignity. For Sikhs, the practice of bearing weapons is one of discipline (training and requiring the mental readiness to properly wield the weapon), worship (taking care of and respecting the weapon as a representation of the divine), and of people-centered justice, where the state or those in power are not relied upon to be the caretakers

of justice or respondents to injustice. Instead, each Sikh is called to be able to return dignity through compassion themselves. According to Punjabi sociologist Bhupinder Singh:

> In the Sikh view, kingship has to be decentralised and transferred to the people. In other words, Sikhism is for the ultimate abolition of kingship or the state in any form and the establishment of moral self- government in society. Till the ideal of self-government is achieved, the people or the citizenry have the right and the duty to rise in revolt against political tyranny, the tyranny of the state. In the religious history of India, the right to rebel and fight against the tyrannical state was instituted by Sikhism for the first time. The kirpan with which Guru Gobind Singh endowed the Sikhs is a sign of people's sovereignty and their right to rebel against an unjust and oppressive state or the powers that be. (2020:457)

As such, kirpan-wearing is a crucial element of Sikh praxis for it requires the amritdhari Sikh to put ideologies of Oneness and non-division into physical practice whenever necessary. For the British colonial administrators, however, it was a crucial *religious* practice that needed to be respected so as to not lose the loyalty of a community who offered their largest recruiting base.

A file in the Punjab State Archives of Chandigarh dictates the year-long debate of British officials attempting to negotiate a special protection of Sikhs' rights to carry an arm while maintaining the larger Indian Arms Act. The file begins with:

> Mr. Howe told me that he remembered having seen some correspondence about the kirpans which took place after the Mutiny, but Record-keeper is unable to trace it. I have myself gone through 8 volumes of printed files, but could not find anything bearing on the point at issue. I have also consulted Roy's Arms Act Manual and Digest of Criminal Law, but could not lay my hands on any judicial ruling which may help in the disposal of this case. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:1)

The inability to trace the record of legal proceedings produces a 40-page file in the Archives, in which commissioners from both Lahore and Amritsar divisions of the Home Department are in conversation from July 1913 through June 1914 to determine a legal response to the practice of kirpan-wearing amongst Sikh soldiers, and the community at large. Primarily, the administrators seem to have been concerned by a lack of clarity in what exactly legal proceedings should be in response to kirpan-wearing: "Recently, a Nihang Singh was challaned [summoned] by the

Amritsar Police for keeping a kirpan, but was acquitted by the Magistrate" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:2). Later discussion continues to return to what is known as legal precedent, or a review of how previous cases have gone to determine the logic for present and future cases:

> Only 3 cases came before the courts. In one case the accused was acquitted by the first court and in the other 2 cases the accused persons were convicted, but were left off on appeal….In some cases the kirpans found in possession of Sikhs were confiscated, but prosecutions were not started….
>
> There has apparently been one prosecution in which the "kirpan" defence was raised and proved successful. In the Sargodha Nihang's case, referred to at various places on the file, the weapon was more like an arrow than a kirpan, and the defence was not, apparently, that it was a kirpan. It was definitely called a tir [arrow]. (I got a copy of the judgement in this case from the Chief Court.)
> > The incidents which really gave rise to this inquiry were—
> (1) The Bhera factory.
> (2) The Attock case which was not proceeded with, I think).
> (3) The Amritsar case. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:28)

In tracing the previous logic of British law-making and -enacting, the colonial administration seeks to develop a sense of consistency and common-sense of the law, both by clearly defining the kirpan and also creating a through-line for British legal procedure. As such, the possible contradictions within British colonial governance needed to be resolved immediately: "Both the Commissioners of Lahore and Rawalpindi Divisions are of opinion that...the matter be taken up to the Chief Court and an authoritative ruling be obtained" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:2). However, immediate legal or punitive action also would have had dire consequences in morale and relationship-building with Sikh Punjabis, particularly kirpan-bearing Sikhs, and so the conversation moves to debating the applicability of the Indian Arms Act to kirpans.

Proceeding to the back of the file, one can find a summary documentation of some of these cases, as well as reasons for declining an exemption unless necessary changes are made to the kirpan. They are listed below chronologically, with italics added for emphasis, to demonstrate a

shift in logic that occurred from the late 1800s (a few decades after the Sepoy Uprisings) into the

early 1900s (just before World War I):

> The dagger in question is certainly one in which a purchaser would merely wear or keep for display as an ornament and not for purpose of offence or defence, and there in the spirit of the orders quoted *no cognizance of the matter should have been taken by the Police* and *no conviction should have followed…* (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, Home Department No. 29, 5 March 1885)

> Mr. J. Wilson also directed the return of a dagger to a mistri from whom it was taken by the Railway Police, and after referring to Major Nisbet's letter came to the conclusion that *a dagger of the type now in question was exempt* from the operation of the Arms Act. Both these officers were executive officers holding high and responsible positions. Their interpretation of notification of the supreme Government is *entirely in accord with the spirit of the law.* (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, Home Department No. 30, 18 July 1902)

> No objection could I think be raised to a *blunt and pointless* piece of iron or steel, having the external *appearance of an ornamental* dagger: and I think it would fulfill the requirements of exempting notification. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, Home Department No. 25, 14 July 1913)

> These daggers appear to be used by Sikhs in religious ceremonies but *any one whether Sikh or Musalman [Muslim] can obtain them*. The daggers cannot in my opinion be described as toys. They are *sharp, dangerous weapons* and it does not appear advisable that people should be able to obtain them in any number like this. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, Home Department No. 28, 25 June 1913)

While I have previously detailed the impact of the 1857 Sepoy Uprisings on Sikh recruitment and

incorporation, which provide context for the 1885 and 1902 leniency towards kirpan-bearing, the

clear shift of approach in the 1913 documents could use additional context. In the early 1900s, as

the British Raj entered a new century of rule and expansion, we can see the desire to make a

common sense law. As secularism was constructed out of Christian moral codes, it bestowed the

same divine authority and language to secularism as it did to a Christian authority figure (Buffam

2021) – consider *the spirit* of the law in the 1902 document, even used in proceedings today.

Protecting such law as rational, objective, and completely authoritative was crucial. In the 1913

document, the concern regarding anyone being able to obtain a kirpan, Sikh or Muslim, also shows

the anxieties the British had around not being able to appropriately categorize communities, and thus an inability to regulate communities' behavior through such categorization. Scholars have argued that the effort to root Sikh identity in a unique martial tradition was also encouraged from within the community, to maintain a distinct religious identity inside the forces of colonial (re)identification (Soboslai 2018) – an effort I will explore from the stance of Sikh elite collaboration in a later section. The sudden shift in the 1913 document, where the kirpan was suddenly an obvious danger and needed to be physically changed to be permissible, was a likely result of the Gadar Party, a transnational anti-colonial movement led primarily by Sikh Punjabis, which called for the violent overthrow of the British Raj. While the Gadar Party falls outside the scope of my work, other scholars have uncovered the impact of the Party on (1) instilling a deep fear of the dangers of "political Sikhs" to the British Raj, (2) developing transnational surveillance of said Sikhs that spanned the US, Canada, the UK, and British India, and (3) creating a divide between so-called "religious" and "political" Sikhs, which largely dictated their stance in relation to colonial rule (Dhamoon et al. 2019; Mawani 2018; Sohi 2014). As relevant to my work, I will detail the construction of a religious versus political Sikh(i) in the next section.

Constructing an apolitical, religious Sikh praxis

The distinction repeatedly argued for allowing exemptions to kirpans was that legality should be based on the intended use of the kirpan in question – for religious or political reasons. Several members of the colonial administration make such arguments, two of which have been reproduced here:

> The case of the Sikhs is different. Since 1699 A.D. when the Tenth Guru established the form of Sikh baptism, it has all along been a recognized religious custom among the baptized Sikhs to wear a kirpan along with the other 4 outwards symbols of Sikhism. It is one of the commandments of the tenth Guru which is binding on all true Sikhs. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:2)

> With the baptized Sikhs to carry a kirpan is a matter of religion. Moreover it has not been shown that the Sikhs have ever used the kirpans for the perpetration of acts of violence. The Punjab Chief Court has laid down in criminal appeal No. 16 of 1900 that "any weapons or instruments carried or possessed for the purpose of offence or defence come under the category of 'arms.' Under this ruling the kirpans which are worn by the Sikhs as a matter of religion cannot come within the definition of arms. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:2)

In constructing the kirpan as a religious symbol, rather than a possible weapon, British colonial administrators worked to incorporate Sikh praxis into a secular-religious binary. Such tactics have been studied as key to determining governance strategies in British India, where the mass of land and population under rule required creating differential logics of which communities posed a threat or were unthreatening (Murphy 2013). As detailed in Murphy's work, for Sikhs, this manifested through more direct and structured governance over Sikh institutions and communities, whereas Hindus were crafted as a more heterogeneous and feminine, and thus a less threatening community to the stability of the British Raj. Given the original intention of a kirpan to bestow arms to the Khalsa – sovereign people guided by a discipline and ethic of Oneness rather than state-sanctioned political endeavors –, this division can be understood as a colonial tactic to view Sikhi through a Christian, secular lens and colonize its original political spirit of praxis to better protect the British Raj from possible destabilization of monopoly rule.

Going through multiple iterations of a new clause which would allow Sikhs to carry kirpans without violating the overarching policy, the bureaucratic, administrative logics of colonialism demonstrate themselves through an attempted selective inclusion of Sikh sovereign identity. In their process to protect the state from further uprisings, the officials met with various Sikh leaders to see their kirpans, trace these kirpans onto paper to demonstrate and document a standard size and/or length (replicated below), and conferred with various British and Sikh officials to determine what type of clause would be appropriate for all parties. The British also employed their own

academics, the most notable being Ernest Trumpp, to examine and translate Sikh practices for British comprehension. After an enormous backlash from the Sikh community, given Trumpp's demeaning translation and his interactions with Sikh leaders in the process of making it, an ex-civil service member Max A. Macauliffe was employed by Sikh community leaders to create a new text. After this was published, many archival documents show colonial administrators basing political decisions regarding Sikhs on the latter – Macauliffe's *The Sikh religion, its gurus, sacred writings, and authors* (1909). In this case, since Macauliffe did not have a clear definition of the kirpan, the conversation continues on by using the colonial record to trace and locate the possibilities of selective incorporation through tangible policy. In February 1914, Commissioner Herbert A. Casson offers the following proviso for British India: "Kirpans when possessed or
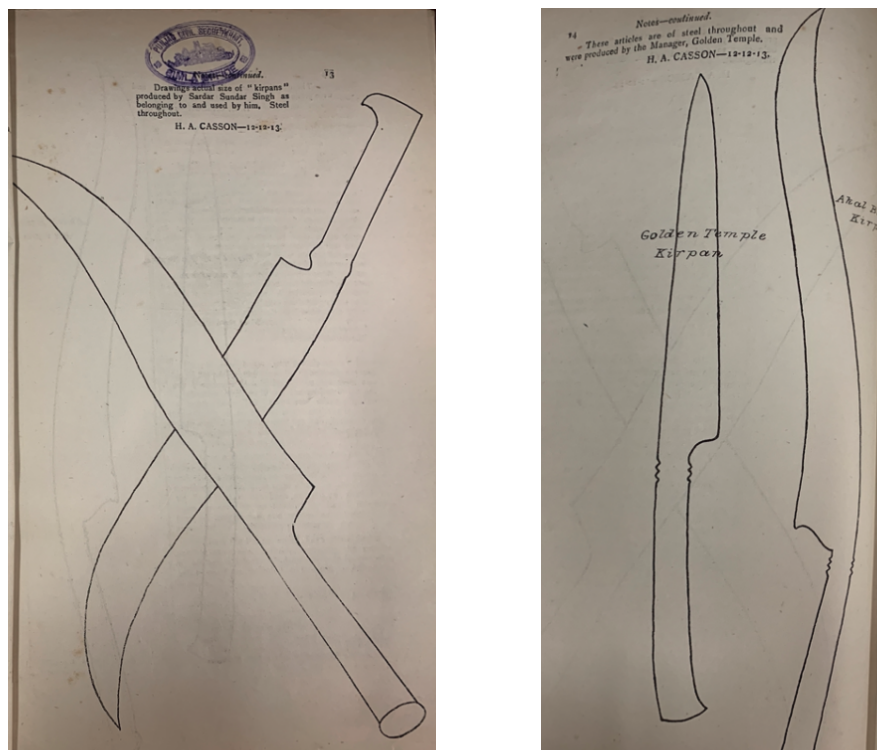
Figure 2.5 - Illustrations of kirpans referenced during colonial policy-making process.

carried by Amritdhari Sikhs, provided that this exemption shall not apply in any case in which a

kirpan is actually used as a weapon of offence or defence" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:18).

In April 1914, Sunder Singh Majithia – one of the largest landowners in colonial Punjab, a strong supporter of British India, and with whom the colonial administration conferred with often – responded with his own feedback and new draft (below).

YOUR DRAFT.			DRAFT I PROPOSE.		
Area.	Arms, ammunition, military stores.	Prohibitions and directions.	Area.	Arms, ammunition, military stores.	Prohibitions and directions.
British India ...	Kirpans when possessed or carried by Amritdhari Sikhs, provided that this exemption shall not apply in any case in which a kirpan is actually used as a weapon of offence or defence.	All.	British India ...	Kirpan, a religious emblem of the Sikhs when possessed or carried by Amritdhari Sikhs, provided the length does not exceed twelve inches.	All.

Figure 2.6 - Table of amendments proposed to kirpan (il)legalization language from colonial Punjab.

His debate of the amendment is based on three main facets: whether the kirpan should be clearly identified as a religious symbol, whether a point about the intended or actual reason for use of a kirpan should be mentioned, and whether there should be a specific length articulated in the amendment. Sunder Singh makes the case that,

> My object was to justify the exemption which is being made only owing to the fact that a kirpan is a religious emblem of the Sikhs and for Amritdhari Sikhs its possession is a religious behest and consequently a necessity according to their religion. This would in its language meet any possible objection that might be raised for the exemption being made in favour of Amritdhari Sikhs. (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:24)

Sunder Singh makes the case that, without identifying the kirpan as a religious emblem and a *necessary* aspect of amritdhari Sikh identity, the possibility for persecution remains in cases where self-defense is necessary: "He exercises this right [of self defence]...But under the proposed

proviso the protection afforded by the exemption would have become non-effective....The proviso under the above circumstances would clear have created a disability and an invidious distinction for the Sikhs" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:25). In the annotated version of Sunder Singh's response kept in the administrative file, Commissioner Casson has remarked the following: "If the Sikhs *choose* to fix an 'arm' as their religious emblem and then use it as weapon, surely they must take the consequences" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:26). Suddenly, the earlier logic of religion being a fixed category with historical precedent becomes invalid, as the possibility for Sikhs to acquire legal protection which is more open-ended threatens British colonial administrators' ability to regulate the use of arms and the protection of British rule in Punjab. Further, Sunder Singh's concern about a Sikh being prosecuted for self-defense cannot hold up in an imperial state, where the necessity for self-defense is illegible when the state's purpose is to offer protection. After brief discussion on Sunder Singh's proposal, the kirpan amendment made quick progress. On April 8, 1914, Lieutenant-General Michael O'Dwyer argued for a quick close to the proposal and rejected the idea to consult more Sikh leadership on the new draft, stating: "I don't think we should gain anything by further enquiries. The matter has been thoroughly threshed out" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:27). By June 25, 1914, the following amendment was offered: "kirpans possessed or carried by Sikhs are exempted from the operation of the provisions of the Act" (Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh, 3923/49:32). Although the record does not indicate the rationale of the shift to a very general statement, the timing in relation to the start of World War I seems pertinent.

In the years following World War I and the rise and fall of the Gadar Party, debate about growing anti-colonial resistance from Sikhs appears in the archive as "the Sikh question." This question emerged in the aftermath of one of the most ostentatious displays of colonial mass murder.

Known as the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, on April 13, 1919, Brigadier-General Reginald E. Dyer led a group of Indian troops to Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, Punjab and opened fire without warning on a large crowd gathered for a political rally after several days of protest in the city against colonial suppression of a growing Indian independence movement. After surveilling the crowd, and then closing off the only accessible entrance with ninety soldiers and armed vehicles, Dyer led this mix of Sikh and non-Sikh troops to shoot continuously for 10 minutes. Official casualty estimates remain staggering low, around 400, although the Hunter Committee Report of 1920 documented a crowd of 10,000-20,000 present before the shooting began (Wagner 2016). This blow to the Sikh community's trust of the British required a deeper dive into the logics of Sikh identity, beliefs, and traditions. In their discussions, British administrators repeatedly referenced a dichotomy of religious versus political Sikhs, with a further demonization of the latter: "The Sikhs speaking generally are a brave people and constitute a sturdy peasantry, but they are impulsive and prone to violence. These tendencies have shown themselves in two ways which may be roughly classified as the political and the religious" (Punjab State Archives, June 1922, 5458/67:1).

Occurring concurrently with these developments of British-Sikh relations were changes in internal Sikh affairs, as a select group of Sikh leaders were attempting to address the rapid increase of Sikhs converting in response to Christian proselytizing, and Hindu and Muslim reform movements. As such, there was a large move to produce "Sikh material", which is increasingly challenged today as having very colonial influences and having had the effect of spiritual colonization on Sikhi. The British support of the Singh Sabha Movement (the Sikh reform movement) is logical, as the investment in a symbolic, spiritual manifestation of Sikhi removed from its political origins has clear benefits for a British Raj:

These decisions of Government are sufficient proof, if proof is needed, of its general sympathy with the movement for religious reform among the Sikhs. They were generally welcomed by the very large number of Sikhs who are interested in these questions without any political bias against Government. But *there is an extreme section of a dangerous type which has for many months been endeavouring to combine the religious and political cries*, and which has deliberately associated itself with the followers of other religions whose avowed object is the destruction of the existing system of Government. *The exploitation of the Sikh community by these advocates of a revolution* would, in the opinion of the Governor in Council, be not only a grave disaster for the Sikh nation but also a serious menace to the orderly and peaceful development of the whole province. (Punjab State Archives, May 1922, 5457/67:1; emphasis added)

While this moment could have been catastrophic for the British Raj in terms of losing its most significant and supportive martial base, the strategy pursued in navigating the over-demonstration of state violence in 1919 was crucial in informing how they would proceed with strengthening the Sikh-British allegiance. Through engaging the Sikh leaders of the province and warning them "that the government was strong enough to 'crush' the rebels but there would be less bloodshed if the Sikhs cooperated" (Mazumder 2011:464), Lieutenant-Governor Michael O'Dwyer, a key figure in the kirpan regulation discussions, was able to convince Sikh leaders that "the [anti-colonial] movement was bringing the Sikhs as a whole into discredit, and their interests as well as their honour were involved" (Mazumder 2011:464). By incorporating Sikh leaders into the fold and convincing them to support the British in saving "Sikh honor", the British were able to effectively squash anti-colonial resistance in Punjab and claim the support of Sikh leadership.

In the years after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, there were a few subsequent mentions of kirpan policy that laid the foundation for British administration and Sikh political elite relations going into World War II recruitment. In 1924, just a few years after the massacre, concerns about the kirpan reappeared in the remaining administrative files. Similarly titled "The Kirpan Question", a 5-page essay without a clear author notes that, "There appears to be some doubt as to what is the exact authority for the belief that every Amritdhari Sikh is enjoined to wear a Kirpan"

(Punjab State Archives, Home Department/Police 1924, 5762/71:1). Continuing on, the unknown author notes, while Guru Gobind Singh Ji placed stress upon other embodied Sikh practices, kirpan-bearing does not seem conclusive. He, presumably, regards:

> Earlier English writers do not mention "Kirpan." Malcolm (1812) uses the word knife or dagger…The interest of these quotations lies in the suggestion that the word "kirpan", *although frequently found in the sacred writings* was not formerly in common use. After 1900 it appears freely, perhaps, as the result of the Sikh revival which commenced about 1890. (Punjab State Archives, Home Department/Police 1924, 5762/71:1)

Again, English documentation and legal policy is given the authoritative final say, while Sikh authoritative figures which can be deemed solely "religious" through a Christian lens (sacred writings) are prioritized over embodied practice. The essay goes on to note that the "Kirpan Question" has arisen because of the aforementioned "Sikh agitation" throughout 1919.

In August 1932, questions arise again about the specific definition of a kirpan and, surprisingly, "The Punjab Government have not considered it necessary to define "Kirpan" and Sikhs in the Punjab are therefore entitled to go armed with a kirpan of any size" (Punjab State Archives, Home/Police 6978/88). Finally, in 1934, the kirpan exemption previously only offered in Punjab and Delhi provinces was extended to all of British India, so that "A Sikh [who] is as good a citizen in one province as in another….[can] freely move about from one end of it to another" (Punjab State Archives, Home/Police 13672/168:2). While the Gadar Party resulted in strict punishment of Sikh mobility and transnational community mobilizing, Sikhs within British India were distinguished as "religious" and not "political" Sikhs who have "been deprived of this mark of his religion and heavily sentenced for observing it" (Punjab State Archives, Home/Police 13672/168:2). Anjali Gera Roy has termed this the "immobility regime" (2016), where Sikh movement, so long as it was in service of the recruitment of Sikhs for the military and police. I add to this argument by considering how, through the addition of Sikh political elite who could

serve as intermediaries for the British colonial government and lay Sikh communities, the British were able to pull back on their hyper-regulation of Sikh possibilities for violence. Instead, they created boundaries of trust and inclusion around who could ensure the continued service of Sikhs to the British Raj. Through the creation and development of the Khalsa Defence League, a committee to ensure the continued presence of Sikhs at a high rate in the British Imperial Forces, Sikh Punjabi political elite themselves would effectively carry out recruitment for the British on their own. What is most noteworthy of this recruitment by the Sikh political elite, then and now, is their ability to appropriate Sikh radical thought and revolutionary history to fit a colonial project without any of the effort that the British required in attempting to do the same. The next section will detail some of the speeches and letters of these efforts for colonial support by Sikh Punjabi political elite, which demonstrate the significance these arguments held for the permanence of colonial resonances of identity in the Sikh psyche today and the ways they reflect colonial subjectivity-formation done through mechanisms of imperial racecraft.

Forging a colonial Sikh narrative

With the start of World War II, Great Britain once again was relying on the great showing of Sikhs in the Imperial Forces that had been crucial for victory in the first World War. By this point, Punjab had been under the power of the British Raj for nearly a century, so the relationships between various bodies of power, such as colonial administrators and local Punjabi Sikh political elites, were well-organized. As such, the Maharajas (local Sikh rulers) took it upon themselves to launch the Khalsa Defence of India League in 1941 "to ensure a steady flow of Sikh recruits with the idea of maintaining and strengthening the special position of the Sikhs in the armed Forces of the country" (Punjab State Archives Patiala 1941). The Khalsa Defence League was an organization chaired by the same Maharaja of Patiala, Yadavindra Singh, with the membership of many British

officers "well-acquainted with the Sikhs" and a select few Sikh officers; according to Sikh historian Khushwant Singh, "Members of the commission individually toured Sikh districts and discussed the difficulties of soldiers with retired Sikh officers" (1966:240). By and large, they placed value, and thus a significant investment, into ensuring the presence of Sikh (men) in the military. There were specific quotas created and regulated through the League (see right), and particular Maharajas would promise several thousand recruits from their own provinces to meet these quota values. All of this was a simple matter of ensuring an "adequate supply of Sikh recruits both from the point of view of the defence of the Empire and the desirability of the Sikh community making a contribution to India's war effort worthy of its glorious traditions" (Punjab State Archives Patiala 1941).

Enlistment, however, was not simply a matter of making a contribution to the soon-to-be nation-state of India; archival records demonstrate the colonial narrative taking hold of Sikh identity and fusing into a historically rooted and narrative-informed Sikh colonial martial race that continues to hold significance today. In the meetings and recruiting efforts of the Khalsa Defence League, the transmuted stories of Sikh history were suddenly intertwined with colonial

Quota of recruits fixed for the British Indian Districts.

District		Recruits
Amritsar	..	500
Rawalpindi and Jhelum		150
Gujranwala.	..	200
Sheikhupura.	..	300
Sialkot.	..	200
Gurdaspur.	..	200
Jhullundur.	..	300
Hoshiarpur.	..	250
Ludhiana.	..	500
Ferozepore.	..	1,000
Lyallpur.	..	150
Montgomery.	..	200
Hissar.	..	150
Lahore.	..	300
Ambala	..	500
Sargodha	..	150
Gujrat	..	100
Total		5,150.

Figure 2.7 - Table of recruitment numbers proposed by Khalsa Defence League.

responsibility and ownership, or making Sikhs belong through their duty to the crown. In a recruitment speech during World War II, Maharaja Yadavindra Singh shares:

> The small but potent brotherhood of *the martial Sikh community*…has, for centuries, been *the nursery of warrior-sons, with martial instincts running in their veins*. On all occasions of stress and strain, her valiant sons have held the banner of her military glory aloft. In the present war also, they have not only been unwearied of keeping her age-old tradition untarnished, but have also forged new links in the chain of her proud heritage. When the part played by India in this struggle comes to be assessed, we may rest assured that the Punjab will find a high place for herself. (PTL 1297; italics added)

Here, Yadavindra Singh incorporates colonial racist notions of biological predisposition to military service and encourages a continued support of this 'heritage'. The message of the honor and pride of Sikh Punjabis only being upheld through rigorous military service to the Crown was reiterated in internal facing conversations as well, as seen in a letter from Maharaja Yadavindra Singh of Patiala to his father and other family members a year prior:

> The League…has been doing its utmost to ensure a steady flow of Sikh recruits with the idea of maintaining and strengthening the special position of the Sikhs in the armed Forces of the country…The Punjab States, in keeping with their martial traditions, have been supplying adequate number of recruits, but there are *certain backward districts* in the Punjab.…Your Highness, no doubt, appreciates the great importance that attaches to the question of adequate supply of Sikh recruits both from the point of view of the defence of the Empire and *the desirability of the Sikh community* making a contribution to India's war effort worthy of its glorious traditions. (PTL 1296; italics added)

In this instance, Yadavindra Singh incorporates casteist language too, as "backwards" was often used as a proxy for describing caste-oppressed communities and their behavior, demonstrating the continued linkage of racist and casteist ideology in constructing a new social order in British India. The efforts of Yadavindra Singh are reflective of the desire to be seen as constantly and unbreakably legible through imperial service and a devotion to the colonial state, as well as the dismissal of those who did not prescribe to the same politics.

The British used similar framings in their recruiting tactics, creating an exclusivity around who was worthy of recruitment both *through* Sikh identity and *against* it, as they also utilized the

Brahmin caste system, which Sikhi aimed to abolish since its inception, and only were interested in recruiting dominant caste Jatts (Singh 1963). Time and again in the archive, there are request letters that those who have not been deemed as Jatt were actually miscategorized. As such, Sikhs were forced to make themselves legible through an ideological social system antithetical to Sikh praxis in order to become visible through imperial service. In one such instance, a young Sikh man sent a six-page petition verifying his status as a Jatt, to which the response was that, "Nothing…will add more weight to your request to Government than a real response now by enlisting in large numbers" (CHD 10148:129). Placing the onus on the Sikh colonial subject to come with masses of men bearing his caste-linked surname demonstrates how even British management of social boundaries was done in service of increasing state power. Casteism in India was already linked to land ownership and employment possibilities, and further solidified through colonialism's reliance on written law; the British capitalizing on this system for their own institutional organization both reified caste inequities and also furthered the desire of colonized subjects to attain dominant caste status to seek out the benefits of employment for increased capital.

Sikh obligation to serve the British Raj was equally sutured to Sikh historical narratives of sacrifice, martyrdom, and battle – all rhetorics that continue in martial race narrative today, as Chapter Two will demonstrate. From a gathering of the Khalsa Defence of India League, District Ferozepore, in Moga on January 7, 1942, the opening remarks employ evocations of historical Sikh bloodshed nourishing the land on which they now prepare to fight for justice again. The membership states,

> This sacred place where...the 40 devoted followers of Shri Guru Govind Singh laid down their lives fighting bravely for the cause of the Master, and thus expiated with blood the little sliding in their faith, which once they had fallen prey to. The magnificent martyrdom of those who dyed this earth with crimson, is replete with an object lesson for all of us today. Their brave performance exhorts and inspires us to feats of an equal courage and

bravery to be performed at the common battle front, where the Allied Forces are fighting for the liberation of humanity.

The Ferozepur membership references the saakhi of the Chaali Mukte, a story that many Sikh children could repeat from memory; it is one in which 40 soldiers, giving up faith that Guru Gobind Singh Ji can lead them to victory against the thousands of Mughal soldiers outside their fort, leave and return home. A woman of their village, Mai (Mother) Bhago, is infuriated by their cowardly behavior and leads them back to the battlefield herself where she battles alongside the men until all forty redeem themselves through martyrdom. Mai Bhago is one of the most renowned women in Sikh history to this day, known to have become Guru Gobind Singh Ji's personal bodyguard after this encounter. The evoking of a story of betrayal (out of fear) and then return (out of love) must be read as an intentional choice in emotional capital, especially given the final line directly referencing their "brave performance" and the potential inspiration for "equal courage and bravery" to be performed "where the Allied Forces are fighting for the liberation of humanity." In 1942, Sikhs recruits were being reminded of this Sikh history to enforce that they must support the Imperial Forces in order to honor their legacy of sacrifice and bravery.

This message is made clear in a speech delivered by Maharaja Yadavindra Singh at the Amritsar Mela on January 24, 1945, at a similar rallying event for recruitment:

> The adequate representation of the Sikhs on the Army is an issue vital to the very existence of the Sikh community and we must pool our united effort to ensure a steady flow of recruits from amongst the Sikhs. Needless to say, Sikhism will lose its distinctive flavor if the military acumen of those professing it was allowed to be fagged out by harmful exotic creeds. It cannot but cause the deepest concern to all well-wishers of the Panth that unwholesome influences have been operating to make the Khalsa forget his noble mission and have resulted in causing some shortage in the number of Sikh recruits coming forward in certain British Indian districts; however, it is a matter of sincere satisfaction to us that the efforts of the Khalsa Defence of India League are beginning to bear fruit and we see amongst the Sikhs a re-kindling of their natural interest in the military glory to which they are proud heirs.

Maharaja Yadavindra pulls upon many narrative touchstones that continue their role today – Sikh exceptionalism, distinctive service to the state and royalty to the Crown (via the military), and, of course, the continuation of the belongingness Sikhs are meant to claim and receive through the military. His insistence upon the collective investment Sikhs should have in seeking pride and ownership through the Imperial Forces is unsurprising considering what he stood to gain as part of the Sikh political elite, but it is important to note the legacies of these words today. As Sikhs continue to seek cultural citizenship through military service, and thus the further oppression of other Black and brown bodies, they draw upon this transmuted colonial Sikh narrative of heirdom to military glory. Sikhs are no longer beholden to inherent Creator-given sovereignty, but to the power received through the nation-state and dying in its service.

Given that Sikhs originally entered into diaspora through imperial military service, it is important to acknowledge the transnational interactions Sikhs had through their military service with other non-white communities. As such, I share a letter from Maharaja Yadavindra Singh to Sikh soldiers in early 1941, congratulating them for their service in the Battle of Sidi Barrani, a war which was fought in December 1940 to claim the Egyptian coast from Italian rule:

> I congratulate you all for the memorable role you have played in this great war which will decide the destiny of human civilization - a war which involves the progress and prosperity of the entire world and all that we hold dear. The entire Sikh community is proud of your gallant deeds at Sidi Barrani and other theatres of war...I am confident you will cheerfully bear the brunt of this grim struggle inspired by the ideals of the Great Gurus and so perform your military duties as will not only bring you good name but also add to the military glory that is your priceless heritage.

This letter holds the map for the Sikh diaspora's racial positionality and concurrent choices in racial membership that were happening elsewhere (recall that Bhagat Singh Thind had already been denied citizenship by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1923). Again, Yadavindra Singh evokes Sikhi alongside sentiments of pride, honor, ancestry, and bravery. However, the positioning of

being memorable in a "great war which will decide the destiny of human civilization" is an important, and accurate, statement. By positioning themselves as imperial servants in the war to claim and reclaim land from other brown bodies, Sikhs ironically participated in the same erasure of belongingness and unsettlement that they themselves experienced. This choice of seeking acceptance through imperial service and violence against other non-white bodies, all while "inspired by the ideals of the Great Gurus" and rewriting Sikh history and identity to incoporate this heritage, has set Sikhs up all too well to continue to seek belonging and citizenship through the continuation of the martial race.

Resonances and Remnants of an Imperial Sikh Identity

All of these factors resulted in dramatically high Sikh recruitment and enlistment into the British Imperial Forces which had a reverberating effect on Sikh identity and visibility within and outside Indian borders. Nearly half of the one million British Imperial forces who served outside of India were Sikh, solidifying global perceptions of an amritdhari Sikh man, hyper visible through turban, beard, and kirpan, as the quintessential imperial soldier (Das 2018). The high ratio of Sikhs also had severe implications well after colonial rule, as it created a deep trust and investment in the military as *belonging* to Sikhs, which made the military takeover of Punjab in the 1980s, initially, much less suspicious (Kaur 2019). Military service also fueled permanent emigration, as Sikh men who were sent outside of India for their military service often stayed and became citizens in these nations, or at least permanent residents (PTL 1302/CHD 5673). Chapter Two will dive in deeper to examine the lasting and contemporary impact of imperial racecraft on US diasporic Sikh subjectivities. Here, however, I will close with a brief note on the ongoing prevalence of these colonial histories in shaping Sikh subjectivity in both the Indian and British context.

Today, Sikh belonging continues to be contested and sought within postcolonial India as anti-Sikh violence is rampant in a Hindu nationalist imaginary; however, similar to British colonial racism, Sikh inclusion is mobilized (against Muslim exclusion) to mark an inclusive Hindu nationalist state[6] when necessary (Sharma 2002). On June 15, 2020, Indian and Chinese troops clashed in the Galwan Valley in a longstanding military standoff between the two countries over contested land ownership in Kashmir. However, while news of this usually might not have extended beyond increased nationalist rhetoric and a simple death toll, there was one narrative that rose to the top across Indian and Sikh news sources: "Gurtej Singh, the latest martyr or 'Shaheed' in an enormously crowded pantheon of Sikh heroes starting from Banda Bahadur, is a hero India is yet to know but will never forget once it did." Military veterans and journalists flooded blogs and smaller news sites to give tribute to Gurtej Singh, a 23-year-old Sikh who was one of twenty soldiers killed from the 16th Bihar Regiment, which dates back to the British Indian Army (Bhaumik 2020). All of these iterations of Gurtej Singh's final moments share this identical statement from an unidentified military source:

> Though he was injured severely in the neck and head, he rewrapped his turban and pulled himself back to the fight. He used his kirpan to fight more soldiers until he could snatch a sharp weapon from a Chinese soldier. He further took down seven Chinese soldiers making the tally to 11 before one stabbed him from behind. But before going down, he killed his final 12th enemy with his kirpan too.

---

[6] The effective liberalization of Hindutva and its proponents note V.D. Savarkar, the man who coined Hindutva, included Sikhs in his "essentials of Hindutva—a common nation (Rashtra), a common race (Jati) and a common civilization (Sanskriti)" (Savarkar 1923:116).

Gurtej Singh's death was covered widely in Sikh press as well, but this coverage focused much more on the exploitation of Punjab's village families and their young men to feed India's military. Images of Gurtej Singh's mourning mother overwhelmed Sikhs' social media timelines and Whatsapp messages. The most concise of challenges against this use of Gurtej Singh's death comes from the Sikh Information Centre, who even turned their statement into a downloadable poster (Appendix A). The cover

— 2020 —   — June 1984 —

Figure 2.8 - Image from Sikh Information Centre Flyer on treatment of kirpan-carrying Sikhs in India.

Chinese soldiers with a kirpan before dying in Galwan Valley

pledged to commit murder, arson, and acts of terrorism."

image of the poster (above) that circulated widely on its own makes an immediate connection between the villanization of amritdhari Sikhs during 1984 by the Indian Army to the way the same institution now glorifies Gurtej Singh's use of his kirpan on behalf of the Army, placing two images of Gurtej Singh side-by-side: the Army soldier versus the threatening Sikh Punjabi man. The Sikh Information Centre covers several instances in which Sikhs in government positions were humiliated by the Indian government, and also when Sikhs outside of Punjab (e.g., in Kashmir or Delhi) were attacked by the same Indian Army. The poster works to reposition Sikhs to understand how Sikh identity and bravery is used in service of the Indian military when convenient and easily thrown away when it must be vilified. The poster ends with a statement on the utility of Sikhs fighting in the war against the Chinese specifically: "No Chinese have ever attacked any Sikh gurdwaras, raped Sikh women, or killed Sikh youth. The Chinese are not the enemies of the Sikhs

of Punjab. The real enemy of Sikhs is Hindutva from New Delhi." Thus, while Sikhs balanced the precipice of inclusion via colonial subjectivity, they now identify the Indian state as the source of violent Othering, which they continue to experience alongside Muslims, Kashmiris, Dalits (the caste-oppressed), Adivasis (Indigenous tribal communities), and other victims of postcolonial Hindutva (Griswold 2019). The ongoing positioning of Sikh sovereignty against an increasingly Hindu nationalist India will return in Chapter Three.

For UK-based Sikhs, the salience of martial race histories impact not only collective and individual Sikh identity, but ancestral and familial notions of belonging and migration to the UK, as well. On Remembrance Day 2021, the Punjab & World War One Archive was launched as a partnership between the UK Punjab Heritage Association (UKPHA) and the University of Greenwich to "reunite families with their ancestors and their ancestors' military history" and determine "whether Indian soldiers were commemorated as equally as their European colleagues" (Anon 2021; UK Punjab Heritage Association and University of Greenwich 2021). Concerns about lack of recognition for Sikh soldiers' contributions in British military history continue to be relevant for Sikh inclusion in the UK today, as UK Labour Party MP Tamanjeet Singh Dhesi highlights: "[Sikh soldiers] were highly decorated as well…and that is what needs to be taught, and I think that it would really aid community cohesion" (Nash 2021). For UK Sikhs, then, recalling a martial race project is not only about historical Sikh subjectivity, but possibilities for present and future ones, as well.

In including these brief anecdotes of Sikh martial subjectivity in contemporary India and the UK, I hope to demonstrate that – while this dissertation will focus on US-based Sikh subjectivities, the relevance of imperial racecraft through Sikh racialization has trans-national implications. Much of this has to do with the continued reliance on the colonial archive for

dictating a Sikh relevance to British India. The legacy of Sikh visibility and power through the

military continues on, both a continuation of colonial relations in diasporas like Canada and the

UK, and a morphing of this into widespread nationalism displayed through military service.

LEGACIES OF A MARTIAL RACE:

Sikh Punjabi Investment and Implication in the Police State

Lining the walls of gurdwaras (Sikh place of gathering) worldwide are portraits of shaheeds (martyrs) who gave their lives to defend sociopolitical justice throughout Sikh history. A gurdwara in California, however, has included a recent image alongside them – a photograph, thrice enlarged from its representative size, of Houston's first Sikh police officer Sandeep Dhaliwal, killed on duty in September 2019 [Figure 3.1]. In the days after his death, Sikh Coalition – the largest US Sikh advocacy organization – released a statement "In Memory of Deputy Dhaliwal", but focused on reiterating the organization's campaign to challenge US military and police uniform policy which prevents visible Sikhs from serving without a time-consuming accommodation (Sikh Coalition 2019a). In media reports on Dhaliwal's death, a 2015 quote from the officer was featured often: "serving in the police force is natural to us, as Sikhs value service", Dhaliwal shared, highlighting his father's service as a Punjab police officer (NBC Asian America 2015; Williams and Webber 2019). Two years after Dhaliwal's death, US Congress officially renamed a Houston post office after him, ensuring "the Dhaliwal name and the distinction of being the first Sikh to serve in the uniform of the

Figure 3.1 - Sandeep Dhaliwal on the wall of shaheeds in El Sobrante, California gurdwara alongside shaheeds from the Indian government-led mass killings of Sikhs throughout the 1980s and '90s.

Harris County Sheriff's Office will live on in perpetuity" (Cruz 2020). While crucial to understanding US Sikh subjectivity formation, these ongoing commemorations of Dhaliwal also seemed to speak to a larger function of US institutions and the collective memory projects they oversee.

To examine possible linkages between Sikh community and US projects of memory, I interrogate contemporary US Sikh advocacy projects through the lens of commemoration and mourning. Specifically, I explore instances of politicized Sikh deaths to examine when and how individual experiences of grief are remade into projects of collective memory, and through which means they are identified as worthy of this transformation. I inquire: when and how is the trope of the Sikh martyr mobilized in response to contemporary Sikh death and what does this mobilization, and community responses to it, illustrate regarding the project of Sikh belonging in the US?

I analyzed online community discussions and news reports on the deaths of 42-year-old police officer Sandeep Dhaliwal, shot during a traffic stop in September 2019, and 6-year-old Gurupreet Kaur, who succumbed to hyperthermia while entering the US through Mexico in June 2019. Dhaliwal and Kaur died within four months of each other, both in the southwestern US; this temporal and geographic proximity generated intertwined yet conflicting community conversations on recognition, mourning, and commemoration. Additionally, in this analysis, I noticed the Sikh "martial race" legacy emerging as a commemorative mechanism to mark subjects as worthy of collective mourning, particularly in discourse mediated by Sikh advocacy organizations. During British colonial rule over India, Sikhs were categorized as one of the "martial races", constructed as biologically and culturally predisposed to excel at military service (Rand and Wagner 2012). Thus, I pursued a second round of analysis to explore the impact of this legacy on commemoration, particularly through (1) Sikh community organizations' advocacy

materials and news reports on the ban on Sikh identity markers (turban and unshorn hair) in US military and police uniforms and (2) online community discussions around Sikh participation in the US police and military. Data was selected based on relevance to Sikh community dialogue over a prolonged period and for increased engagement by standards for that platform (e.g., one week of dialogue on a single Twitter thread) and evaluated through its mobilization of Sikh historical and contemporary narratives around belonging, safety, and inclusion.

As a result, I offer two contributions to studying commemoration as a tool of the state. First, past instances of incorporation are useful mechanisms for state-inclusion commemoration narratives because they recall racialized and gendered subjectivities that can be recreated on bodies impacted by those same categorizations today. Second, commemorating such inclusion as apolitical both disavows contemporary implication and predetermines which bodies are grievable through their value to the state – another racialized and gendered project. Through these findings, this paper also makes clear how bodies generally marked as solely victim or Other are weaponized through selective commemoration to solidify a hierarchy of exclusion central to the structure and function of the US.

Sikh Subjectivities and the Historical Narrativization of Inclusion

The implicated subject has been a critical addition to studies of memory, violence, and collective responsibility, particularly to understand power as inheritance through harms one did not directly commit (Rothberg 2019). Grappling with tensions between Sikh involvement in projects of imperialism alongside Sikh precarity amidst white supremacist violence, I mobilize implication to think through the simultaneous possibilities for safety and threat generated by the same visible markers of subjectivity (Sikh turban and unshorn hair). The first Sikh migrants to the US arrived via California in the early 1900s, primarily from Punjab, India (La Brack 2005). During British

rule over Punjab from 1849-1947, Sikh traditions of weapon-carrying and four centuries of defending against tyrannical rule in south Asia had marked them as worthy to protect the Empire (Imy 2019). However, this was not done through racial tropes alone. Martial race categorization was a useful device for the British to refine Victorian notions of masculinity, making it equally significant in shaping gendered Sikh subjectivities (Streets 2004). Sikhs' privileged martial race status in the colonial racial hierarchy manifested as highly-focused recruitment tactics – Sikhs were 12% of Punjab's population, but 22% of WWI recruits from the region – and transported Sikhs around the globe to act as the imperial arm of British conquest (Das 2018; Roy 2013). Much of early Sikh migration was already marked by implication, as US immigration policy prioritized citizenship for those with military service (Ngai 2014).

Still, recent hate violence like the 2012 Oak Creek gurdwara shooting and the 2021 Indianapolis FedEx warehouse shooting, where Sikhs constituted half the victims and were known to be a disproportionate number of workers, continue to mark Sikhs as vulnerable (Hundle 2012). This is unsurprising, as Sikh bodies are readily hyper-visible through Sikh embodied practices, turbans and unshorn hair, that have been racialized and gendered as symbols of masculine terror (Singh 2019). On the contrary, these embodied practices denote a Sikh's devotion to divine Oneness, through a refusal to alter the natural form of the body (unshorn hair) and mark the body as innately sovereign (turban). For a tradition emerging out of a society with centuries of casteist exclusion, this was and is a radical transformation – through casteism, bodies are marked as always-already polluted (caste-oppressed) or always-already liberated (caste-dominant) (Omvedt 2011). Today, 41 out of 50 US states now have at least one established gurdwara, demonstrating the wide-reaching settlement for the US Sikh diaspora.[7] However, hate violence manifests on the

---

[7] States without a known gurdwara are Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

body of the gurdwara, too, with graffiti and vandalism incidents, or even community resistance to possible construction of a new gurdwara (T. Kaur 2021; Singh 2002). These fears are further cemented through ongoing violence against Sikhs in India, where post-Partition villainization of the community exponentially increased as the government began to fear its martial race minority's calls for sovereign statehood (Axel 2001). Considering these vulnerabilities of Sikh life, the martial race legacy represents an established pathway for racialized and gendered belonging by equating previous preferential status in the empire to possibilities for contemporary inclusion in the nation-state. However, such inclusion requires upholding logics of US state violence, where bodies' values are predetermined through racialized and gendered subjectivities, and state violence becomes a mechanism to justify such de/valuing (James 1996). Given this, continued martial race commemoration deeply implicates Sikhs, for, in the words of Rothberg, they "propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present" (2019:1).

Eric Foner explores the elision of implication in US historical narrative broadly, where the "problem with these histories was not simply that they were incomplete, but that they left students utterly unprepared to confront American reality...these [histories] seemed to spring from nowhere, without discernible roots in the American past" (Foner 2003:xv). This elision of implication occurred, according to Hayden White, through the nineteenth century construction of an *absolute* historical narrative, constructing History with transcendental authority as with God or Nature. Previously, in history as discourse, a reader of history can still recognize "the circle of moral conceptions that defined their practical social horizons; of leading them to identify this circle as their own conscience and guarantor of the integrities of their selfhood" (White 1987:103). However, because the historic past is "both known and unknown, present and absent, familiar and

alien, at one and the same time", it opens up possibilities for developing subjectivities that feel more grounded in the "reality" of history (White 1987:89). As such, "historical representation permits the reader to give free reign to 'the imaginary' while remaining bound to the constraints of a 'symbolic system' but in such a way as to engender in him a sense of 'reality' that is 'more comprehensible' than his present social existence" (White 1987:89). This development of a historical narrative that is, in fact, ahistorical, develops a "national imaginary" that guides desires of belonging in the US through the symbolic system developed out of a racialized, gendered, and class-based order (Anderson 1983). The US-specific national imaginary, then, confers upon communities a historical narrative that is white supremacist, patriarchal, and capitalist to conceptualize the self, while also obscuring these political commitments (Du Bois 1940). In another way, one can understand US historical narrativization to mean that an absolute *commemorative* space also develops a particular moral frame that is then mobilized to define one's subjectivity – in other words, a rejection of implication.

Jackie Wang's "Politics of Innocence" extends this theorizing, where empathy – or how we indicate who is equally moral – is also racialized. In the context of which US police murders of Black people are deemed grievable, Jackie Wang articulates that innocence becomes a stand-in for "nonthreatening to white civil society" and a way to obscure the actors who enact Black physical and social death by refocusing public attention on a debate around individual morality (Wang 2012:2,3). Making claims for empathy based on innocence means that "[t]he desire for recognition compels us to be allies with, rather than enemies of the State, to sacrifice ourselves in order to meet the standards of victimhood" (Wang 2012:2). Analyzing state projects of commemoration, then, requires addressing how implication is elided through the construction of racialized morality, in service of the ahistorical narrativization of the US national imaginary. Here,

studying the routes of the martial race legacy is necessary to understand when and why Sikhs are commemorated (Erll 2011). In Wendy Brown's words (1993), remembrance of a time of inclusion is both a reflection of the "wounded attachment" to that site of exclusion and also the desire to recreate present inclusion through that particular subjectivity. Perhaps, then, the choice to commemorate the Sikh martial race legacy is to imagine oneself as part of the nation.

Sikh Commemoration and Shaheedi

Across time and space, the gurdwara has been a place for community gathering, organizing, and learning, where commemorating shaheeds plays a key role. In Punjab, most gurdwaras mark the site of a significant historical event and display artifacts from that event to indicate the co-temporal presence of Sikh Gurus (enlightened teachers) with their present-day Sikhs, or students (Murphy 2005). Gurdwaras in the diaspora, lacking such site-specific attachment, carry this history through portraits of shaheeds. Celebrations of martyrdom should also be contextualized in larger Sikh praxes to reject social and political hierarchies, like casteism. As individuals, Sikhs are called to destroy desires for self-recognition and realize the liberatory possibilities of humbling oneself before the equally present divine in all creation, or Oneness. Shaheedi, derived from Arabic, also means to witness. The shaheed, then, is a Sikh who has gone beyond their individual practice to, instead, call attention to the denial of Oneness and demand the rectification of such denial through self-sacrifice – a form of witnessing injustice. This sacrifice is then both continually witnessed by the larger Sikh community through the wall of shaheeds and carried forward as a material way of being in the world (Haripriya 2018).

The majority of gurdwaras decorate their internal walls with shaheeds from the first several centuries of Sikh history, during which Sikhs challenged pre-colonial tyranny across south Asia. In some gurdwaras, Sikhs who were killed during Indian government-led massacres of the 1980s are included (Chopra 2010), but rarely shown are women from any of these periods. In one noted instance, there is a recognition of anti-colonial sacrifice and rejection of Sikhs as solely a martial race – a wall of Canadian Sikhs who returned to Punjab to sow seeds of anti-colonial dissent among the Sikh imperial forces and violently overthrow British rule [Figure 3.2]. Finally, we started with the select instance in which Dhaliwal, a Sikh cop killed in the line of duty, has also been included in the commemorative project of shaheedi [Figure 3.1]. Thus, while commemoration is a core part of Sikh collective identity, the nuances in each gurdwara's wall of shaheeds indicate it is also a project of curating the historical narrative that communities have selected to orient themselves

Figure 3.2 - Anti-colonial shaheeds in Surrey, British Columbia gurdwara. Sign reads, "This gallery is dedicated to the sacrifices of those Canadian Gadari freedom fighters that left Canada and went to India to fight for freedom of India and faced imprisonment, life imprisonment and death penalty."

towards (Trouillot 1995). Ongoing "colonial aphasia" allows the Sikh martial race narrative to be

simultaneously "at once selectively available and out of reach" for developing critical Sikh subjectivity (Maan 2005; Stoler 2011:122). But, the "unanchoring" of the Sikh martial race from its aim as a project of racialized and gendered violence allows memory projects of the Sikh martial race to vacillate between commemorative and mediatized memory; the former "in which the past is invoked at set times and places for specific social purposes and [the latter], where the past is consumed as entertainment or as part of the identity projects of individuals" (O'Connor 2019:3). Rather than making linear sense of archived histories, resisting the colonial impulse to analyze such violence as complete allows us to trouble choices in commemorative narratives as they occlude the recognition of implicated subjectivities (Judge and Brar 2021; Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein 2016). A new framing of Sikh subjectivity through implication can attend to the denial of racialized and gendered violence which occurs through collective memory.

Thus, in examining the utility of the martial race legacy to US Sikh advocacy projects, I contend with the disavowal of implication that occurs when contemporary positionality is confined to that of the constantly excluded victim rather than the implicated subject. First, I detail the history of Sikh incorporation into the US via imperialism, followed by an analysis of how the martial race legacy is mobilized in Sikh advocacy projects to incorporate the turban and unshorn hair into US police and military uniform standards and how this commemorative model has morphed alongside dialogue on gender equity and the anti-Blackness of US policing. Then, I contrast forms of grief taken up after the deaths of Gurupreet Kaur and Sandeep Dhaliwal and examine resistance to considering Sikhs as implicated. Through these analyses, I demonstrate how Sikh bodies are marked as grievable by proximity to the state, a distance measured through racialized and gendered possibilities for empathy and incorporation through commemoration.

Sikh Citizenship through the Police State

As Sikh Punjabi emigration increased with community knowledge of strong economic opportunities outside India, and continued threats to safety and livelihood inside, Sikhs also began to locate themselves in relation to a transnational white polity that was not as willing to grant the special colonial status as they had received from the British (Mills 1997; Tatla 2004). These experiences of racialization and discriminatory treatment in nascent settler-colonial nations crafted opportunities for Sikhs to broker their relationship to the Racial Contract as they realized their selective incorporation into the boons of whiteness had solely been to the benefit of British India. These experiences of racialization had various impacts on Sikh subjectivity. For instance, some Sikhs continued to negotiate their positionality as one within the racial polity and state, such as Bhagat Singh Thind's claims to citizenship in front of the U.S. Supreme Court, where he argued Aryan ancestry in addition to his prior military service for the U.S. in World War I made him a rightful citizen. Located perhaps at the opposite pole was the Gadar Party, a group of Punjabi Sikhs, as well as other diasporic Indians, who launched a transnational, anti-colonial movement to violently overthrow British India. These Sikhs were radicalized through their interactions in the fields, factories, and logging camps with the Industrial Workers of the World and other union movements who connected transnational labor rights with an anarchist struggle against capitalist wage labor and towards grassroots democracy through self-management in the workplace (Ramnath 2011). However, the movement was successfully criminalized and squashed through joint surveillance and policing across British India, the U.S., and the U.K., where all three empires felt threatened by the rise of a peoples' movement ready to use violence to end global racial capitalism (Sohi 2014). Even with these alternative political ideologies and subjectivities in the Sikh diaspora, the British Imperial Forces played a large part for Sikh Punjabis in initiating the role of military service as a pathway to traverse borders and gain at least some privileges in those

nation-states relative to India. In Thind's case, while his claims were denied, the respect he gained for being a veteran within the U.S. context became a vessel for Sikh belonging outside of India through military service and continued the legacy of Sikh military service in the diaspora.

Sikhs migrating to the U.S. continued to use military service as a mechanism to attain and preserve cultural citizenship through legacy-based arguments of Sikh belonging and service to the nation-state. Until, on October 1, 1981, the Army made changes to its uniform policy to both reflect the need for a temperate climate uniform post-Vietnam, and included a few other key shifts for those serving with religious accommodations to standard uniform:

> "The Army terminated the policy of granting exceptions to appearance standards based on religious beliefs for wearing beards, unshorn hair, turbans, or religious jewelry. This change followed a review of the effect of these exceptions on the soldier's mission, health, and safety. Soldiers already in the Army may continue to enjoy the previously granted exceptions as long as they are otherwise eligible for service." (Cocke et al. 1988:140–41)

While the removal of religious accommodations does not receive any other context in any public Army or Military documents, the study of Executive Orders and U.S. foreign policy from 1981 is telling – the year began with the end of the Iran Hostage Crisis, which is often noted as an important flash point for racial-religious discrimination against Sikhs prior to September 11, 2001. In previous research on US-based Sikh experiences, Surinder Singh shares the decision to "cut my hair...after the Iran hostage situation when I was heckled everywhere", thus marking racist discrimination a common experience for Sikhs during the hostage crisis era as well (Chhibber 2005). Theorizing around terrorcraft, akin to racecraft, has demonstrated the intentional crafting of the "Arab terrorist" archetype as a pre-9/11 U.S. state project to fuel domestic support of international interference in the Middle East (Kumar 2020). It follows, then, that the intentional removal of Sikh-specific religious markers ("beards, unshorn hair, turbans, or religious jewelry") tied to the need to regulate the inclusion of Sikhs into a white polity after the Iran hostage crisis

created blurry lines between Sikh identity and enemies of the U.S. state. With this 1981 policy change, the legacy of the Sikh soldier in the U.S. context slowly came to a halt. While those grandfathered in continued to serve until retirement, new Sikh recruits would be forced to remove their turbans and cut their unshorn hair and beards to meet uniform standards. This continued to act as a barrier for Sikh enlistment in the U.S., until nearly thirty years later.

In April 2009, Sikh Coalition acquired two uniform accommodations for Sikh clients seeking to serve in the US Army, launching a campaign that continues to be one of its most popular more than a decade later. The campaign, which aims to obtain unbridled access into the US military for Sikhs with unshorn hair and/or turbans, frames its work as "following in the footsteps of the African American, women's rights, and LGBT communities…to systematically remove barriers that prevent Sikhs from serving in the US military" (Sikh Coalition n.d.-c). Sikh Coalition argues the campaign would set precedent for equal employment for Sikhs throughout the US: "if the nation's largest employer allows observant Sikhs to serve, this will make it harder for employers everywhere to discriminate against our community" (Sikh Coalition n.d.-c). The US Department of Defense has maintained that Sikhs are unable to make a secure seal with military-grade masks due to their beards, while the turban and unshorn hair underneath prevents proper protection through a helmet, rationalizing their uniform policy as protecting "the soldier's mission, health, and safety" (AP 1981). Additionally, accommodations to uniform would not allow for *esprit de corps*, or the unification of troop morale through their uniformity.

To counter the narrative of Sikhs being unable to comply with uniform standards, Sikh Coalition memorializes the history of Sikh service in various US-led wars as evidence that Sikhs have no limitations to serving safely and properly (Sikh Coalition n.d.-c). Instead, they argue Sikhs are *primed* to serve in the military, not unlike British racial categorization, and continue to call the

US ban on Sikh military service a "presumptive ban", implying an obvious removal if further information was considered (Sikh Coalition 2017). A historical timeline of Sikh US military service is labeled as "a timeline of the history of honorable and capable service by Sikhs in the US military", and those who do receive accommodations become "Sikh Americans who are serving their communities without compromising their faith" (Sikh Coalition 2020b).

In 2013, a year after a neo-Nazi gunman entered the gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, and killed six members of the congregation, Sikh Coalition rebranded the individual litigation project into a multi-year campaign called "Let Sikhs Serve", targeting an end goal of unrestricted Sikh service in the US military. Utilizing the one-year anniversary of the Oak Creek shooting to remind US policy makers of the significance of military service to Sikh American freedom, two Sikh community leaders wrote in *The Hill*:

> While the raising of awareness was one positive development to come out of such a horrific incident, it begged the question: why is it that this distinctly visible minority group – of driven entrepreneurs, successful professionals, family-oriented citizens – have only been noted and praised in tragedy? And further, why is it that Sikhs do not appear to be part of the American fabric?

> A central part of the problem is that Sikhs have not been allowed to contribute to one of the most powerful forces that binds Americans as a people: shared sacrifice in an all-volunteer military that works tirelessly to defend and promote our common values as Americans. (Singh and Singh 2013)

Although the Oak Creek shooting is marked as a tragedy, grief due to loss of life is elided in the larger project of Sikh incorporation into the project of imperialism. The authors recalibrate towards the positive outcome of awareness, defining Sikhs' worth to the nation-state through their "voluntary" willingness to die in service of it. Through this argument, Sikh death is a loss because it was unable to be celebrated as a martyr for the country through military service.

While Sikh Coalition is the only organization that takes up large-scale litigation on this matter, several other organizations have been part of the project to "Let Sikhs Serve" and improve

the public image of US Sikhs through uninhibited military service. National Sikh Campaign (NSC), whose mission is "to promote a better understanding of the Sikh community in America and other Western countries, and to project a positive image and profile of the Sikh community", similarly memorializes Sikhs in the military as part of the Sikh community's contributions to the US and other Western nation-states (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-b). Recalling the "rich military tradition" of the Sikh martial race, NSC claims that Sikh "enthusiasm for military service has been challenged by mandates to cut our hair and remove our turbans" (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-e). NSC also reorients historic Sikh mobilization against social oppression towards a campaign for Sikh military service:

> Taking a stand for ethics is integral to Sikhism—from Guru Nanak's work toward dismantling the Indian caste system, to our core belief that the purpose of life is to grow closer with God through service to others. When Sikhs immigrated to America, they did so with the expectation that they would give more than they would take…. Many also bravely serve in the United States military, working alongside soldiers of all colors and creeds to protect the American homeland and our enduring values. (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-d)

NSC links a Sikh praxis of abolishing material hierarchies to a general project of "service", in which the object or objective of service is not further complicated. Service, instead, obscures implication by imagining the state as benevolent through its promise of universal brotherhood.

Another such effort stems more directly from Sikh Coalition through Major Kamaljeet Kalsi, the first person to receive an accommodation in 2009. Kalsi started the Sikh American Veterans Alliance in 2018, as "creating opportunity for more Americans to serve their nation is not just a matter of national security, but a matter of national identity — everyone should be able to see themselves as part of the world's greatest fighting force" (Sikh American Veterans Alliance n.d.). In Kalsi's experience, "wearing his 'religious uniform' provides him confidence as a soldier" and, he argues, "military service is a natural fit for many religious Sikhs" (Dickstein 2017). With this, Kalsi mirrors the reasoning of Sikh elite who collaborated with the British to increase Sikh

recruitment in the early 1900s, as martial race status was restricted to Sikhs who embraced all embodied elements of Sikhi in order to enforce what the British interpreted as a productive form of social discipline (Imy 2019; Rand and Wagner 2012). In addition to paralleling Sikh embodied practices with military uniform, Kalsi connects fighting ISIS through the US military to the historic challenging of the Mughal Empire by the Sikh Gurus:

> This is a story that Sikh children grow up listening to. It teaches us lessons of sacrifice, bravery, and social justice. It taught me to stand up for the practice of all religions… Sikhs have been fighting against violent extremism and religious intolerance for centuries. (Kalsi 2017)

Kalsi argues that the US military will be able to draw upon this legacy and expertise if it incorporates Sikh identity into uniform standards, which will allow US democracy to emerge victorious:

> We show our strength when we recognize the civil rights of small minorities. And when we do, we also gain in our fight with our enemies. ISIS tolerates no dissent, no disagreement, no difference. Our acceptance brings new people to our side, just as ISIS' intolerance pushes many away. (Kalsi 2017)

Making these legacy-based connections between Sikh justice and Islamic terrorism to distinguish US capacities for religious tolerance from ISIS, Kalsi roots Sikh service in the US military as a simultaneous Sikh *and* American victory for democracy. Kalsi, like those who received accommodations after him, imagine the possibilities of Sikh belonging in its manifestation through military service. Harpreetinder Singh Bajwa who received a 2019 accommodation for the US Air Force stated, "Today, I feel that my country has embraced my Sikh heritage, and I will be forever grateful for this opportunity" (Epstein 2019).

Though this narrative has been dominated by Sikh men for many decades, Sikh women are starting to find pride in the martial race legacy and, in doing so, broaden state-determined inclusion for possibilities of "female empowerment". In June 2020, *The New York Times* reported on West

Point's first observant Sikh cadet, 23-year-old Anmol Narang who shared that "military service was always in her blood. 'My grandfather was in the Indian Army,' she said in an interview. 'It was always a big part of my life and something I was always interested in'" (Karni 2020). One month later, in a LinkedIn post that garnered close to 37,000 reactions and 1,700 comments, Naureen Singh shared how her recent completion of the US Air Force training program was inspired by her own father's legacy, Col GB Singh, "the highest-ranking Sikh to serve active duty with a turban in the US Army" (N. Singh 2020a). She connects her choice to carry on her father's legacy with Sikh history's "really empowered Sikh females [who] continued to rise up and defeat the odds" (N. Singh 2020b). Whereas the martial race legacy incorporated racialized subjects into a colonial racial hierarchy through masculine tropes, the liberal discourse of inclusion has transformed such a category into one that can also empower women. In this case, since many Sikh women do not engage with Sikh embodied practices (one consequence of the masculinization of Sikhi through colonialism), the martial race legacy becomes about preserving a bloodline – ironically a more direct tie-in to US racial ideologies, as well as casteist ideologies of purity preserved through ancestral bloodline.

In addition to campaigning for Sikh service in the military police, Sikh Coalition also has extensive investment in police trainings to ensure the appropriate investigation of hate crimes and proper knowledge of Sikh embodied practices: "The Sikh Coalition looks forward to…continuing our engagement with government and law enforcement across the country in service of equal treatment and respect for Sikhs and minority groups everywhere" (Sikh Coalition 2019b). Sim J. Singh, Senior Manager for Policy & Advocacy further shared, "No one should ever feel disrespected or humiliated because law enforcement did not understand how to interact with a Sikh" (Sikh Coalition 2019b). However, in the aftermath of the summer 2020 uprisings, Sikh

Coalition has added a one-pager on their "Policy Principles Regarding Civil Rights and Law Enforcement" at the top of their general Law Enforcement Engagement FAQ, which previously simply focused on how they litigate cases around employment discrimination against Sikhs choosing to join law enforcement (Sikh Coalition 2020a). It states that the organization now endorses the demilitarization of the police, the end of profiling and qualified immunity, trainings around de-escalatory behaviors, and other general police reform policies that have entered popular discourse after the murder of George Floyd. The remainder of the document returns to the FAQ, with an updated final question that is mirrored on the Sikhs in the military FAQ: "Some in the Sikh American community are proud and excited to serve or see Sikhs serve in law enforcement; others are deeply critical of law enforcement agencies. How does this difference of perspectives affect your work?" The response largely focuses on the right for all Sikhs to pursue the career they desire, but adds, "the vast majority of our work with law enforcement is not focused on securing religious accommodations for Sikhs, but instead centers on holding law enforcement agencies directly accountable when they fail to adequately protect and serve the Sikh community." The FAQ closes by reiterating that the campaign's primary focus is ending employment discrimination:

> The decision to join law enforcement, like all career choices, is a very personal one; naturally, our clients who wish to serve in law enforcement are passionate about their choice. We recognize that every individual has his or her own perspective on service in law enforcement. Organizationally, we do not judge whether one should or shouldn't join law enforcement or any other profession, and we respect each individual's right to make their own career choices. We do, however, insist that all Sikhs across all employment sectors be allowed to do so while practicing their faith as they see fit. (Sikh Coalition 2020a)

While this ongoing campaign against employment discrimination has adjusted for new debates around diversity and inclusion, legal scholars have shown that reform-centered advocacy cannot effectively disrupt the state's racialized and gendered (de)valuing of bodies (Spade 2015). As community traditions of self-defense, colonial and state projects of imperialism and policing, and

familial legacies of military participation are all collapsed into a singular narrative of "service", a framework is forged from which pre-judgements can be made on whose life is worthy of being commemorated through their value to the state.

Who Dies a Martyr?

Selective collective memorializing of deceased Sikhs by the Sikh community has been marked by both racialized and gendered tropes of state belonging. In June 2019, 6-year-old Gurupreet Kaur died from dehydration in the Sonoran Desert after a many-months-long journey to the US from Haryana, a state neighboring Punjab (Frayer 2020; Karimi 2019). While the family gained organizational support and legal representation from a few community spaces, and some media attention over time, the community remained largely silent. A few Sikhs with large social media followings shared the CNN report of her death, but they received no more than 50 retweets, most receiving much less. Death from hyperthermia became common for undocumented migrants after the US launched Prevention Through Deterrence in the 1990s, which used hyper-policing to limit viable crossing points to those accessible through the Sonoran Desert and manipulate the decay caused by extreme heat to erase undocumented migrant deaths (De León 2015). Thus, calling attention to the death of Gurupreet Kaur would have aggravated US desires to obscure racialized border violence, counterintuitive to a project of Sikh inclusion. In contrast, when Dhaliwal was killed four months later, CNN had a 3-minute segment on Dhaliwal's funeral, and many politicians, government agencies, and popular icons commemorated Dhaliwal's passing – including the US Secret Service Twitter account. The week of Dhaliwal's death, UK-based Sikh artist "Inkquisitive" shared his rendering of Dhaliwal embracing a small child as his turban unravels into a US flag [Figure 3.3], garnering more than double his usual Instagram engagement at 43,000+ likes, indicating the mourning for Dhaliwal had become transnational.

Figure 3.3 - Illustration of Dhaliwal by UK artist Inkquisitive, based on a photograph circulated on news networks after Dhaliwal's death.
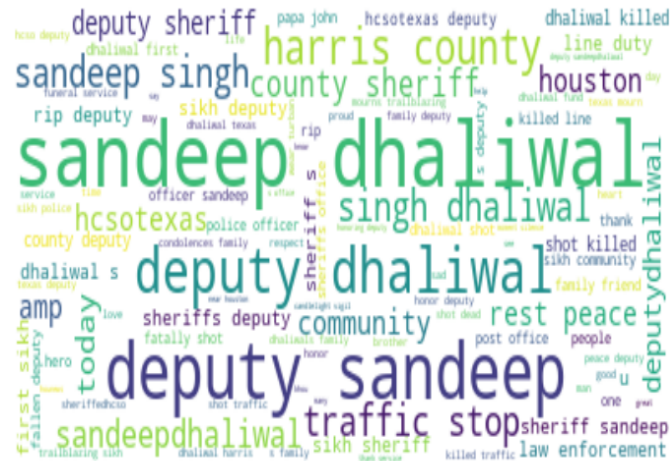
Figure 3.4 - Word cloud of tweets containing "Sandeep Dhaliwal" or "Deputy Dhaliwal" from September 27, 2019, until December 8, 2021.

Figure 3.5 - Word cloud of tweets containing "Gurupreet Kaur" from June 12, 2019, until December 8, 2021.

Scraping and analyzing all tweets mentioning Kaur versus Dhaliwal from the time of their deaths through December 2021 also demonstrates markedly different impact and focal points [Figures 3.4 and 3.5]. There are 230 tweets about Kaur and 7,470 on Dhaliwal to date. @simran, a co-author of *The Hill* article, received 8.2K retweets on his tweet announcing the death of Sandeep Dhaliwal and 4.4K retweets for the death of Gurupreet Kaur. While tweets on Kaur focus primarily on the border, and slightly less so on her cause of death and her Indian nationality, tweets on Dhaliwal largely highlight his positionality as a state civil servant, followed by desires for him to "rest in peace" and condolences to the family, and several words that make no appearance in the word cloud on Kaur: honor, peace, and good. Still, in death, each body is marked by its proximity to the state – Kaur through her experience of the US border apparatus and Dhaliwal through his service as a police officer.

In the days after Dhaliwal's death, a few voices brought attention to the stark contrast in commemoration of life and death for Dhaliwal and Kaur. Sikh Punjabi poet D Kaur contextualized the celebration around Dhaliwal's life through the history of US police as slave catchers and the responsibility Sikhs must accept in claiming power on stolen land. She shared,

79

> i want to raise question on what are we mourning & what are we also normalizing?...what does it mean for us to celebrate turbans & representations & sikhi in a country that was not made for us + does not want us + kills people of color everyday + uses us as tokens? (@_dkaur 2019)

D Kaur ended her reflection by asking Sikhs to be self-reflective in "being warriors" and protect those who are left to the mercy of the police state, including ICE. Other, however, were not yet willing to consider the implications of Dhaliwal's participation in the US police:

> He gave a bigger sacrifice than any of the ones who are opposing Dhaliwal Saab's [marker of respect in Punjabi] death. His exsistence [sic] in the police force was a slap on the face of institutional racism…You fix systems from the inside out. (@rasans_ 2019)

However, this commemoration has not been consistent within the passing of Sikhs who took up civil service. The death of 43-year-old Army veteran Parminder Shergill in 2014 faced an intentional silencing from the community, as he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and PTSD and was shot by police during a mental health crisis (Gonzales 2014). While local elders wanted to mourn quietly, community organizers used it as a chance to address a taboo topic. Like Dhaliwal's family, Shergill's family called upon the martial tradition: "'It's a typical Indian immigrant story,' [Parminder's cousin] says. 'Sikhs are known either as farmers or warriors.'" Despite the attempted mobilization of Shergill's service in relation to the Sikh martial race, there was no national attention or calls for justice. Shergill's death demonstrates not only stigmas around mental health but also how mental illness precludes commemoration within a state inclusion discourse that privileges neurotypical bodies.

Hence, only the deceased Sikh who dies *honorably* in the line of duty is commemorated as a martyr. Innocence, as conceptualized by Jackie Wang, upholds the moral purity of whiteness and becomes a mechanism for non-Black people of color, like Punjabi Sikhs, to participate in anti-Black abuses for their selective incorporation into the US state. However, in the case of Gurupreet Kaur, her presumed innocence – generally granted to undocumented children – is elided within a

framework of commemoration that prioritizes inclusion into the US as its end goal. Because Sikh embodied practices have been masculinized through colonial and imperial frames, the turban and unshorn hair both queer Western norms of masculinity while also denying Sikh women and non-binary Sikhs the ability to be recognized as such (Gill 2020; Mahmood and Brady 2000). Thus, Gurupreet Kaur's death, while invoking grief, did not carry traction for the project of Sikh inclusion – between her lack of US citizenship and Sikh embodied markers, her body could not carry forth such a commemorative project. Instead, Gurupreet Kaur's death represented the violence of US border control – perhaps why she is only formally commemorated in an exhibit on intimacies of state violence at the Jewish History Museum in Tucson, Arizona [Figure 3.6].
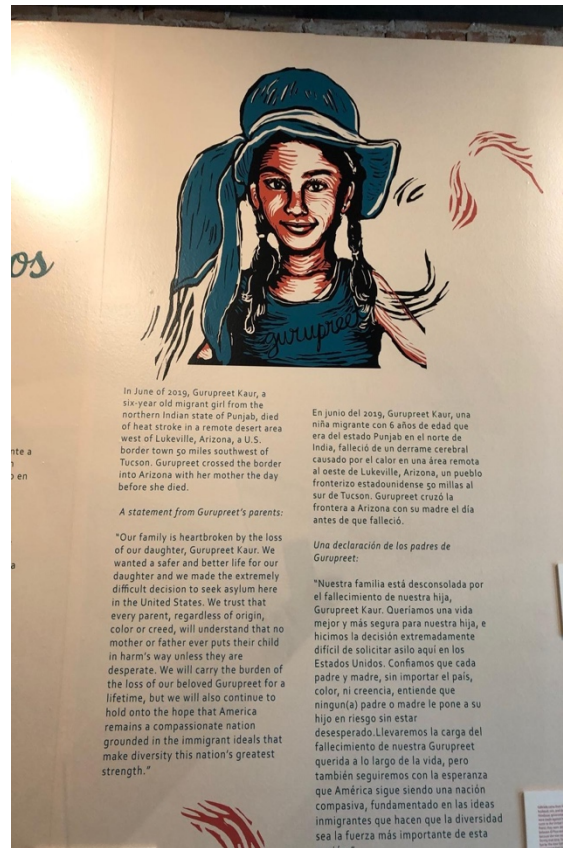
Figure 3.6 - Memorial of Gurupreet Kaur in the Holocaust History Museum, Tucson, Arizona. Featured in Asylum/Asilo exhibit "to address a chaotic circumstance of the government's own making".

Although Sikh organizations and the community at large have yet to attempt commemorative projects that take implication into account, individual voices are attempting such conversations. In May 2021, a week-long Twitter conversation on Sikh involvement in US policing was sparked when @beynaam tweeted, "sikhs in north america will be all 'fuck the indian government for 1984' and then be pro police. or even better, be IN the police" (2021). In this assertion, she evokes possibilities for transnational solidarity around police brutality, connecting Sikh experiences of Indian state violence to their implicated subjectivities regarding US police

violence. Some individuals furthered this sentiment by making explicit links between state actors and institutions:

> "KPS Gill[8] and Derek Chauvin are the same. No justice" (@comrade_marcus 2021)

> "the police actively cooperated with the state in order to push the genocide in 84, it's the same thing here…police don't serve the people they serve the state" (@nun2mee 2021)

> "1984 was not just an event but a structural form of violence that had been sustained for years. Settler state policing in [North America] is also a structure…which carries out violence, harm in the name of securing the state" (@arshallow 2021)

In response, some argued a validation of police service through an argument of alternative historical encounters: "if there [had been] more [Sikhs] in the Police Force. It would have been harder for the government to carry out what they did" (@Sabi_Singh93 2021). A few individuals challenged this logic by mentioning the already disproportionate presence of Sikhs in the Indian police and military, a remnant of the martial race legacy. Still, the most evident foreclosure of acknowledging implication in current commemorative projects comes in one brief exchange:

> You'd think facing the state sanctioned violence we did in 1984 would make people more sensitive to how [the police] operates in America. But instead it feels like "well I'M not being harmed here so [relieved face emoji]" (@preetypants123 2021)

> "Well I'M not being harmed here so"
> Of course not, I don't commit crimes. (@GurvirShinda 2021)

Claims for empathy fall short when they have been constructed through racialized and gendered notions of innocence. Framing commemoration through state inclusion requires that innocence is granted to the Sikh martyr-state actor upon the denial of innocence to, and resultant criminalization of, all Black people. The absolution offered through innocence emerges most saliently through the collective mourning of the martyr-state actor and the mobilization of their memory, where

---

[8] Former Director General of Punjab Police KPS Gill is known for creating an incentive system for officers to capture and kill militants, resulting in thousands of Sikhs being disappeared throughout the 1990s (Ensaaf n.d.).

innocence allows for the most effective form of advocacy through a denial of implication while requesting inclusion into the nation-state imaginary.

Re-narrativizing Sikh commemoration

Through an analysis of commemorative uses of the Sikh martial race legacy, I have demonstrated how Sikh advocacy projects and community members co-create a narrative discourse, historical and contemporary, that identifies the perfect Sikh citizen to be mourned through racialized and gendered categories of value. In placing Dhaliwal on the wall of shaheeds, community members call upon a history of imperial inclusion rather than resistance [Figure 3.1 versus Figure 3.2]. The martyr-state actor (Sandeep Dhaliwal) becomes part of a national project of commemoration, both for the state and Sikh advocacy organizations. The state actor who does not die honorably (Parminder Shergill) is not granted innocence and thus becomes a localized instance of mourning instead. The non-state actor (Gurupreet Kaur) is denied martyrdom, innocence, and legibility altogether, forcing legitimate mourning and commemoration of their death into the private realm and resolving the human consequence of US border enforcement. The public mourning of the latter two deaths is declared indecent and unrecognizable to collective commemoration. Other politicized Sikh deaths, like the Oak Creek victims, are reoriented in terms of their utility for state incorporation through imperialism. These subjects take on an exclusively victim positionality that does not leave room to consider institutional or historical implications of belonging.

In prioritizing the positionality of the Sikh martyr-state actor, Sikh subjectivity emerges by rejecting even possibilities of the state as a violent entity and, thus, a rejection of Sikhs as implicated for their participation in such systems. These legacies mark the intricacies of implication: it was through military service that Sikhs became privileged British subjects and through US-led incorporation that many Sikhs transferred their martial race status into citizenry.

However, ignoring the cost of violence against Black and Indigenous communities in which Sikh imperial subjects have played a crucial part constructs a highly selective commemorative project for Sikh narrative histories. By interrogating the narrativization of Sikh memory, precarity comes into focus as limiting commemoration and shaping the exclusion of more liberatory ontologies, impacting both projects of Sikh memory and Sikh subjectivity formation. Still, some unsettled voices occasionally rise to the top to remind us there are more narratives than the celebrated imperial Sikh. Those who remain unsettled continue to disrupt and challenge the retrospective significance given to Sikh colonial history, asking us to consider another memory, another narrative – perhaps building a new wall of Sikh martyrs.

PART TWO

From Sikh Belonging to Sikh Liberation

Chapter Four

MAKING CITIZENSHIP, BECOMING CITIZENS:

How Sikh Punjabis Shaped the Exclusionary Politics of Belonging

> "It's important, therefore, to know who the real enemy is, and to know the function, the very serious function of racism, which is distraction. *It keeps you from doing your work.* It keeps you explaining over and over again, your reason for being."
>   - Toni Morrison, at Portland State University, 1975

On August 5, 2012, Sikhs in the United States found themselves spinning, untethered, at the center of white supremacist violence. As the early morning program at the gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin came to a close, a neo-Nazi gunman entered the place of worship and killed six people: Paramjit Kaur, Satwant Singh Kaleka, Prakash Singh, Sita Singh, Ranjit Singh, and Suveg Singh.[9] Punjab Singh was struck in the head by a bullet and remained in a state of paralysis for over 7 years, until his death on March 2, 2020. In post-Oak Creek community advocacy projects, the shooting is marked by Sikh community organizations as the climax after years of anti-Sikh violence following 9/11,[10] demonstrating how Sikhs' visible identity made us "mistaken targets" of Islamophobia.[11] However, this rhetoric ignores that the racialized experiences of brown

---

[9] Sikh community center used for singing Gurbani (compilation of transcendent poetry, writing, and reflections of Sikh Gurus and other mystics to reflect the universality of Oneness), reflecting on Sikh history, serving langar (free community meal started by the third Sikh Guru, Guru Amardas Ji), running community programs, and more. Open to all and frequently used as a space to support the larger community during times of need (e.g., gurdwaras opening up to families left houseless by climate disasters or preparing langar for distribution during the COVID-19 pandemic).

[10] With over 300 cases of violence and discrimination in the month after 9/11 and continued hate violence leading up to and following the Oak Creek shooting, there has been a litany of instances when Sikhs have become targets of this anti-Muslim racism, attacked for being a visible "other" in a country that boasts religious and other forms of freedom. (See "Fact Sheet on Post-9/11 Discrimination and Violence against Sikh Americans", The Sikh Coalition, https://www.sikhcoalition.org/images/documents/fact%20sheet%20on%20hate%20against%20sikhs%20in%20amer ica%20post%209-11%201.pdf)

[11] Anti-Sikh harassment and violence (racial epithets, TSA profiling, violent beatings and killings, harassment of Sikhs in highly visible blue-collar jobs like taxi drivers, etc.) is a common experience for visible Sikhs since at least 9/11, although earlier immigrants share anecdotes of anti-Arab rhetoric during the Gulf War and Iran hostage crisis.

religious people, Muslim and Sikh alike, are structured on a foundation of white supremacy[12] and anti-blackness, which simultaneously constructs a paradigm of limited acceptance and variant tactics of exclusion to maintain the racial hierarchy. This examination of Sikh Punjabi racialization in the U.S. since 9/11 establishes how the community has continued to utilize its hypervisible, but malleable, identity to forge belonging. Yet these conversations ignore how defining belonging through community-based efforts to raise awareness about Sikhs and Sikh identity in the U.S. functions to strengthen the physical boundaries of citizenship.

Through a study of national Sikh awareness projects in the United States, this paper tracks shifts in self-representation by Sikh organizations that occurred over time, from 9/11 to the 2012 Oak Creek shooting, in response to mutations in the experience of anti-Sikh discrimination and hate violence. Analyzing the heterogeneity in Sikh community organizational strategy and politics of belonging in the United States, I aim to demonstrate the limitations of racial belonging via whiteness and the strategic but nuanced choices Sikh leaders are making to find safety and security through U.S. citizenship. By rooting this discussion in transnational Sikh experiences of othering, I demonstrate that there is a longer history for Sikhs to draw upon than just our experiences in the United States. By doing so, Sikhs can have a richer, more intentional process of identity formation that is not simply in response to the U.S. racial order and citizenship-based models of belonging.

The transnational, racialized Sikh body

Sikhs emerged from Punjab an uprooted people, given no opportunity to participate in the independence deal that the British struck with Hindus and Muslims leading up to the end of

---

[12] According to Frances L. Ansley, white supremacy is "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." See Frances L. Ansley, "Stirring the Ashes: Race, Class and the Future of Civil Rights Scholarship," *Cornell Law Review* 74, no. 6 (September 1989):1024.

colonial rule in 1947 (Jamil 2016; Sandhu 2012). While many other communities were similarly left out of this flawed plan to develop two nation-states for the region, the pain for Punjabis was immediate: Punjab was partitioned between the newly created nation-states of Pakistan and India, leading to massive displacement and communal violence (Jawaharlal 2015). The following decades would be no more generous to Sikhs as they put down roots in East Punjab, India. Tumultuous and divisive politics initiated by the British continued after their formal departure, reaching a violent climax with Operation Blue Star (June 1984), Operation Woodrose (June-October 1984), and Operation Black Thunder I (April 1986) and II (May 1988). This multi-stage Indian government strategy to silence anti-government resistance from Sikhs resulted in the mass murder of an estimated eight thousand Sikhs from June 1-10, 1984, with ongoing violence and disappearances to follow in years to come. The intentional targeting of visible Sikhs and Sikh identity in postcolonial India during these years has been well documented. In particular, there was a focus on amritdhari[13] Sikhs due to an embodied commitment to Sikhi, one aspect being through the donning of personal weaponry. This collective resilience through a physical expression of sovereignty was seen as a direct cause and validation for the attacks, as amritdhari Sikhs were declared dangerous and a threat to national security by the Indian army. Thus, the targeting of a visible Sikh personhood is not unique to the United States nor the West, but instead has its origins in much more intentional and pointed attempts at incorporating Sikhs into a national polity.[14]

---

[13] Those who have pledged themselves to Sikh ideology and sovereignty through Khande ki Pahul or Amrit Sanchaar, the initiation into the order of the Khalsa, or sovereign Sikhs. Receiving Amrit requires the maintenance of a visible Sikh identity (*kes*, unshorn hair to respect natural and divine life; *kanga*, comb to maintain *kes*; *kara*, an iron bracelet historically used as a weapon in battle; *kirpaan*, sword to protect the Sikh tradition of physical readiness and promote radical notions of people-driven justice; and *kachhera*, long underwear to maintain modesty and discipline) and the daily practice of Sikh philosophy through meditation, service, and a commitment to realizing Oneness through practice of Gurbani.

[14] For more resources on anti-Sikh violence in 1980s India, as well as its aftereffects on the diaspora, see the following: R. Chopra, "Commemorating Hurt: Memorializing Operation Blue Star," *Sikh Formations* 6, no. 2 (2010):119-152.; Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, *Fighting for Faith and Nation Dialogues with Sikh Militants* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Ravleen Kaur, "Reliving the 1984 Sikh Killings: What the

Yet, even prior to fleeing state violence as refugees, Sikhs had already entered the global landscape as British subjects and servants, recruited at disproportionately high rates into the British Imperial Forces through a coopting of Sikh legacies of physical readiness and warrior traditions, stereotyping Sikhs as a "martial race" naturally suited for military service (Rand and Wagner 2012). These colonial subjectivities positioned Sikhs as witnesses to the profits of whiteness, but without the global access they desired. As Sikh Punjabi emigration increased with community knowledge of strong economic opportunities outside India, other realities of life abroad – like discrimination on the basis of skin color – were a disappointment to Sikhs who had experienced colonial exceptionalism and a myth of equal rights for the sake of political expediency under British rule (Tatla 2004). While Sikhs negotiated belonging across domestic contexts – settler nations that explicitly targeted visibly Sikh bodies or simply "colored migrants" as infringing upon their colonial conquest – they simultaneously brokered their relationship to the racial contract, which developed a transnational white polity for those who could claim Europe as home while exploiting bodies, land, and resources on other lands (Mills 1997). Although Sikhs had access to European belonging through colonial subjectivity, they still could not be included, according to Charles Mills, in "a racial polity, a racial state, and a racial juridical system, where the status of whites and nonwhites is clearly demarcated, whether by law or by custom" since the colonial production of whiteness was created to limit the gain of capital to a select few (Mills 1997:13–14). Thus, while Sikhs balanced on the precipice of inclusion via colonial subjectivity, they were forced to experience violent othering at the hands of the Indian state (and continue to do so alongside

Media Couldn't Tell You 33 Years Ago," *Youth Ki Avaaz*, June 7, 2015, https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2015/06/1984-sikh-massacre/; Amarjit Singh Walia, "I Lived through the Sikh Riots – And 30 Years Later, I'm Not Ready to Forgive or Forget," *Quartz*, October 30, 2014, https://qz.com/india/289671/i-lived-through-the-sikh-riots-and-30-years-later-im-not-ready-to-forgive-or-forget/.

Muslims, Kashmiris, Dalits, indigenous tribal communities, and other victims of postcolonial Hindutva) in order to maintain transnational systems of power (Griswold 2019).

Sikh migration to the U.S. increased exponentially in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the hypervisibility of Sikh identity made it a notable symbol upon which racial otherness could be established as the turban became a marker for foreignness, incivility, and the unknown from other lands waiting to invade (Ogden 2019; Scheffauer 1910). Given immigration laws, the migrant population out of Punjab for several decades was overwhelmingly young Sikh men who, upon arrival in the U.S., often faced violent backlash from fellow laborers or legal discrimination barring non-whites from marriage, citizenship, and owning land. While some Sikh men challenged this illegality of Sikh belonging through logics of whiteness, like the well-known case of *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923), others took up transnational anti-colonial sensibilities, developing a nuanced understanding of how nation-states were collaborating to build empires of exclusion built on colonialism and white supremacy (Sohi 2014). These historical divergences demonstrate the nuances in Sikh methods of asserting power in response to nation-state exclusion: Thind chose to argue his right to citizenship through colonial legacies and white-determined superiority (Singh 2008), Gurdit Singh chartered a ship bringing hundreds of Sikh Punjabi migrants to Canada on the basis that they should be recognized as equal British subjects, and countless Sikh men participated in cross-racial marriage in order to find some sort of legibility in the then current legal frameworks of the U.S. (Leonard 1994; Shah 2012). These nuances can demonstrate both the choices that individuals made and make in seeking racial and legal belonging, and also the nuanced ways in which the state prevents their entry.

Still, it is important to note how all of these cases came up against limitations of belonging via whiteness. For Thind, while all citizenship cases to that point had been rooted in scientific,

genetic definitions of whiteness, his was the first to be based in "common knowledge" of who was white, using Thind's hypervisibility as a Sikh man to establish the cultural legibility of whiteness and citizenship in the U.S. (Haney Lopez 1996:66). For Gurdit Singh and the passengers of the *Komagata Maru*, even their anticolonial resistance was rooted in the right to pursue migration freely, like their white counterparts, because of their status as British subjects, not on the basis of basic human rights and desires to pursue migration freely. For Sikh Punjabi men marrying primarily Mexican women in Southern California, it was finding legibility of one's individual choices within the legal realm of the United States. In all of these instances, it is the Sikh-specific *dastaar*[15] and *daari*[16] that established distance from whiteness, but also the desire to find distance from blackness, as Sikhs, and South Asians broadly have cooperated in existing ethnic-racial hierarchies through reifying the black-white color line (Prashad 2001). Thus, understanding how Sikh racialization in particular has had a circuitous route both in shaping and being shaped by historic struggles for belonging within the nation-state elucidates how hegemonic racism is sustained through transnational projects of legal belonging.

Considering these narratives of violence, migration, and conditional acceptance, the utility of the physicality of Sikh identity must be analyzed as a key turning point in the racial logics of whiteness to establish axes of othering outside of a white-black binary. The multiplicities of racialized religion for South Asians (Muslims and Sikhs, in particular) uncover that it is the visible markers of faith *in addition to* color that lead to these communities being "rendered theologically,

---

[15] *Dastaar* is the term used by Sikhs for what is colloquially known as a Sikh turban, but it literally means that which is done with the hands. Perhaps giving more understanding to the reverence that a dastaar holds, the verbs used with the act of donning one's dastaar in Punjabi translate to make or decorate, demonstrating the beauty and intention in the daily practice by dastaar-wearing Sikhs. Many Sikhs will reference the time of making their dastaar each morning as time to reflect on Sikh martyrs and those who gave their lives in order for us to maintain the dastaar and other aspects of a physical Sikh identity today.

[16] Traditionally an unshorn beard, although many Sikhs nowadays have started to keep a closely trimmed beard to reflect Western beauty standards of hair maintenance.

morally, and socially illegitimate," as Khyati Joshi suggests (2006:212). Within a U.S. context, the religious visibility of Sikhs and Muslims disturb the ideas of "meltability" and salvageability that fuel a white, Christian American (sub)conscious for its idealized society. This reckoning of the visibly Othered body thus becomes, as Jasbir Puar describes, a process of terror "being both read *from* their bodies as well as *endowed upon* their bodies; [. . .] both an identificatory modality producing individual bodies and a generalized rubric applied to populations" (2007:169). As a terrorized American psyche builds these models of racism from individual, racialized bodies, it manifests as the denial of cultural human rights, leaving Sikh communities unable to exercise agency when it comes to visible religious practices and identifiers within American institutions (Iwata and Purkayastha 2011) – the trial that many Sikh organizations have chosen to litigate.

Because of the ways in which the dastaar embodies, in Puar's words, "the impossibility of resonance, of appearing to feel the same" (2007:177), anti-Sikh xenophobia has continued to morph and mutate to match these disturbances in the American national psyche. The precarity of Sikh life and "the Sikh self becomes constituted by a transformed subjectivity that responds in multiple ways to pervasive and sudden violence," as Anneeth Kaur Hundle notes (2012:289), which, after Oak Creek, is a clear threat in both public and private spaces. As Sikh organizations have tried to keep pace with these shifting threats of physical violence, there have also been transitions in how Sikhs are being marketed to the mainstream. While originating with a focus on distinguishing the physical aspects of Sikh identity as unique and exceptional, community organizations have now shifted to using Sikh awareness projects to mark Sikhs as morally legitimate and legible within the American context. These shifts in public relations are indicative of the changing nature of racialization and white supremacy, particularly how hypervisibility and morality are interconnected in the project of race and whiteness.

Methods and Data

This paper combines semi-structured interviews with Sikh community leaders and a discourse analysis of Sikh organizational rhetoric to understand Sikh identity formation. My recruitment efforts for interviewees were focused on outreach via email and phone based on a list of qualified participants that I generated. My initial list was created based on current and recent leadership of Sikh organizations that have a more national (versus regional) focus: The Sikh Coalition, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF), Sikh Research Institute, and the National Sikh Campaign. I interviewed at least one current and/or former member of each organization. I also reached out to people who had been highly influential on their own self-created platform – individual or communal (i.e., *Kaur Life* magazine editor, Sikh youth camp organizers, and Sikh bloggers/writers). My identification of an individual as a "Sikh leader" was measured through informal solicitation of community members in California and the midwestern U.S., as well as on the basis of those who came up most frequently in a Google search for "Sikh," "Sikhs in the U.S.," or "Sikh leaders in the U.S." Finally, because of the focus on historical and present violence that Sikhs in the U.S. have faced, I attempted to limit my respondents to people above age thirty who have lived in the United States for at least twenty years with only two exceptions – one interviewee under the age of 30 and the other who grew up in Canada – totaling 13 interviews ranging from one to three-and-a-half hours.

Applying an oral history approach to the interviews, I mapped the interviewees' lives through questions on how Sikhi was taught to them in childhood and then how those initial lessons were shifted based on experiences at school or in other settings, with a particular focus on how these conceptualizations of Sikh identity shifted (consciously or unconsciously) after 9/11 and the Oak Creek shooting. Through these questions, I connect personal perspectives on Sikhi and Sikh

identity with the work that these leaders are doing in the community at large. I chose to focus my interviews on community leaders because of the large influence and access they and their collectives have in relation to more regional and/or grassroots efforts, thus leaving a more explicit impact on mainstream and institutional understandings of Sikh Punjabis.

Sikh Identity Formation in an Era of Precarity

The following sections examine how Sikh racialization shifted into a value-based narrative to counter the villanization of a hypervisible Sikh identity. The Sikh organizational strategy of creating "awareness" around Sikh identity often centers desires for mass visibility and representation over all other aspects of identity formation. Despite attempts to repurpose markers of exclusion for the community's belonging, I argue that Sikh community leaders have locked the community in a cycle of transitioning between attempts to achieve citizenry and differentiate the markers of their own exclusion. Focusing on a narrative of Sikh identity construction that is rooted in erasure and acculturation as a response to past violence and the fear of future occurrences, Sikhs have found themselves in a recurring process of survival mode.

"We are not Muslim": Searching for Sikh Legibility, Post-9/11

The contemporary conception of Sikh advocacy was 9/11. As told by Amardeep Singh, co-founder of the Sikh Coalition, his involvement in speaking out on hate crimes against Sikhs after 9/11 stemmed directly from work he was doing regarding anti-Sikh violence in Punjab:

> We'd send one email a day with a testimony from a Sikh who had been tortured to raise awareness. . .and then 9/11 happens. So, all that effort that I was putting in personally, professionally, to do human rights work because of how much '84 changed things in my life, got switched to what was happening to Sikhs in the U.S. I had a group of friends who were really into Sikh human rights issues and, instead of publishing documentation of Sikh human rights abuses, we started documenting hate crimes and discrimination in the U.S. And Sikh Coalition was formed.

I establish this initial connection between the formation of a major Sikh advocacy organization

and historic anti-Sikh violence (particularly state-sanctioned violence as outlined in the literature review) to demonstrate how the embodiment of historic racialization is central to how Sikh awareness projects function in the U.S. The lineage connecting these justice projects means there is also a carrying over of emotion, intention, and strategies to building awareness about violations of the Sikh body. Valarie Kaur, a self-identified civil rights activist who uses her skills in law and film for Sikh awareness projects, elaborates on the factors that shaped foundational approaches to Sikh organizing:

> After 9/11. . .we were in crisis response mode and it was premised on the idea that the crisis, the backlash was going to fade and then we would establish a new normal. But because of the war on terror and the policies by the state and hate crimes on the street, we never got out of crisis-response mode. And then we started to get funded to build organizations that were designed to respond to crises and being rapid response.

The reflections of Valarie Kaur and Amardeep Singh, two advocates who were establishing their careers pre-9/11 and whose career trajectories drastically shifted as a result, demonstrate the structural problems with "awareness" projects that became Sikh organizations' bread and butter as they established their crisis management processes. Funds were raised and given to support legal cases to shift policy around religious discrimination, address high rates of bullying of Sikh children, and develop national trainings for Sikhs to gain skills in media talking points, policy change, and community engagement to produce positive visibility (Sikh Coalition n.d.-b).

Although this work developed a much-needed national network for Sikhs during a time of precarity, it also established a precedence for Sikh community organizing to be rooted in triumphing over U.S.-specific racialized violence and the resulting trauma, rather than acknowledging transnational projects of whiteness built through colonial relations and cooperative surveillance of radicals across borders (Sohi 2013). The structural fallacy of these projects is that they believed it was a case of "mistaken identity" and misunderstanding that led to violence against

95

Sikhs, that it was something that could be educated away – rather than a fundamental value of the U.S. racial order.

As this newfound terror of hate violence entered Sikhs into a battle for positive visibility against xenophobic and racist attacks and policies, Sikh community leaders felt the need to clarify who Sikhs were, or were not, since this new stigmatization was not explicitly anti-Sikh, as it had been in Punjab, but anti-brown/Muslim. Valarie Kaur shares, "immediately after 9/11 we had bumper stickers that said 'we are Sikh not Muslim,' and then we quickly pulled those bumper stickers and understood 'we are American' is the thing that we need to do because otherwise it implies that there is a correct target for their bias." While Sikh community rhetoric, for the most part, did move away from the post-hate crime narrative of "mistaken identity," there has still been a larger failure to understand the source of the violence. Tavleen Kaur, a community scholar and activist, described how her father's tires were slashed in North Carolina even though he does not have a visible Sikh identity. She says, "It wasn't even that [attackers] needed to see a dastaar, a daari, and that's what triggered a lot of the violence. It was just being brown." Again, it was not a case of "mistaken identity," but that an othered identity folded Sikhs into the larger racialized religious category that also incorporated those who the U.S. government and media were identifying as enemies of the state.[17]

Still, the rhetoric continued to focus on creating Sikhs as a distinct entity separate from these "terrorists," even if it was no longer portraying all Muslims as the enemy. Gurwin Ahuja, Executive Director of the National Sikh Campaign, identified this flaw as a lack of a collective definition of Sikhs: "we don't have one, even despite our own efforts. . .like if you go to a random uncle and you tell them, 'describe who Sikhs are,' they'll just basically say we're not Muslim." It

---

[17] Many Sikhs, when discussing post-9/11 violence, will blame the dissimilarity between Taliban turbans and the Sikh dastaar in inciting confusion and fear against Sikh identity.

must be recognized that this way of defining Sikhs by who they are not – Muslim – is directly in response to white nationalist definitions of national security that limit belonging through identifying who must be excluded. With the sudden rise in attacks on Sikhs after September 11, Sikhs knowingly or unknowingly chose to participate in anti-Muslim racism in response to feeling frozen in crisis response and in attempting to solidify a definition of Sikhs during a period of instability.[18]

The belief that education on Sikh identity was enough to solve hate violence against Sikhs reveals that these awareness projects miss one key point – whiteness is limited (Maghbouleh 2017). The creation of whiteness is the creation of marginality and, through this, the production and assignment of value to particular bodies (Cacho 2012). In arguing that more intentional education about Sikh identity will move Sikhs from the margins of exclusion into acceptance, Sikh organizations and community leaders failed to acknowledge that whiteness does not only function through exclusion, but also distance and dehumanization. Questions of value and difference are forced upon racialized people constantly, as Simran Jeet Singh, Senior Religion Fellow at the Sikh Coalition, puts it:

> When you choose to look different in society and particularly as a religious minority from a young age, you're expected to explain who you are in a way that other people aren't. . .so the people asking you feel satisfied that they understand why you're doing what you're doing, why you're choosing to look different.

---

[18] Interestingly enough, there is a collective definition of a Sikh, also written somewhat during a time of precarity as Sikh practices and lifestyle was being diluted through colonization the loss of communal power. The Sikh Rehat Maryada, or the Sikh code of conduct, approved in 1945 in Amritsar by a Sikh organizing body (Shrimoni Gurdwara Parbandak Committee) establishes that a Sikh is any human being who faithfully believes in (i) Vaaheguru (One Immortal Being), (ii) Ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, (iii) Guru Granth Sahib, (iv) the utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus, and (v) Amrit Sanchar created by Guru Gobind Singh (defined extensively in footnote 17), and does not follow any other *dharam* (guidelines or prescriptions for righteous behavior).

While some Sikhs might be able to argue for selective inclusion as contributing members of society, the limits of whiteness force them to do so by devaluing other members of the Sikh community, or in relation to the devalued bodies of other racialized communities marked as deviant. Thus, we see how racialized people are forced to engage in conversations about which

Figure 4.1 - Signage that reads "God Bless America" and "Sikhs are Proud to Be American Citizens", distributed by National Sikh Campaign and frequently found outside the entrance to gurdwaras.

aspects of themselves they are willing to strip away for inclusion into a limited definition of the human.

Through the project of awareness, Sikh organizations have attempted to reframe Sikh legibility and visibility in a way that does not establish Sikhs as the other. However, what complicates these projects is that by basing all aspects of Sikh identity in the context of awareness-building or educational work, they reframe Sikh existence as aspiring towards inclusion into a society invested in the perpetuation of Christian, patriarchal, white hegemony.

While core Sikh tenets were originally built up as radical ways to dismantle structures of oppression and hierarchy, they are now being utilized to argue for "global acceptance" into a white supremacist nation (Singh 2018). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this acceptance does not come without its costs.

"We are Americans": Asserting Sikh Exceptionalism after Oak Creek

The cycle of crisis response and policy battles continued for over a decade until a new flashpoint for anti-Sikh violence in the U.S.: the 2012 Oak Creek shooting. While contemporary Sikh advocacy originated with 9/11, Valarie Kaur expressed that "Oak Creek became a place where we, as national Sikh advocates who have been working together for years in whatever form since 9/11, all congregated because we were confronting the thing that we had fought so hard to prevent. And all of us had the words failure on our lips." While Sikhs had faced rising hate crimes in the decade prior to the shooting, the Oak Creek shooting initiated a more intimate stage of fear. Rubin Paul Singh, a community educator and activist said, "after September 11th, I felt like I was not welcome in this country. But the thing about Oak Creek was, despite all that, our gurdwaras were our one safe space [...] everyone else could look at me as their enemy, but that was the place where I was with my brothers and sisters, my mothers and fathers. It was the one safe place I could be myself without fear." With the violence now entering spaces of worship and community, Sikh leaders realized that their attempts to distinguish Sikhs enough to humanize them had not been sufficient.

In large part, Sikh organizations were limited by the strategies they employed to educate a public audience on Sikh identity. Focusing on mainstream media and policy change alone as ways to find positive visibility or legibility, Sikh community projects were shaping Sikh identity and existence by the possibility of recognition and inclusion into a white supremacist society, which

only served to push Sikhs into the hole of victim narratives. Amardeep Singh reflects on how victimhood became central to creating visibility for Sikhs:

> The number one topic in news articles about Sikhs were around hate crimes and discrimination, and the Sikh Coalition definitely played the lead role in getting stories about Sikhs into the press, but the stories about Sikhs in the press were all about the bad things that happened to us. And it was always bothering me and killing me that we were not able to humanize the community [so that we were] not defined by our difference and the discrimination that occurs because of the difference.

Valarie Kaur also reflected on the failings of post-Oak Creek media coverage in developing a more holistic understanding of Sikh experiences in the U.S.:

> We got the most media attention we'd ever gotten in the wake of Oak Creek, but I don't think the media attention that we got did very much to cultivate empathy or compassion within our fellow Americans, inviting them to see us as American or to grieve with us as American. And that may have been different if they had given us a longer window, but we were still getting around Sikhism 101 and how to pronounce "sick" or "seek" before the curtain fell and they were on to the next issue. [But with] our profound illegibility and the insistence of seeing us through the lens of terrorists and trying to undo that all that. . .I don't know how far we could have gone, even if they gave us more time.

Thus, even with the immense national spotlight in the moments following the Oak Creek shooting, Sikhs were caught in the dynamic of trying to find legibility within a white, Christian context of the human (Wynter 2003). Jasjit Singh, then Executive Director of SALDEF, describes his experiences showing up in Oak Creek the morning after the shooting: "Immediately, they told me to please talk to the camera. Actually, I was in a suit and tie and it was abundantly clear that immediately they wanted me to talk to the camera. They felt like, this is our chance, we want someone to be telling our story. In the 20 or 30 minutes I was there, I did more interviews than I did in the whole 7 years I was at SALDEF." With the intense focus on humanization and validity in an American context, U.S. Sikh leaders found themselves stuck in a cycle of media sound bites and normative rhetoric, attempting to distance themselves from the rhetoric on brown bodies as terror-inducing while being forced into portraying them solely as possible victims of white

nationalist terror. Thus, the media, while perhaps creating visibility for Sikhs, could not alter the racial context of the U.S.

On the flip side of this cycle of crisis response and victim narratives created by mainstream media practices were the perspectives of those who saw the Oak Creek shooting as a failure in establishing legibility for Sikhs. Rather than continue the effort to educate non-Sikhs on their visible identity, these individuals chose to focus their time on establishing how Sikhs are embodiments of American identity instead. One such example is the National Sikh Campaign (NSC), launched after Oak Creek, with the promise that it would not only stop hate crimes, but also "highlight the Sikh community's contributions, better integrate [Sikhs] into American society, and lay the foundation for more Sikhs to become leaders in America" (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-a) This approach of redefining Sikhs, or any immigrant community, as assimilable, "meltable," and contributing members of American society is not novel, but NSC started a new chapter in Sikh awareness projects that shifted the focus away from clarifying the physical markers of Sikh identity to stressing similarities in moral values embedded in Sikh beliefs and practices. In fact, the entire strategy of the NSC was built on making Sikhs legible in a U.S. context. Geoff Garin, President of the Peter D. Hart Research firm, was hired to lead focus group studies in Chicago and Iselin, New Jersey to discover what aspects of Sikhi resonated with an American public, published in a report titled "Sikhism in the United States: What Americans Know & Need to Know" (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-f). In our conversation, Gurwin Ahuja emphasized the political capital of framing Sikh awareness campaigns on "common values":

> Regardless of demographic, if you're a hardcore Trump conservative or if you're to the left of Bernie Sanders, the most important aspect of Sikhism that resonated with the American public was equality. In that we found that there's a tremendous ability to enhance people's understandings and feelings towards Sikhs by talking about equality. Now, every time I talk about Sikhism, I lead with that value. I talk about

gender equality; I talk about how the turban represents commitment to fight for equality. And the reason I think that resonates is how many religions do that?

By reframing belonging based on shared values, this new phase of awareness projects makes the case that Sikhs are exemplary or more worthwhile of inclusion into U.S. political and sociocultural society than other racialized communities.

This transition to explain Sikh identity through shared values is a move to redirect the conversation away from obvious *physical* differences to moral *embedded* similarities. Addressing Sikh positionality as a hypervisible yet "unknown" other in the U.S. context in this manner, I argue that these projects mark a dangerous shift in Sikh advocacy. Highlighting Sikhs who have achieved high levels of education, wealth, or inclusion into institutions like the U.S. military, NSC builds a narrative of Sikh inclusion rooted in racial capitalist ideas of value and worth to the nation-state (National Sikh Campaign n.d.-c). Additionally, many of their commercials focus on basic human traits like Sikhs watching *SpongeBob* with their kids, enjoying *Game of Thrones*, or being PTA moms (We Are Sikhs 2018). NSC's double whammy – asserting Sikh exceptionalism by saying that Sikhs have the largest religious commitment to equality, while also trying to humanize Sikhs through trivial characteristics – only offers a humiliating characterization of how desperately certain Sikhs want to attain belonging as (white) Americans.

The existence of awareness campaigns in the community is not a rarity; millions of dollars of the wealthiest Sikhs have gone into finding ways to both distance Sikhs from anti-Muslim racism (Abdul Khabeer et al. 2017) and also introducing the notion of the democracy-loving American Sikh into the mainstream.[19] Sikhi is a faith that equally values the discipline needed to

___

[19] The majority of funding for Sikh organizations and projects comes from Ik Manzil, a group of "Sikh philanthropists" who are able to commit $25,000 a year for three years in order to gain membership. Since 2009, they have donated $1.4 million to Sikh non-profit organizations (Ik Manzil, "What We Do," https://ikmanzil.org/what-we-do/).

attain a higher consciousness and physical signifiers as reminders of one's commitment to this lifestyle to connect with the One universal force.[20] Thus, as advocacy projects and awareness campaigns move to define Sikh identity within U.S. citizenship and whiteness, it is necessary to interrogate their frameworks. According to the Sikh Coalition's website, "through courtrooms, classrooms, community and Congress, we work to protect the constitutional right to practice your faith without fear" (Sikh Coalition n.d.-a). However, if building Sikh identity is focused on the necessity for public visibility – whether in courtrooms, classrooms, Congress, or on CNN – it must go beyond seeking the end of anti-Sikh violence through educational aims. These identity formation projects must address, at least as an eventual aim, the deconstruction of structural causes for racialization of and violence directed at Sikh communities. It is particularly dangerous to continue on this path because of the way these collective identity projects attempt to frame Sikhs as inherently American (i.e., inherently white), thus erasing historical and present realities of Sikh experience, such as the rising number of Punjabi Sikh detainees in ICE facilities across the nation (T. Kaur 2020; Noriega and Templon 2016). While the reality of ongoing racialization will continue to haunt Sikhs in the diaspora, it is necessary to question who has the authority to build these narratives for the larger community and the long-term intentions to belong based on white nationalist terms.

"We are revolutionaries": Cultivating a Diasporic Sikh Identity from Its Roots

Imagining a new type of identity creation that is more radical and removed from identifying as Sikh Americans, Sikhs can revitalize a centuries-long Sikh history of resistance against state and empire to guide a new method of Sikh advocacy. Inni Kaur of the Sikh Research Institute shares

---

[20] All aspects of Sikh physical identity are tied to action. As Gurwin Ahuja mentioned, the dastaar being a physical identifier of Sikhs became a call to action for Sikhs across South Asia as we were known to be warriors and defenders of the defenseless throughout Sikh history.

that when she thinks about her Sikh identity, "what holds me is really the teachings, the absolute freedom that has given me and nurtured in me." Being free from any model of belonging that is structured on a nation-state can remind Sikhs of previous methods of dealing with violence. One such teaching comes from Tav Prasad Savaiye, a composition amritdhari Sikhs are required to read daily, which discusses the futility of attaining worldly power or enlightenment through pilgrimage and ritualism if one is still unable to find eternal Truth through the realization of Oneness. The final line in a stanza that explicitly highlights the materialistic lifestyle of powerful rulers reads:

> ਏਤੇ ਭਏ ਤੁ ਕਹਾ ਭਏ ਭੂਪਤਿ ਅੰਤ ਕੋ ਨਾਂਗੇ ਹੀ ਪਾਂਇ ਪਧਾਰੇ ॥੨॥੨੨॥
>
> Even if one can become such a mighty emperor (through war animals, gold, and large armies), they must leave the world with bare feet. (Singh 2003:42)

Considering this lesson from Guru Gobind Singh Ji, Sikhs must acknowledge how their search for belonging through colonial frameworks of power comes at the expense of a historical legacy of radical resistance. Rubin Paul Singh imagines a Sikh future in which we have broken free of this current cycle of belonging through exclusion and returned to a radical Sikh existence: "As a history teacher, I'm always pointing to PowerPoint slides of what great things Sikhs did in the late 1800s, early 1900s. My hope is that my great-grandchildren are not pointing to the same slides."

Others, like Gurjot Kaur, previously a staff attorney at the Sikh Coalition, are inspired by historical Sikh activism to come up with new solutions for old problems, such as restorative justice responses for hate crime perpetrators:

> Fighting oppression is our bread and butter and we've been doing it for a long time – way before any of these anti-discrimination laws were written. And so, these fundamental ideas of shifting away from retribution and revenge to restorative solutions is something that I'm constantly trying to bring to the table.

As Gurjot Kaur indicates, there is a possibility for Sikhs to do "awareness" work, or practice "Sikh values" in a public way, that is more in line with the essence of the faith. Bringing perpetrators of hate crimes into Sikh spaces to reconcile and heal, and as an alternative to carceral punishment, is

one method she has encouraged to battle anti-Sikh sentiment in the U.S. Furthermore, Tavleen Kaur hopes that "we start to see that Sikhi is radical and even the basic things we follow which we think are so radical is just the starting point of that entry into radical consciousness." While Gurjot Kaur works within the limited confines of organizational politics, what would happen if we could expand beyond the conventional and state-based modes of freedom we have started to embody? Instead, as Inni Kaur said, what if we returned to our Sikh teachings to move beyond finding Sikh identity through citizenship?

In this journey toward a more rooted, revolutionary Sikh praxis of community organizing, it is also important to recognize the multiple layers of violence that many Sikhs experience, not just external discrimination from hate crimes, but also gender-based violence, homophobia, and lack of resources or visibility for undocumented Sikhs to name a few. prabhdeep singh kehal, another community scholar, shared that as Sikhs, we must remind ourselves of "the people that are suffering the most as a result of [oppression]" in order to "think about what it means to be a Sikh in this world." Reminding ourselves that people who have the most to gain from belonging through restrictive models of belonging *vis-à-vis* citizenship and whiteness will not be able to imagine more creative, radical, or Sikhi-based models of inclusion, prabhdeep singh kehal says, "I don't actually trust [those with privilege] to lead us to liberation or create a pathway to liberation." Acknowledging these nuances in experiences of violence and Sikh identity demonstrate that while community representation is motivated by the collection of individual experiences of othering, choosing to represent the community through privileged approaches to belonging will not guide us towards an authentic or honest discussion of how racial othering and white supremacy are operating within and on the community. These methods will only exacerbate the exclusionary work of citizenship by embedding it within the Sikh community itself. In order to deconstruct

framings of existence as survival and belonging as citizenship, the U.S. Sikh community must recommit to a framework of Sikh identity and belonging that is no longer driven by a fear of exclusion, instead looking to Sikh history to find the language and politics that go beyond inclusion as the antidote to precarious modes of existence.

"Becoming" a Diaspora: Imagining a Future of Sikhs Outside of Whiteness

Identity creation in the face of erasure and oppression is not a new concept for Sikhs – from the refusal of the Indian government to include Sikh as a religious categorization on birth certificates (Sikhs are categorized as Hindu) to modern-day campaigns by Hindu American Foundation (HAF) to erase all mentions of Sikhi as its own separate faith from U.S. textbooks (rewriting it as a sect of Hinduism). Rather, it is the shift towards seeking belonging within a white, Christian hegemonic society that is specific to the U.S. and this contemporary moment in projects of Sikh belonging. While I do not contest that Sikhs in the U.S. should organize on a large scale to address issues of hate violence and racism (broadly, however, not solely focused on anti-Sikh violence), current projects capitalize on existing frameworks of categorization and power. As anti-Muslim violence raged across Delhi during Donald Trump's visit to India, and in light of Modi legalizing policy that would extremely limit Indian citizenship attainment for Muslims, we are reminded of the global connections between establishing transnational polities rooted in exclusionary frameworks for belonging and citizenship.

Throughout the U.S. chapter of Sikh history, Sikhs have continuously attempted to define their own belonging on the basis of whiteness. As a result, this has led to arguments of Sikh exceptionalism, framing Sikh identity within the context of white racial logics of inclusion and ignoring other possibilities for community organizing rooted in Sikh teachings and history. Moving forward, if Sikhs can understand how to more effectively build a collective identity that

is in flux for the sake of humanizing each member of the community, rather than to incorporate and accommodate the boundaries of exclusion set by the terms of formal and cultural citizenship, it is possible to rectify the ongoing embodiments of American exceptionalism and white supremacy that are being superimposed onto Sikh identity. Drawing upon resistance in Sikh history and the present, Sikhs can practice what Stuart Hall envisions as the value of recognizing identity as beyond a singular temporal moment:

> Instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (1990:222)

Acknowledging that identity is constantly in flux and built in response to current conditions, Sikhs must more actively choose their frameworks for identity formation. Given the inability for assimilation and resonance of the Sikh identity within white supremacist, heteropatriarchal cultural systems that shape the U.S. nation-state, possibilities for inclusion are created at the expense of the humanity of non-normative or deviant communities. Stuck in the neoliberal project of justice and belonging, the Sikh community is only one of many that have become lost in the distraction of trying to prove their inherent value, worth, or desirability to attain citizenship.

Instead, Sikhs can and must realize the power of visualizing identity creation as an act of resistance rather than one of survival, of what *could* be rather than what already exists. This reframing allows for more voices and narratives, disrupting the status quo through more expansive possibilities for who can be a Sikh and how Sikhs can exist within the United States. Returning to the radical roots of Sikhi and Sikh history, Sikhs can operationalize memories of resistance and activism to move beyond the limitations of belonging via whiteness. The act of *becoming* a diaspora is one that can inspire new types of identification outside of colonial and Western frameworks of existence – an experience that is much more liberating.

Chapter Five

UNSETTLED SETTLERS:

Postmemory, Temporal Orientations, and Imagining an Archive

> "News from Punjab that Deep Sidhu has died in a car accident. Already many are suspicious that this was a state orchestrated assassination. Deep Sidhu was amongst the most vocal for Sikh sovereignty and the struggle for Khalistan as offering the only real solution for Punjab." (@theNSYF 2022)

> "fact that ppl are asking if this was an accident or assassination reveals the conditions produced by the indian state, in both life & death. this question alone should signal the need to organize" (@bikethewind 2022)

> "worst part is that this will just be another mystery murder of a Panjab's son. we will never know what they did to Deep veer and our Kaum will just have to settle with this." (@navabikaur 2022)

On February 15, 2022, news broke on social media that Deep Sidhu, a Punjabi lawyer turned actor who was outspoken in his engagement with the 2020-2021 Farmers' Protests in India, was killed in a car accident. While many popular figures, particularly Sikh Punjabi men, became involved in the protest sites, Deep Sidhu's presence uniquely embodied the embroiled histories of Sikh Punjabi political involvement in postcolonial India. Gaining attention through his eloquent and impassioned monologues on Sikh sovereignty and martyrdom, Sidhu's presence at the protest sites, alongside other popular Punjabi actors and singers, came to represent a broader awakening of Sikh Punjabi consciousness motivated by the farmers' protests. As Punjabi popular media has often faced critical blame for the increased alcoholism and rejection of Sikhi amongst young Punjabis, the presence of these popular figures resonated across the diaspora as a crucial turning point for the Sikh community; rather than representing monetary and cultural capital available through the "Westernization" of Punjabi youth, singers and actors were sitting with elders from Punjab's villages on the borders of New Delhi, providing encouragement by performing folk songs

and offering historical narrativization of Sikhs' ability to resist any tyrannical force through a show of the spirit of Oneness and collective organizing at the center of the community.

From November 2020 through December 2021, as farmers lived in protest camps along multiple borders of New Delhi, Sikhs united across previous identity-based divides. Starting with regional protests in August 2020, farmers stood against three Indian bills which aimed to privatize the sale of agricultural goods to the benefit of large corporations. Due to the relative overrepresentation of Sikh Punjabis in agriculture, the Sikh Punjabi diaspora quickly became attuned to the protests, staging large solidarity rallies and protests across the US, UK, and Canada; launching Sikh-centered news platforms and producing informational content for social media (Baaz News); and remaining hyper aware of media and government villainization of Sikhs given a contentious history with the Indian state. While the farm bills themselves should have been at the center of these Indian national and international conversation around the protests, much of the media attention and political debate focused on religious- and caste-based divisions to place blame on communities within the farmers for not seeing the bills as an asset and creating discord within India. In response, figures like Deep Sidhu brought attention to the continued villainization that Sikhs face in Indian popular media for any political involvement that does not serve the state's narrative.

One such instance was on January 26, 2021, when Sikh Punjabi farmers used the national holiday (Republic Day) to call attention to the silence from the central government over months of outdoor protests through an unforgiving winter. While the protest route had been staged and practiced for weeks, images circulating of hundreds of tractors preparing to drive into the capital city, the news around the event suddenly changed course as news of farmers reaching Lal Qila, the still-standing Mughal fortress in New Delhi, and placed a Nishaan Sahib (Sikh flag) atop. Images

of Sikhs climbing the Lal Qila became a figure for the threat of Khalistani resistance and Sikh sovereignty to the long history of majoritarian religious rule in south Asia (first, the Mughal empire, now, Hindu supremacy). Deep Sidhu, the only popular figure known to be present at the Lal Qila event during the Republic Day protest, was immediately framed as a dangerous Khalistani and maligned across national media for weeks on end. Now, because of these tensions in Sidhu's involvement in the protests, much of the conversation around Sidhu's death points to the likelihood of a state-sponsored death, where the pieces of evidence circulate via social media platforms and group messaging apps. Sidhu has already been situated within a Khalistani discourse of shaheedi (martyrdom) – as seen below, contemporary Sikh digital artists have made portraits of Sidhu alongside popular 1980s Sikh militant leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, to represent his death as a continued sacrifice for Sikh freedom. However, distinct from Officer Dhaliwal's

representation as a shaheed (see Chapter Three), Sidhu's shaheedi rejects the dominant nation-state as legitimate rather than upholding it as a site of valid service. Such nuances in Sikh discourses of belonging, martyrdom, and nationalism raise questions of how Sikhs, from Punjab to the US and beyond, are imagining archives of belonging through postmemory,

Figure 5.1 - Digital art of Deep Sidhu and Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale done by Anandpur Arts.

and ongoing experiences of, Sikh precarity.

In light of these contemporary invocations of Khalistan, this chapter examines historic and contemporary state- and community-based discussions around the partition of Punjab and the potential for Khalistan. I place British administrative documents from the Punjab State Archives in Patiala in direct conversation with the contemporary archive of social media discourse regarding the pursuit of Khalistan and Sikh liberation today. Examining these historic processes and decisions through archival memory alongside present-day dialogues of identity formation and Sikh liberation, I paint a nuanced picture of how diasporic Sikhs are arriving at the pathways they imagine for themselves and the future of the Panth.[21] Considering the invocation of Khalistan – a state that has yet to exist in a globally-recognized form – in protesting Hindutva and Indian nationalist projects, what can we learn about the way trauma interacts with trajectories of becoming and future-making? For instance, how do the ruptures and fractures of being that occur from trauma generate new orientations for imaginings of self and liberation? What does this allow us to imagine when considering how communities memorialize trauma through old and new pathways for action?

In his conceptualization of Indigenous experiences beyond settler time in the context of what is now known as the United States, Mark Rifkin builds a new framework for temporality, working with plural, rather than a singular, axes:

> From [an indigenous] perspective, there is no singular unfolding of time, but, instead, varied temporal formations that have their own rhythms – patterns of consistency and transformation that emerge immanently out of the multifaceted and shifting sets of relationships that constitute those formations and out of the interactions among those formations. (2017:2)

---

[21] Literally meaning path, a term to describe those who have committed themselves to practicing a Sikh lifestyle and thus joined the Sikh Panth or those who are part of this community on this path.

Rifkin continues his discussion of temporalities by making the case that we must see the way we relate to temporality, particularly after a traumatic disruption in it, as a process of directing ourselves in the present towards particular pasts and futures. This notion of *temporal orientation* "suggests the ways that time can be regarded less as a container that holds events than as potentially divergent processes of becoming…orientation involves reiterated and nonconscious tendencies, suggesting ways of inhabiting time that shape how the past moves toward the present and future" (Rifkin 2017:2). Inspired by Rifkin's framework, I aim to understand how Sikh visions for liberation are limited by temporal formations and orientations created through unrectified and unaddressed moments of collective trauma. As a result, these iterative moments of violence and trauma have shifted Sikh memory and postmemory into a space of historical narrative that is still vying for its own validity (or has yet to exist in recognized form).

For Sikh Punjabis, the creation of Pakistan and Hindustan without Khalistan not only instilled in them the notion of the Other, but also exacerbated the internalization of themselves as Other. Due to Indian government-led anti-Sikh violence that peaked in the 1980s, the Sikh community experienced "unsettlement" both in India and abroad as they were displaced amongst nationalist frameworks of belonging that "left Sikhs behind" on the spatial and temporal margins of belonging (Mankekar 2015). Through forced migration, state-sanctioned genocide, police-regulated "disappearances" of young men and mass organized rape of young women, Sikh Punjabis were uprooted from a space of physical belonging and further psychologically and spiritually traumatized by the Indian state (Kaur 2019; C. K. Mahmood 1996). Forced to contend with an ongoing construction of the Sikh atvaadi (terrorist) in Indian national consciousness and elsewhere, Sikh subjectivity has continually been shaped through a racecraft/terrorcraft discourse, where Sikh political engagement is always funneled through the mythos of terrorism (Fields and

Fields 2012; Kumar 2020; Mahmood 2001). This traumatization not only disrupted *variant yet stable* ideas of safety, community, family, memory, and identity, but it also created new temporal orientations for Sikh Punjabis out of a collective moment of trauma, loss, and violence. Acknowledging that prior temporalities existed as multi-variated, and continue to do so, these collective moments of trauma represented a consolidation, a flattening of these various temporalities into a homogenized experience of identity through mass violence.

However, even within a "collective" moment, there were varying experiences of trauma, dependent on whether families had escaped violence early on, if their social and emotional distance from violence allowed them to be fed a more state-based rhetoric of the situation, as well as social positions across gender, class, age, caste, and more impacting embodiments of violence.[22] The embodiment of this trauma is not simply something to be read on the individual bodies of those who were violated physically (Krieger 2005); rather, it can also be witnessed through the specters that appear in collective memory. The shadows cast by these specters illuminate the nuances in temporal orientations – for whom the specter appears through the screams of sexual trauma or gender-based violence and for whom it appears as a loss of capital security or physical belongings. Additionally, it is not only how these specters are revisited but also how they are rectified. Some Sikhs quiet the specters through a claiming, and embracing, of the constructed colonial, diasporic Sikh identity that roots itself in nationalism (Saluja 2015). Other Sikhs find a rootedness in a masculine, upper caste, educated homogenization of Sikh identity (Gill 2020; Judge and Brar 2021; Mooney 2020; A. Singh 2014). Yet, consciously or not, these Sikhs also lengthen the silences in collective postmemory by reifying a singular mode of Sikh identity, Sikh belonging, and Sikh trauma. In this chapter, to imagine "an archive of the present", I will converse with archives, formal

---

[22] *See* 1984 Living History Project (http://www.1984livinghistory.org/).

and informal, in an attempt to move beyond a reliance on written word and a "saturation of confessions" (Hochberg 2021). In other words, as Gil Z. Hochberg puts it, this chapter is a reconciling with the desires behind nostalgia:

> We all experience nostalgia. But it's not a particularly future-oriented feeling. It has to keep you in some kind of a state of longing for something that has been better, that you have lost, because the pleasure of nostalgia is in feeling that though you lost the object, you can reclaim it in mourning. There's no problem with that, but it's not a recipe for moving forward. I think we need to focus on—and this is something I took from [English scholar] Stephen Best—the question of what this "we" is that we're trying to revive, and whose story we are trying to tell. The collective that comes together in generating archives is a collective that is building itself.

Thus, in considering postmemory and temporal orientations around Sikh liberation, this chapter bears witness to historical and contemporary Khalistani discourse in state and social media archives of nostalgia. It aims to uncover what dreams of belonging Sikhs aim to retrieve through a continued commitment to Khalistan as the manifestation of Sikh liberation. In another sense, this chapter draws upon what performance studies and queer theory scholar José Esteban Muñoz called "the burden of liveness", which "affords the minoritarian subject an extremely circumscribed temporality. To be only in 'the live' means that one is denied history and futurity" (1999:189). In the context of Indigenous erasure and myths of Indigenous extinction within the US, Jean M. O'Brien calls this denial "firsting and lasting" (2010), where the ideological construction behind historical narrative is crucial to understanding which contemporary subjectivities are continuously obscured, denied, or elided altogether. Khalistani discourse, then, exists in a liminal temporality, where nostalgia builds on an ideological rhetoric of a community living in the past, unable to enter modernity, while the burden of liveness under the imperial state only prescribes a future that is in service to the nation-state.

By uncovering and illuminating the silences that happen in postmemory through *memory* creation, assembly, retrieval, and retrospective significance, we can uncover a nonlinear

understanding of how particular historical narratives, personal and collective, are weaved between the silences to lift up a historical narrative that is in line with the *facts* that were created, assembled, retrieved, and retrospectively made significant by state-sponsored narratives and the community perspectives that chose to align with them (Trouillot 1995). Viewing fact and memory as intertwining processes, these temporal orientations are necessary to uncover because they allow us to understand the memories and facts that were left behind and forgotten. While a collective postmemory may appear in the present, it is always fragmented without the inclusion of nuanced (and likely conflicting) temporal orientations to give voice to disparate embodiments of trauma. Beliefs about the validity and possibility of Khalistan stem from this reality. Understanding these violent disruptions in Sikh Punjabi history as creating new temporal orientations establishes a new lens to understand how Sikh Punjabi memory and postmemory can have such divergent understandings of self and liberation.

Liberation truncated into the nation-state

To discuss the spectrality of an unrealized Sikh state of Khalistan, we must also understand the spatial and temporal context from within which Khalistan was born. With the border of Pakistan and Hindustan looming over Punjab, Sikh Punjabis began to worry that their fewer numbers across India at that time would not protect them as the end of British India neared and leave Sikhs unrepresented in a partition agreement (Jamil 2016). In order to make themselves legible, Sikh Punjabis started to adopt the notion of nation-state as an accurate embodiment of Sikh sovereignty. According to Sikh Studies scholar Giorgio Shani, ideas of nation-state territory reconfigured "personal identity by privileging one form of collective identity, belonging to a nation, over others, i.e. class, gender and locality. Consequently, in order for the Sikh qaum[23] to be recognized

---

[23] Often translated as nation, qaum is used to describe the global, transnational, diasporic Sikh community, especially in the political sense. From the Sikh Humans Rights Group website: "Existing national legislation and

internationally, its self-appointed elites are forced to employ discourses of 'nationhood' and 'territoriality'" (Shani 2005:61). This new focus on territoriality to define Punjabi claims to land appears in an examination of archival documents of the partition of Punjab. In community letters to the Boundary Commission, Punjabi relation to land is unquestionable. There are countless arguments made on behalf of Zamindars, or landowners, for a fair trade of land between Sikh and Muslim Punjabi landowners given the inevitability of the partition of Punjab into west and east – Punjab, Pakistan, and Punjab, India respectively. And still, this new focus on territorial power is not unique to the legacy of Khalistan, Punjab, or even South Asia; rather, it was simply a projection of the international order that India had been indoctrinated into through its colonization. By convincing its colonial subjects that they were distinct in their spiritual and cultural modes of being, and that those differences were irrevocable, the British Raj was able to seal its going away gift to its colonized subjects: distinct nation-states.

The specters of the imposition of a nation-state model onto the imagination of Khalistan are still felt today, as observed through our contemporary social media archive. Shabd Singh, creator and host of *The One*, a podcast discussing primarily US-based Sikh diaspora issues, explored the variations and contradictions of these postmemories in the present, posing the following question on Twitter: "What is Khalistan to you?" (@shabdsingh 2019). The thread collected dozens of responses ranging from "a place where Sikhs can truly be sovereign and free" to "a state built on oppression, fanaticism, and terror". From this, we can understand how postmemory and historical narrative are both frozen in time and shifted in meaning through the context of one's relationality to the idea in question. Those in favor of Khalistan largely used the

---

policies fall short of protecting the intertwined racial/cultural/ethnic/religious identity of the Sikhs. Very few groups fall into this sort of category . . . The category of religion does not adequately protect the Sikhs. We call ourselves a 'Qaum' that has no translation in English."

rhetoric of Sikh liberation from oppression being achieved through (1) the right to self-determination via nation-state protection and (2) an active dismantling of oppressive structures elsewhere. Some delved into the structure of this nation-state, basing it in a model of Sikh sovereignty that would be derived from Sikh historical models of egalitarian governance, or even stating the exact territories it would comprise. Many others also believed Khalistan, given it was built on Sikh beliefs of radical equality, could be a safe haven for non-Sikhs to live free of societal markers of status. However, others defined Khalistan through an entirely different lens, painting its existence as a diasporic pipe dream or a "theocratic oppressive, Talibani, orthodox state like Saudi Arabia", and others more simply calling it a terrorist organization. Without further analysis, one can either deem these polarized viewpoints as opposing ends of a pointless political battle for land or a community's unending desire to right past wrongs that others see as disrupting present reality.

Within the framework of temporal orientations, particularly those created through collective trauma and violence, there is room to consider how a community and those adjacent to it could construct such divergent historical narratives and still miss other possibilities. Dissecting the partition of Punjab and the conditions around Khalistan's original invocation, we can understand how the trauma that resulted from this moment led to silencing of certain temporalities of being within Sikh memory, unearthing itself as a specter upon Sikh collective memory and consciousness. Remembering that "[n]arrativity not only represents but justifies, by virtue of its universality, a dream of how ideal community might be achieved" (White 1987:157), In order to flesh out the significance of these divergent, contemporary narratives of Khalistan, I place this social media archive in conversation with the historical documents from the state archive around the partition of Punjab. By demonstrating the way that land was apportioned and logics of conquest

were cloaked as offers of independence, we can better understand the ongoing consequences of a limited vision for Sikh liberation witnessed in the social media discourse – one whose imagination remains confined by the strictures of the present.

ਢੁੰਢਣਾ: the echoing search for Khalistan

Historical mentions of Khalistan arose within the context of both the partitioning of Punjab, as well as the rise of popularity for the creation of a Muslim state of Pakistan. Centering a framework of Sikh identity and belonging that was created during a moment of erasure, loss, and trauma, Sikh historical narrative has thus been defined by what could not come into existence then and what has continued to not exist. Entering the Punjab State Archives, I grounded my present-day analysis of the need, desire, and disapproval of Khalistan in historical debates on how land transitions during partition could happen in a just manner. Spending three weeks across two locations of the Punjab State Archives, I witnessed what Lowe describes as "the historical trace of imperial activities" as they are documented through "the copied and recopied correspondence between offices" (Lowe 2015:4). Examining a 115-page file titled "Partition of the Punjab" from His Highness' Private Correspondence (Punjab State Archives, Patiala, No. 2243), I pored over letters from Yadavindra Singh, the last Sikh king of Patiala, to various British colonizers and several Sikh leaders, all with their own ideas for the fate of Punjab. While these administrative letters are largely focused on setting up meetings and sharing the results of others, they demonstrate the haste and ignorance with which these decisions were made through the proximity to the date of partition, the meetings that could not be attended, and the voices that were both over- and underrepresented. However, what is most notable are three consecutive letters that disrupt this administrative narrative with Sikh voices of personal and/or community-based reason. Analyzing their rhetoric, I am able to excavate a more nuanced narrative of Sikh liberation that is often buried beneath the politics of

separatism and anti-colonial unity and the distortions of uprising or resistance from brown bodies as terrorism or extremism.

In the first letter, the collective authorship immediately launches into a discussion of how those enacting the partition of Punjab have ignored Sikh positionality and, instead, "when all concerned were keen to give Sikhs special consideration, it should have eventually received no consideration at all." Among their concerns is being "reduced to a hopeless minority," being "put in a helpless position," and experiencing "slavery and domination" rather than "Sikh solidarity." Using a capitalist framework of human value (initiated through colonial logics of power coming from the size of a community), these community leaders point to the drastic overrepresentation of Sikhs in the British Empire's and India's military, which we will return to, and the "sweat and toil" that cultivated the agricultural belt of the region as reasoning for why this lack of consideration is particularly insulting. The collective authorship makes note that they are against a severing of India "but as one section of our peoples wish to secede from us, *we have no alternative*" (emphasis added). This presumptive lack of agency starts to uncover the way that the creation of new nation-states was not simply imposed on the region but was accepted as an inevitable end result to the two-century "divide and conquer" occupation through the East India Company and the British Raj. The need to emphasize the value of Sikh bodies and their contributions to the British Raj demonstrates the community's understanding that the logic of the region had shifted through this period and required new logics and rationale in order to make their case; there are letters between Sikh leaders discussing that the "highest legal talent available should be employed to fight this case, as important points of international law will have to be developed" and special cases were developed for Punjabis and Sikhs specifically. The letter concludes with three demands, focused on ensuring a fair trade of land between Sikh and Muslim landowners who will be forced to migrate

and a border that would be more representative of current Sikh populations. Interestingly enough, these nuanced desires for the border are preserved in the Partition Museum of Amritsar on a map from the UK National Archives that is contrasted with a map from the Punjab Digital Library [Figure 5.2]. The caption reads: "these maps show the differing interpretations [of the border] by the Muslim League and Sikhs representatives." Thus, even within the formal state archive,

nuanced recollections – an accurate depiction of the messy logics of independence from nearly a century of colonial rule.

The second letter is written by Santokh Singh of Shahkot on behalf of Sikh zamindars, or land caretakers, from East and West Punjab, similarly arguing the necessity for an exchange of property to mitigate the immense loss of land for Sikhs in the creation of Pakistan.[24] He mentions fighting a case in front of the Boundary Commission, raising a collective fund from the Zamindars, and the urgency to come to a consensus as
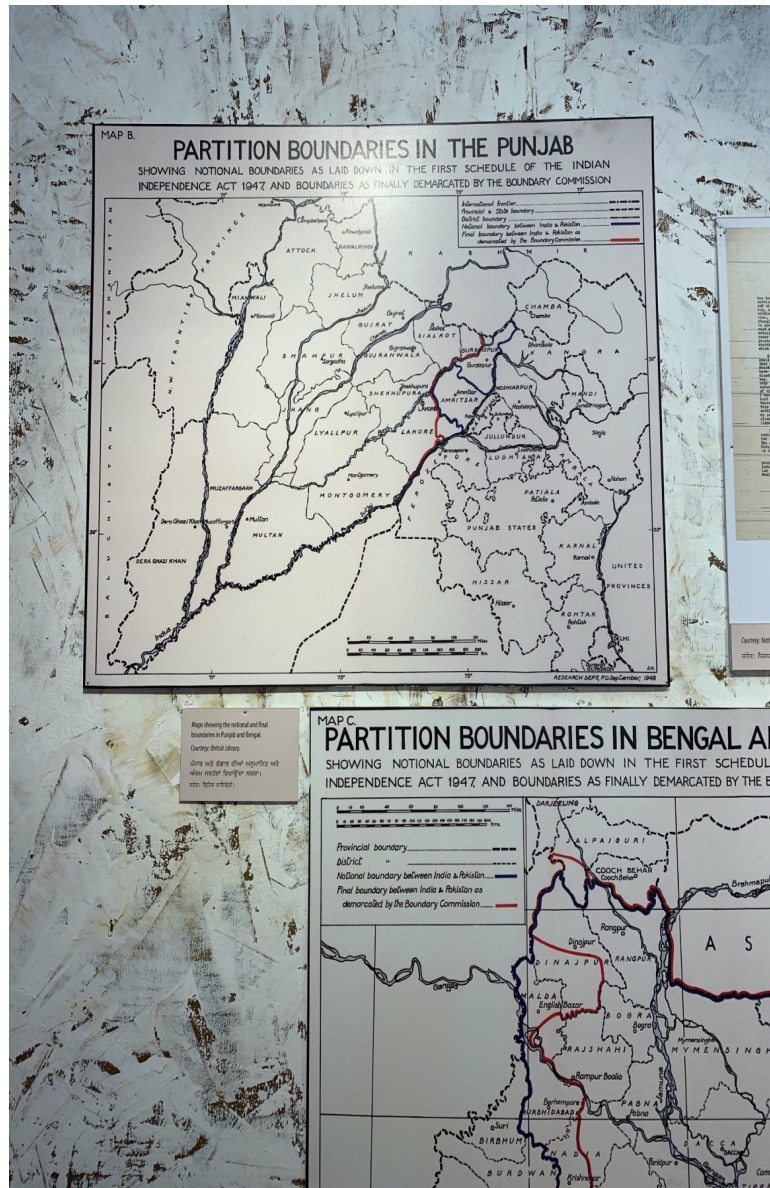

Figure 5.2. Alternative imaginings of the partition from Partition Museum, Amritsar.

[24] The concern was not simply the amount of land, but that the land that would remain in East Punjab was significantly less fertile than what existed across a complete pre-partition Punjab (M. Kaur 2019).

"our success depends now on our faith, courage, and quick action" in protecting the Zamindars. Again, the most urgent plea is to protect ownership of land as it pertains to Sikh Punjabi identity.

The final letter deviates from the previous in that it represents an individual opinion and it is also the first to criticize existing demands from all parties, Sikhs included. Its significance in this place is less so that of representativeness, but that it is the only letter to mention Khalistan by name. A letter to the editor of *The Liberator*, a Sikh publication out of New Delhi, on July 12th, 1947, we hear Gurdial Singh Grewal proclaim, "The struggle for Khalistan should have been started years earlier. If we wait now even, we shall definitely lose all." Grewal continues, "Sikhs made only reasonable demands, with their eyes closed…Are the demands of the Muslim League just? Are the British Awards just? Has the Congress accepted a just decision? Is the Frontier Referendum just?" While this letter is maintained in the file, its lack of response and context echoes profoundly in the archive. With *The Liberator* no longer in publication and no online record to be found, one wonders how this plea was heard, if at all. Instead, it stands solitary amongst official letters between Sikh rulers and British colonizers of Punjab, a lone plea to exact Khalistan.

Yet, the difficulty with these "reasonable" requests that Grewal dismisses is that, within the historical conditions of Partition, even they seem untenable given what is found in the rest of the letters. The most significant letter from Yadavindra Singh is his letter to Lord Mountbatten himself, the final Viceroy of India charged with severing British involvement in India after the financial losses of World War II. Yadavindra Singh acknowledges their prior conversations on the boundary, as well as (re)emphasizes a request of "the greatest importance": the designation of Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, founder of Sikhi, to East Punjab, so Sikhs could have continued access post-partition. Singh makes sure to demonstrate that this request is of the utmost importance and should not be seen as an arbitrary decision to disrupt the potential

122

boundary. In fact, he goes further to demonstrate he is abiding by the logics of colonial partition, stating that finding ways to connect the pockets of Sikh and Muslim communities across Punjab "would be *administratively* wrong" (emphasis mine). While the archive does not add the knowledge of the present (that the desire to include Nankana Sahib in East Punjab was left unfulfilled), what is fascinating is Singh's simultaneous acknowledgement that "the Sikh sentiment" on this issue is "so strong it would be most dangerous to minimise it", while in the closing lines also stating: "I do not consider the claims put forward by both the [Indian and Pakistani] parties before the Commission as justifiable and I would not mind even if you told the Sikhs my opinion in this matter, if you are so inclined." These logical acrobatics are demonstrative of what is required to both establish Yadavindra Singh as the authority figure on the condition of Sikhs in response to partition and also as worthy of communicating these desires to Mountbatten himself instead of the Sikhs on the Commission. In abiding by colonial administrative norms, the requests for what Sikhs will receive in this partitioned Punjab are forced to make themselves legible in ways that fit within the nation-state or, as Grewal names them, they must be reasonable, following colonial logics for visibility.

Lord Mountbatten's reply is brief, underwhelming, and condescending. He starts, "There seems to be widespread belief that the boundary line on which the Boundary Commission decides will, in some way, have been approved by myself…Nothing can be further from the truth…I have made it clear from the start…that I should not intervene in any way in the deliberations of the Commission." Rather than acknowledging Yadavindra Singh's two-and-a-half pages of pleading to do justice to Sikhs and their historical, communal relationality to the land in question, Mountbatten focuses his short, two paragraph reply on explaining the judiciary framework of the

Boundary Commission and wishing that Singh shares what his "true position is" with the Commission. With this letter, the file on the Partition of Punjab ends.

The lack of forethought and intentionality in these decisions is palpable from the timeline of these letters. Maharaja Yadavindra Singh sent his letter to Lord Mountbatten on August 8, 1947, with the response returning on the 12th. Given the new boundaries of partition went into effect at 12:00am on August 15th, this indicates the boundary was still being determined within just two to three days of its actualization. Those familiar with the chaotic realization of partition will not be surprised by this haphazard decision-making and extremely delayed timeline, but the archive closing its narrative on Punjab's partition on this letter leaves the final taste of partition in the archive as bitter as it was in lived experience – bureaucratic, imprecise, and indecent. The logics that nation-state boundaries embedded in the land and people they were built on was the notion that there was civilization and the Other; thus, the pre-colonial notions of seeing and feeling with a culture did not fit into Western ideas of civilization through expansion and errantry (Glissant 2010). By removing a community's place in the world from the root, nation-states created the ability to expand in order to discover Self in opposition to the Other. Glissant theorizes the idea that nations are "concentric circles," recreating the same cultural sentiment within a borderland over and over; Benedict Anderson, of course, calls this the "imagined community" of the nation-state (1983). Thus, nation-states are articulated as a method to constrain nuance. Moving away from the fluidity of nomadism into a structure that continuously develops clear boundaries of insider and outsider, nation-states determine humanity around sites of difference to justify the inequity of resources, often created through imperialism and force. Through colonial rule in Punjab, the British were able to instill this notion of boundaries through behavior, identity, and belonging. By embedding these new colonial logics, even when a nation finds itself free from this

colonial power, the only way it knows to move is by practicing the same frameworks of domination:

> Most of the nations that gained freedom from colonization have tended to form around an idea of power – the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root – rather than around a fundamental *relationship* with the Other. Culture's self-conception was dualistic, pitting citizen against barbarian. Nothing has ever more solidly opposed the thought of errantry than this period in human history when Western nations were established and then made their impact on the world. (Glissant 1997:14)

Perhaps what we are meant to realize is that the practices of domination become embedded in the people who experience them, unable to release themselves from the time and space in which they were utilized. As the spirits of these previously oppressed people search for freedom, they find their way back to these notions of singular identity, confusing the familiarity for a taste of home.

We find these same colonial logics in the debates around Khalistan's viability, its potential, its imagery. Imaginings of Sikh liberation have continued to mutate; for some, frozen in 1984 Punjab with new layerings of diasporic experiences of Othering, while further temporal orientations have formed for those who continued to experience trauma directly at the hands of the Indian government. These temporal orientations continue to fracture, building new pathways of becoming for Sikh Punjabis in the diaspora and in Punjab. One such project emerges in the UK today, constructing a community-based archive to recall and create Khalistan.

The Khalistan Archive: contemporary social media narratives

While Khalistan remains unthinkable within the Punjab State Archives, and in many ways Punjab itself, Sikh activists in the UK diaspora are reawakening collective memory through their own Khalistan Archive. This creation of a public archive for a state that does not have territory is another way that the diaspora is reinvigorating this memory of a past hope in the present, continuing to bring the realization of Khalistan to life. Sharing images of protest, narrative, and persona around Khalistan on a public Instagram account (@khalistanarchive), there is a resurgence

of both historical narratives rooted in diasporic activism, as well as a re-emphasis of the political

inclinations for needing Khalistan. The Archive also has a YouTube channel where they share

historic speeches from Khalistani activists, US and UK news interviews from the 1980s political

upheaval in Punjab, and even evidence of FBI wiretapping key US-based Sikh leaders of the

Khalistani movement. In a brief email interview with Simranjeet Singh, creator and curator of the

Khalistan Archive, he clarified some of the conditions and narratives around Khalistan. Singh

shares that the Khalistan movement, in its original form, was started by Davinder Singh Parmar in

1955 in Southall, UK, which continues to be a hub for the UK-based Sikh community. Singh says

that Parmar was "very close to Master Tara Singh [and] Dr Chohan and a member of the Shiromani

Akali Dal", all key political figures and parties in post-partition Punjab. Singh adds, "Parmar

pursued the idea of the Sikh Fatherland concept whilst working with Master Ji amidst the Panjabi

Suba Movement," which was a movement for sovereignty based on language, a first attempt to

preserve Punjab after partition. Singh continues:

> Unfortunately Davinder Singh passed away in 1992 and hence very little is known of him
> and his work. The next occasion where Khalistan is mentioned is during the Indo-Pak War
> of the late 1960s, with the formation of the Sikh Homeland Front. I have yet to meet an
> elder who was involved with this following the infamous case of Tarsem Singh Sandhu.
> This then leads on to the advertisement in the NY Times by Dr Chohan on behalf of the
> International Council of Sikhs in 1971. This movement continued with Dr Chohan at its
> helm until the formation of the Dal Khalsa and the 1978 Massacre. Dr V.S.Bhatti was the
> personality who coined the term 'Khalistan' and most notably Maharaja Yadavinder Singh
> of Patiala & Baba Gurdit Singh (Komagata Maru) were two personalities who supported
> the Sikh Fatherland concept.

The inclusion of Yadavindra Singh, of whom we were previously speaking, is indeed surprising.

While in this and earlier chapters, I have shown Yadavindra's continued implication and

participation in colonial rule of Punjab, it appears that the realization of partition and the denial of

his request for Nankana Sahib to stay in Sikh territory swayed his perspectives. Similarly, the

inclusion of his name alongside Baba Gurdit Singh, a lead Gadar Party member and staunch anti-

colonialist, also demonstrates the shifting political commitments that were present even within the original Khalistanis, a group who is often painted as the most extremist of Sikhs today.

When asked about imaginings of Khalistan, both in its origin and today, Simranjeet Singh focused on tangible documents as key reference points; again, perhaps not surprising coming from an organization committed to archiving.

> Main reference is the 'Case for Republic of Khalistan' by Surjan Singh (1982), which is the only piece of literature which actually states what the Republic would look like. Davinder Singh Parmar had produced a geographical map of the territory of Khalistan. Bhai Kirpal Singh Sihra who has also passed away produced the constitution of Khalistan. Dr Chohan imagined Khalistan in the early days as a body similar to that of the European Union - an umbrella body per se, this rapidly changed in the late 70s/early 80s as the 'Sikh Homeland'.

> *The Khalistan News* & *Times*, both printed in the United Kingdom during the 80s, would print maps, currency and a list of what Khalistan would look like, but it wasn't very in-depth. Following 1990, it is very tricky to understand what happened, towards the 'end' of the armed struggle and the plateau of lobbying foreign governments. Pre-1984, the movement was dominated by 'Politicians' per se, following 1984, with the emergence of the Damdami Taksal & Panthic Committee, the shaping of Khalistan seemed to have changed from a secular nation to more of a 'theocratic state'. Fast forward to 2020, there is still very little consensus on what the ideal state will look like, function like, etc.

Here, we see a commitment to upholding traditional models and practices of nation-statehood: producing currency, passports, constitutions, newspapers, and maps to create legitimacy; mapping Khalistan onto already-existing bodies of governance, while also going outside of them (Khalistan as an EU, rather than a single nation); and the shift of Khalistanis from secular politicians to theocratic bodies of governance. Returning to Chapter One, this imagining of Khalistan demonstrates the internalization of secular-religious divisions within Sikh politics, even today and even in returning to a *post*colonial representation of Sikh sovereignty. Here, British binaries of Sikh politics and faith, rather than a joint practice of miri-piri, continue.

Such a binary also emerges in articulating the shifting significance of Khalistan within the Sikh community, as well as the popular narrative divisions amongst Sikhs today:

Khalistan was a very big 'issue' in the United Kingdom…Khalistan was discussed often in the early 80s as mentioned previously. Following 1984, there was a power struggle in the Sikh Gurdwaras, with Communist/Congress supporters being axed and being replaced by the ISYF/Babbar Khalsa-AKJ strongholds. These two organizations often worked from the Gurdwaras and had a strong presence whereas the Khalistan Sarkar - the umbrella body – was based in central London. This concept of the Sikh Fatherland, especially after the bloodbath in Amritsar, made many Sikhs more vigilant and brought one's emotions to the forefront. The Khalistan Sarkar was a collective force until its split [in 1988] into the Government in Exile & the Council of Khalistan. Towards this point, the movement had lost much of its pace.

In 2020, much has changed. There are very few…sympathetic Gurdwaras left and this notion of Nationhood has been largely forgotten. The Council of Khalistan organizes two demonstrations outside the Indian High Commission yearly. The Federation of Sikh Organisations organize a Remembrance Rally in Central London in June. Shaheedi Smagams do occur up and down the country but the amount of sangat attending has most definitely dropped. Our parent organization - Aston University Khalistan Society is the third Khalistan Society at a University to be established. We have found it very hard to engage Sikh Students, this growing sense of westernization has engulfed many, with many being unaware of basic Sikh Tenents & Sikh History.

In this response, Simranjeet Singh identifies many groups who were present at the Farmers' Protests, placing them in similar positions of secular or religious, orthodox or modern. Also, he identifies the "westernization" of Sikh youth – another critique familiar to the Farmers' Protests – as the source of blame for why enthusiasm for the Khalistan movement has fallen. Still, at the center of current activism is remembrance. Remembrance Rallies, demonstrations outside the Indian High Commission, and Shaheedi Smaagams, or weekend-long programs where Sikh divine poetry is sung in community to reinvigorate the memory of those who died for the Panth. These practices of memory are perhaps their own archive, even more so than the formal documents preserved on social media. Rather than turn to newspaper clippings or old photographs, the memory of Khalistan emerges in embodied commitment to retrieving memories of those who gave

their life for something unformed, something imprecise, something only just imagined. Perhaps that is enough to create an archive.

Imagining a formless archive

I want to close with a return to our contemporary archive on Twitter, particularly two responses that both highlighted the constraints through imagining Khalistan in a nation-state form. Uncovering what Khalistan could be imagined as *instead* is especially important considering Shabd Singh did not confine responses to a nation-state paradox in his prompt; instead, he asks, *what* is Khalistan to *you*? Khalistan is imagined anew through each response.

Amardeep Dhillon defined Khalistan as "a dream of sovereignty that condenses a matrix of oppressions to propose an idealist solution…in practice the setting up of a nation-state would involve key capitalist players that would further exploit the most vulnerable" (@AmarDeepSinghD 2019). While acknowledging the "dream of sovereignty" that is present for Sikhs, this individual simultaneously acknowledges Shani's argument – that linking Khalistan to a nation-state framework not only limits Sikh notions of collective identity to "an idealist solution," but it also confines a more radical framework of global community to a "matrix of oppressions." Most fascinating, however, is the response of Japjyot Singh who did not conceptualize Khalistan as a nation-state at all. Instead, they shared, "the mind 'is' Khalistan. Until the mind is not free of doubt and on the path of Gurmat, the physical reality of Khalistan can never exist" (@jap_the_jyot 2019). Notions of Khalistan in this manner are not novel; there are many Sikh Punjabi activists and politicians who understand Khalistan and Sikh sovereignty as beyond nation-state territoriality. However, because Sikh Punjabis have become frozen in particular temporal orientations, driven by fear of past and ongoing trauma, it has led to silences of other possibilities for historical narrative. Instead of relying upon historical ideas of self-sovereignty outside of the

nation-state model, Sikh Punjabis are focused on attempting to rectify the specific manners in which autonomy and land was taken away. As Franz Fanon articulates, "For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with 'human' dignity" (Fanon 1963:9). For Fanon too, then, the reclamation of land is not enough to reclaim one's sovereign spirit.

The only public digital record of *The Liberator*, the paper in which Grewal made his cry for Khalistan, is the cover page from September 21, 1947, preserved in the UK National Archives. The majority of the front page is taken up by a photo of Darbar Sahib, the same gurdwara that would be callously attacked in 1984, and a caption: "The golden temple at Amritsar, brings joy of hope to the misery-stricken Sikhs of the West Punjab who are once again gathering round it in their millions, creating a homeland for once scattered Sikh people." The invocation of homeland here is different, evoking an affective beyond the physical while also referencing the significance of a particular locality. By envisioning displaced Sikhs as finding home by returning to a location of spirituality in practice, this imagining of homeland is reminiscent of that which is envisioned in Gurbani:

ਸਾਜਨ ਦੇਸਿ ਵਿਦੇਸੀਅੜੇ ਸਾਨੇਹੜੇ ਦੇਦੀ ॥

O Friend, you have traveled so far from your homeland; I send my message of love to you.[25]

This shabad (poem of divine love) is written by Guru Nanak Dev Ji in Raag Tukhari, a raag that is said to speak to the ambitions of the Soul, regardless of where the mind's consciousness may be located. In particular, it speaks of the Soul's desire to (re)unite with Akaal Purakh, the timeless Creator and convince the mind to complete the actions necessary to do so. While this line comes

---

[25] Full shabad can be found here: http://beta.igurbani.com/shabad/3994?verseId=47693.

from a longer shabad that speaks of the Soul's desire to wed, or unite with, Akaal Purakh, this line is interesting for its play on the idea of des (land) and the idea of being videsi, foreign to a land. In this case, while the line is translated with the word "homeland," the interpretation of the homeland is actually one's consciousness. Having traveled so far from one's homeland is the notion of disconnect from one's internal reality, one's Divine Light and, thus, one's inherent sovereignty.

Sikhs have remained in this state of simultaneous exile and errantry, unable to return home for as long as Khalistan's specter casts this divisive shadow upon the community through the limited possibilities of the nation-state framework. By re-centering the more imaginative purpose for its invocation, Sikhs can perhaps locate a better way to understand the role Khalistan has in Sikh liberation. Khalistan is often called upon in moments of community struggle or grief, and thus Khalistan's realization is a rallying cry for unity and a rectification of past harms. However, the activism surrounding its realization can no longer be limited to a nation-state framework nor temporal orientations of trauma for the sake of Sikh liberation. In the words of Khalistani activist and artist Jagdeep Singh Mahoon, "Sikhi permeates and exists beyond analysis of whiteness, beyond the analysis of colonization. We're not diminished through numbers; we're not diminished through a hand of power. [We've gone] from living in the jungles to the fifth largest population of a religion in the world" (Veerhood n.d.). Sikh models of collective identity and sovereignty stretch well beyond Western ideas of nation-state, instead expanding across borders and rooting themselves in the power of indigenous belonging to land, water, and temporal sovereignty (Bal and Singh 2017; K. K. Singh 2020). This is embodied in Sikh frameworks like the historical, collective decision-making process of Sarbat Khalsa, a process that requires unanimous consensus from all members of the community to pass a gurmatta – a decision rooted in Sikh philosophy for the community to follow. For Sikhs, desiring to recreate a community that is able to fully and

accurately carry out the model of Sarbat Khalsa would mean being in a time and space that all voices are not only valued, but are heard, acknowledged, and delivered the fullest imaginings of justice. However, in order to arrive in this new temporal orientation, and thus a new era of belonging and being, Sikhs must first untangle themselves from the specters of colonialism that continue to live on in the present, reproduced and reinforced through state and discursive (collective/social) archives. In the next chapter, I return to Sikh praxis alongside Sikh youth to create an otherwise archive, where embodied knowledge can carry us into the future, still unimagined.

Chapter Six

"REVOLUTIONARY LOVE HAS FREED ME MORE TIMES THAN ONE":

Gurmat Liberation Theology and Praxis as Imagined by Sikh Youth

In Sikhi, the dissolution of ego occurs through constant thought and action in service of creation. Each being of existence (human and non-human) is equally capable of connecting with infinitely creative Truth (Vaaheguru), a force which is beyond time, space, and form. Prior to this beyond, yearnings are trapped within the human condition where despair and precarity elicit reactionary politics and an activism void of utopian vision (Du Bois 1938:12; @WilliamMParis 2021). If our "wounded attachments" to being recognized as fully human foreclose possibilities for realizing liberation and emancipation, what is the process through which political praxes and moral dispositions oriented otherwise can be developed (Brown 1993; Wynter 2003)? What would it mean to root imaginings and manifestations of self-collective ("Oneness" in Sikhi) in these "otherwise worlds", which exist beyond what can be understood within a single lifetime or singular form of existence (King, Navarro, and Smith 2020)? These inquiries guide this chapter – an examination of data gathered through a self-created consciousness-raising program that weaves Sikh praxis with radical political theory. Held over six months with ten Sikh young adults, these two-hour dialogues open up questions of relationality, im/materiality, and liberation that emerge from attempts at Sikh meaning-making. The analysis of these youth dialogues grapples with imagining an otherwise; specifically, what can and should be done to reckon with material violences while forever grasping for consciousness beyond the material. Guided by Sikh onto-epistemes, this concluding chapter reimagines relationality as a process of yearning for connection with Vaaheguru, the ultimate teacher and creative energetic force – a yearning manifesting through multi-lifetime experiences of seeking this Truth.

Bunga Sikh Virsa: Origins and Manifestation

Central to diasporic Sikh youth experience for much of the last three to four decades has been the Sikh youth camp model, ranging from day camps held at local gurdwaray to week-long overnight experiences hosted at nearby YMCA campsites. While not a regular community space for earlier Sikh migrants, or Sikhs in south Asia, structured Sikh youth education programs were born out of simultaneous circumstances: (1) post-1965 immigration of class- and caste-privileged Sikhs entering the US for work or education opportunities, and, thus, with visas already secured, (2) a concern that Sikhs growing up outside of Punjab would not be as inundated with knowledge and experiences of Sikhi, and, most saliently, (3) a strong desire to strengthen Sikh identity amongst the youth in the aftermath of increased direct and mass violence on Sikh bodies from the Indian government in the early 1980s. The first condition allowed for Sikh communities to think more seriously about how to establish themselves as a secure diaspora away from Punjab, as their circumstances were less economically precarious and, in light of increased anti-Sikh violence from the Indian government, seemingly less socially and politically precarious as well. For the second condition, 1984 was a key flash point that initiated a concerted effort to establish a new generation of Sikhs that held pride and confidence in their Sikh identity while also being strongly established in the US diaspora. Although Sikh education spaces were present in the diaspora previously, state-sponsored attacks on Sikh identity transformed this project into one of community survival. This led to youth-centered education efforts, rather than sole reliance on traditional collective learning models in the gurdwara, like established Khalsa or Punjabi schools (Sikh Sunday school) and overnight camps as a way to bring together local youth to learn Sikh history and gurbaani (divine poetry), practice Sikhi, and strengthen their Sikh identity through friendships with other Sikh youth for several days at least once a year. While there are additional models for Sikh youth education,

particularly full-time Khalsa Schools (Sikh-run schools) which have flourished in Sikh hubs like Vancouver and Toronto, Sikh youth camps have become a primary means of connection for Sikh youth in less concentrated areas of community, especially the midwestern US, although still present on the east and west coasts.

Given the original intentions to promote Sikh identity, practice, and knowledge, Sikh youth camps have largely focused on how to help Sikhs in the diaspora understand Sikhi and make it legible to their current environment. Sikh youth camps, particularly post-9/11, started incorporating exercises like the "elevator pitch," where campers as young as 7-years-old were made to stand in front of a group and attempt to explain Sikhi to a stranger who had started the hypothetical conversation with something obviously interrogatory about Sikh identity, like, "What's that on your head?" The pressure of these exercises was immense – youth were often reminded that this might be the only opportunity that said stranger would ever have to learn about Sikhi in an informed way, and so the youth had to be ready to give the perfectly refined answer. Many of these refined answers were thus framed through Judeo-Christian legibility, regardless of their accuracy: *Sikhism is monotheistic; we are a non-violent people; we believe in equality for all and we wear the turban so that we can be easily recognized to fight for justice.* As demonstrated in chapter two, however, these legibility projects became simultaneously more concerted and fraught in recent years, particularly after the 2012 Oak Creek shooting. For one camp in particular, Camp Sikh Virsa, the questions around legibility projects hit immensely close to home as a youth camp based out of Wisconsin and serving the youth who attend the Oak Creek gurdwara. As an additional factor, Sikh youth camps like Camp Sikh Virsa had shifted towards a more youth-led model where college-aged students were running classes and programming; this was consciously done as a way to center the experiences of youth who knew what it was like to grow up Sikh in

the U.S. and could better understand the new generation's experiences. As these diasporic youth took charge, Sikh camp material began to reflect more localized elements of what it meant to practice Sikhi. Key themes from the camp theme shabad (divine poem) were explained through analogies using the training regiment of local NBA players or the plotline from popular Disney movies, Sikh history was compared to the US Civil Rights Movement, and understanding what it meant for Sikhs to stand for justice became intertwined with other community struggles in the US and around the world. Over the last several years at Camp Sikh Virsa – particularly with a new generation of campers, counselors, and teachers growing up with active social media usage –, these connections took on new forms, like finding ways for Sikhs to act in collaboration with Indigenous, Black, and other oppressed communities in the US. Sikh youth were deeply invested in the NoDAPL movement, which reminded them of water rights issues in Punjab, or ongoing gender violence within and outside of the Sikh community.

Bunga Sikh Virsa emerged from these histories and conditions. Soliciting a small group of regular youth teachers and organizers of Camp Sikh Virsa, the participants were asked to voluntarily participate in six 90-minute sessions on a virtual platform, engaging in pre-selected readings, a pre-meeting reflection exercise, and a post-meeting survey. As per the invitation email, the project's purpose was to:

> (1) build stronger resources for Sikh youth to utilize Sikh values of radical humanism and resistance within their everyday context and (2) build a generation of not only informed, but active and engaged Sikh leaders. This consciousness-raising group for Sikh youth will develop and execute a trial run of a larger curriculum to be published for widespread usage. The curriculum would utilize Sikh perspectives of ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ (gurbaani/enlightened poetry), ਇਤਿਹਾਸ (ithihaas/history), and ਮਰਯਾਦਾ (maryaada/discipline), as well as global literatures on identity and liberation to *develop a Sikhi-based framework for a political ethic*. This would cover topics such as, but not limited to, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, class and capitalism, nationalism and borders, privilege and positionality, and protest and resistance. (emphasis added)

136

While originally imagined as an in-person consciousness-raising session to be held in Chicago, where many of the Camp Sikh Virsa youth could easily attend monthly meetings, the start of the pandemic quickly shifted all education online and thus made it feasible to both hold the meetings on a virtual platform and also increase the reach of participants. Thus, while nine out of ten participants were born and raised in the midwestern US, they were calling in from all over the US for these meetings, where they were either attending college or working. The one exception was a participant who had started attending Camp Sikh Virsa from a young age due to extended family being deeply involved in the camp and fewer youth opportunities for Sikhs in this participant's home state. The selection of individuals who already had long-standing relationships with each other was intentional, as it allowed the consciousness-raising sessions to focus on struggling with the material rather than relationship building (although relationship strengthening did occur). Logistically, the meetings held up to the originally-envisioned structure with two slight modifications: (1) after two meetings, the group unanimously agreed to extend the time from 90 minutes to two hours given the previous two meetings had run long and/or felt cut short, and (2) the final pre-meeting reflection was changed from a short one-page reflection to a creative format of each individual's choice.

What is Liberation-Centered Gurmat Pedagogy?

In carrying out Bunga Sikh Virsa, one of the most distinct elements from other fieldwork preparation was the necessity to develop and implement a curriculum that both contained clear pedagogical goals while also remaining flexible to participant feedback and interaction. My undergraduate research and teaching experience drew heavily from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his critique of banking education, in which students were present simply to consume and rearticulate a hierarchical production of knowledge creation. Instead, the Pedagogy

of Action project grounded itself and its members in community-centered learning practices. In this learning approach, all students were also teachers and knowledge was something to be co-constructed through sharing resources, experiences, and language for a new collective product in each iteration and experience of learning (Kaur Forthcoming). Pedagogy of Action also drew heavily from bell hooks' feminist consciousness-raising program model, in which knowledge was not gained through engagement with elite spaces, literature, or people, but through a constant and active reflection on one's own world in relation to theory grounded in these lived experiences (Kaur et al. n.d.).

Drawing upon a tri-fold model of Gurmat inquiry, or enlightened wisdom, which has in recent years been solidified through the Sikh Research Institute's "State of the Panth" reports (The Sikh Research Institute n.d.), participants were asked to engage with Gurbaani (divine poetry compiled in Guru Granth Sahib), Sikh history, and maryada (formalized Sikh practices of discipline). In addition to this content, participants were given a select number of articles, essays, videos, and/or podcasts to engage with on that meeting's content. The goal of this additional content was to situate the Gurmat materials in relation to global, liberation movement dialogue on each axis of power and domination. The dialogues themselves were less about offering a singular answer to be delivered by an instructor, but rather for a collective group of students to struggle through difficult questions about how to attain liberation through a praxis that is built on striving beyond current material conditions through im/material reflection and refinement. The participants, in their pre- and post-meeting reflections, often shared that they struggled with this element of the experience greatly. They had been trained to expect that anything they offered in an education-based space would be judged through a binary of right or wrong and, thus, were unsure how to engage in a space where they would leave with more questions than they began, or

perhaps feel they had taken a significant leap backwards in their perceived comprehension. However, in strengthening their sense of community with one another, participants became more willing to challenge each other, reckon with the uncertain and untenable, and interrogate their own resolve to question what they had already invested in by nature of their career paths and upbringings.

In defining what exactly liberation-centered Gurmat pedagogy is, then, I turn to my Bunga interlocutors who offered their own refined definitions throughout the program. harnoor singh shared that consciousness-raising is:

> something that would be amazingly powerful within the Sikh sangat across the world, just because it's something historically that we had and then we lost through colonization. We had these kinds of groups [bungay] at some point in our history and it was amazing and beneficial and pushed our thought process to new areas in our practice.

In situating consciousness-raising in Sikh practice in this way, harnoor singh is calling upon how the name of the project, Bunga Sikh Virsa, reflects these intentions through a Sikh lens. Sikh Virsa, as in the camp name, means Sikh legacy. Bunga (literally, residence) is derived from Sikh communities in the 1700s who set up bungay around Darbar Sahib to protect from foreign invasions; however, these bungay also doubled as learning centers, where different residences would focus on protecting Sikh legacy physically, but also through their own mastery of poetry, calligraphy, interpretation of Gurbaani, and Sikh musical traditions. Thus, carrying forward this message through learning Sikh legacy and also rooting ourselves in Sikh legacy to contribute to the protection of community (Sikh and non-Sikh) was central to the gathering of Bunga Sikh Virsa. Two other participants, Baani Kaur and Ivraj, noted early on the distinction between learning as a reactive experience in contrast to consciousness-raising as proactive. Ivraj realized after the first meeting "(a) just how little consciousness-raising happens to a regular individual daily and (b)

how much of my own efforts of consciousness-raising feel somewhat reactive. There's a distinction between education and consciousness-raising." Further, Baani Kaur shared,

> the bridge between education and action relies on the individual responsibility to transform reactiveness to proactiveness through gurmat. Reactiveness involves responding to a stimulus such as learning empathy only after a personal circumstance, situation, or story. However, what if this individual reflection and learning was proactive instead of reactive. Proactiveness involves challenging ourselves every day to grow with the awareness of our mindset, sangat, and actions to prepare our natural instinct. Firstly, I think this starts with a mindset of humility to question our current belief systems, reflect on previous patterns, and remember guru ji as the ultimate source of authority.

In this, Baani Kaur centers the transformation of the learner through Gurmat and the shift away from self-centered action in relation to worldly pain or suffering. She also identifies sangat, or community, as a key site for this transformation. Finally, seeing Guru Granth Sahib Ji as the ultimate authority makes clear that this transformation of self occurs through a Sikh framework of responsibility in the world. These are all themes that the participants discussed often and will be theorized further below.

Finally, harnoor singh also shared an additional component of consciousness-raising that distinguishes it from traditional education models: "to do community-based education, you need to take the community for where it's at and you can prioritize where you want them to go. You have to see where they go, where they take you." This reflection of community-based education humbled me in my efforts and, although I do not claim I achieved this vision fully, I tried to make this a guiding principle of my pedagogy for this program. In offering what felt like the most engaging and rich materials for each session, I would lesson plan, and then often re-lesson plan once I had read participants' pre-meeting reflections the day prior to meeting. In meetings, too, lesson plans would often get cut short or recalibrated as conversations delved deeper into what it meant to respond to worldly suffering from a Gurmat perspective, rather than "retro-fitting" Sikh thought onto worldly issues as Ivraj framed it in one of his reflections. Given this, the themes

covered in this chapter are not pre-selected or what I had expected to emerge from the meetings. Instead, they are the four themes that emerged most saliently in my post-program analyses, the concerns that participants raised themselves in engaging with my pre-constructed syllabi and their own thoughts on the matter. First, the question of maya (worldly attachment) or mukti (liberation) was frequent, through which participants tried to demarcate clearly when social action or political ethics were reflecting human desire rather than a selfless service of Oneness. From this emerged the second theme, where it became necessary to have more engaged conversations on Truth and the necessity of the absolution of ego in order to realize Oneness in a world permeated by false realities. Third was sangat, or community oriented towards Gurmat, which was identified as the space in which this transformation happens and, finally, miri-piri (worldly-spiritual power) was the Sikh praxis centered in pursuing this transformation. Through these reflections, participants strived towards making the ever-aspirational project of Oneness more real through their situatedness in the world. They centered a Love that emerges from the destruction of ego and the allegiance to a vision of people and community that is whole. Most significantly, they stayed committed to raising their consciousness despite fears of all that remained uncertain.

Maya or Mukti? Detangling Political Ethics from Human Desire

Core to Sikh notions of liberation is the concept of maya (worldly entanglements), from which all Sikhs are struggling to be free during their lifetime. Maya contains the panj chor (five thieves) – kaam (lust), krodh (anger), lobh (greed), moh (worldly attachment), and ahankaar (ego). While ego is often hyper-focused on as the primary element of maya that must be destroyed for one to attain mukti (liberation), gurbaani describes the panj chor as a joint operation collectively acting upon the human consciousness at all times. The human mind is compared to a wild animal and the ego must be destroyed through constant acts of love and sacrifice in order to achieve true mukti.

In discussing power, oppression, and liberation, Bunga participants often debated whether a certain pathway in discourse or social action was falling into maya or mukti. In tandem with this distinction was the element of dubidha, or duality, a state of being in which one's intentions and actions are out of sync, and therefore a failure to achieve true mukti as the duality of the ego is still guiding one's presence in the world. This section will follow some of the participants' discussions on maya versus mukti, and also lay out how they distinguished between both stages of human consciousness. What made something maya versus mukti? More significantly, how could they tell? When they were uncertain, how did they work through their process of inquiry? These will serve as guiding questions to explore.

The first session focused on building a foundational understanding of power, privilege, and positionality. Pre-meeting reflections addressed how social identities and social systems played into a Sikh process of attaining mukti in this world. Much of this reflection came through an engagement with the Combahee River Collective (CRC) statement and an excerpt from Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). harnoor singh identified the CRC statement as a framework in which social identities are a way to bind and restrict individuals through socially constructed and maintained systems. He articulated a responsibility for detachment from one's identity but a commitment to "understand the ways in which these labels and identities affect us and then learn how we may liberate ourselves without further enforcing the bondage of others and ourselves as well." Seerat shared a similar view, where "Sikhs must learn to let go of the social systems that control our view of the world," but added that those with privilege can make change if done outside of self-interest and, instead, for the "betterment of the greater good"; this concept is often depicted in Sikhi as sarbat da bhalla (for the welfare of the collective). Ravjot and SK reflected further on how Sikhs are guided to challenge power inequities; Ravjot shared that

"knowledge is power [and] the energy for empowerment." They both articulate a process in which the Sikh is enlightened through the Guru to understand that no natural nor permanent hierarchy exists, which quells the turmoil of the mind to attain a higher status. Shedding the ego, and forgetting the illusions of worldly desire (capital is specifically identified), one attains true peace through a connection with Vaaheguru. Seerat also more clearly states in a later reflection, "Freedom in the eyes of Gurmat is not restricted to political borders, it is about liberation in every aspect of how we live. Having the access to education, the right to practice Sikhi freely, and be able to live without the threat of mass destruction."

However, Simrnjit Seerha remained uncertain whether it was such a clean connection, or demarcation, between identity politics and mukti:

> My question is how do we acknowledge our bodies, experiences, ethnicity (and more) while still trying to be one? I have a feeling that we as humans see a false duality of black and white; Sikh and Hindu; and North-indian and south-indian but there is no such thing. So how can we get from respecting our identities but not getting so caught up in them that we are not able to see oneness?

This concern around duality would continue to drive discussions on how to distinguish between maya and mukti. Part of this concern emerged around the use of English translations for gurbaani, specifically in cases where the poetic effect of the shabad might be lost through a single translation for a word that could have multiple, simultaneous meanings. One example that was discussed in depth is a shabad that is used often to denote women's empowerment in Sikhi, but has become more fraught in recent years. The main line is usually translated as (and the translation is also frequently circulated alone): *why call her bad, from whom kings were born?* Participants discussed how this translation was not entirely accurate but rather represented Western politics with which diasporic Sikhs wished to demonstrate their alignment (Singh 2006). Rather than focusing specifically on the shortcomings of women's empowerment being solely conceptualized through

her "contribution" of childbirth, I want to turn to other concerns of maya versus mukti that emerged in response to Sikh community action or inaction. Or, as Jaskirat Singh put it, "How do we dismantle patriarchy & replace it with something new? How do we move beyond the divide of culture and legislation to shift behavior?" Participants were deeply concerned with this general question at the heart of challenges to abolitionist thinking – if we get rid of this, what comes next? If what comes next fails, then what?

Just a few days before the second gathering of Bunga Sikh Virsa, George Floyd was murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, launching a new wave of uprisings against police brutality against Black communities across the US. The timing of this in relation to our meetings led to many fervent conversations on how the Sikh community had positioned itself as an upwardly mobile and morally salvageable migrant community. While now sympathetic, perhaps for the first time, towards victims of police violence, there was still a succumbing to "gray areas" of morality, primarily that looting or anything but non-violent protest would evade the possibility of sympathy. Jackie Wang conceptualizes this prerequisite for empathy as the "politics of innocence," where innocence becomes a stand-in for "nonthreatening to white civil society" and a way to obscure the institutions and actors who enact Black physical and social death on mass scale by refocusing public attention on a debate around individual morality (Wang, 2012: 2,3). Mayher Kaur problematized stereotypical resilience narratives of immigrant communities, asking, "How am I supposed to teach new ideology to someone who has gone through life learning that adamance is the only way to move forward? How am I supposed to try to show Sikhi, to show the life of a student, to someone who is so blinded by their own biases that they actually start to move backwards?" harnoor singh critiqued Sikh community politics of innocence and representation with an eye to Sikh history, sharing,

144

> Nowhere in history do we see our Guru or any Gursikh enter the court of the oppressor to beg to be treated humanely. Has anyone ever heard a saakhi of the Guru or a Gursikh walking into Aurungzeb's darbar [royal court of opressive Mughal emperor] and asking for him to stop murdering Sikhs? Of course not, because that would ignore the larger systemic issues of the empire being based in the non-recognition of the humanity of all.

Instead, harnoor singh offers, "To not stand up and challenge racism in our own homes and communities is to accept that we in fact do not love our family and sangat as much as we believe. To not challenge the denial of humanity to another human by a loved one is to allow that loved one to grow distant from their source which is to allow them to abandon Sikhi." In this unique way, harnoor singh identifies a lack of Sikh organizing and mobilizing in response to anti-Blackness as two simultaneous rejections of Oneness. The first is a rejection of divine embodiment in all creation, which is more frequently noted. The second, more unique, is that this rejection also marks an apathy towards Sikh communities' distance from Vaaheguru through their inaction in response to dehumanization of those categorized as Black. Many other participants identified this duality as inherent to separation; for example, Simrnjit Seerha articulated any sense of duality in identity as naturalizing the illusion of separation.

While these earlier sessions resulted in a shared understanding that power imbalances naturalized through socially constructed identities could be rectified through a commitment to Gurmat-driven relationality, participants struggled to reckon with capital and borders in a way that did not overly valorize one mode of capital production, or to land on a new sense of international relationality that felt logical in the rock-solid makeup of world relations. Mehr Kaur critiqued the movement for a Sikh state of Khalistan from this lens, sharing, "I'm a little confused about why the conclusion was we need a new state, which by definition seems to be problematic, as opposed to, we need to adjust the current situation to be less state-like or adjust your current situation to be more in line with these values that we hold." In these moments, participants jolted against the

seeming impossibility of removing ego when human nature appeared to always strive towards worldly success and the refinement of ego. At one point, perhaps in frustration, Mehr Kaur proclaimed, "It just seems to be fitting in something that is so other from the current norm into the norm...I feel like you'd have to change the whole world." Although it was not always this clearly articulated, this is what the participants were reckoning with – how does one negotiate and identify the axis upon which they can engage with the world for the purpose of changing it, but with tools and ideas that do not succumb to the world's own strictures? While constructing an alternative understanding of self felt within reach, perhaps because of participants' own self-work in understanding how socially constructed identities already fell short even for their own understanding of self, the same logic did not apply when analyzing worldly systems or modes of relation. A powerful moment in these reckonings was during the meeting on class and capitalism, when participants were especially struggling to separate worldly methods of living from Sikh practices of mukti. At this point, Baani Kaur eloquently intervened, "Gurbaani teaches us that it is possible to remove the ego; it seems unrealistic because we don't want to." In this articulation, Baani Kaur reminds us of what Lauren Berlant identifies as cruel optimism; "A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (2011:1). Berlant theorizes:

> optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving; and, doubly, it is cruel insofar as the very pleasures of being inside a relation have become sustaining regardless of the content of the relation, such that a person or a world finds itself bound to a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly conforming. (2011:2)

While Sikhi insists on attaining mukti while living in the world (grist jeevan), participants reflected to what extent this meant living in the world as such or pushing beyond the current world to build anew. Or, as SK asked us, "how do we stay connected to our true purpose, our true passions, when

our current economic, political, and social systems complicate our efforts?" This next section will explore the conceptualization of Truth to which SK refers, usually used to denote any qualities or embodiments of Vaaheguru. How did participants understand Truth and distinguish Truth from other modes of being in the world? What were tangible and intangible methods of seeking Truth? These queries will guide the next section.

Truth Seeking in a Transient World

Early on in the Bunga meetings, participants clearly defined "Truth" as the ideal end goal for Sikh consciousness-raising efforts and the most important quality of one's consciousness. Truth was further identified as ੴ (IkOnkaar), the first utterance of Guru Granth Sahib Ji, generally understood as the notion of complete Oneness central to Sikh onto-epistemes. This mantar represents the singular creative force at the center of all existence, into which each Sikh longs to be reabsorbed. Jaskirat Singh explains, "indeed Sikhi is an individual's journey to the truth…every person has to go on their own separate journey to get that truth." However, Simrnjit Seerha notes that, because ੴ is a concept so central to Sikhi, one can fall into stating ੴ as eternal fact without embodying or materially experiencing the sensations of it. For Simrnjit Seerha, the duality between recitation and embodiment was identified as emerging out of a Western notion of fate, free will, and a separately existing Divine Force: "It was a ਵਾਹਿਗੁਰੂ [Vaaheguru], I and me, them and me, you and me mentality – I really had a western mentality of my eastern religion! I feel relieved of this burden to try to accomplish everything now because there is an external force that I have to please." This notion of resolving a mental division between Vaaheguru, self, and others emerged frequently in Bunga participants' discussions of Gurbaani, during which they often tried to make sense of socially crafted and materially applied worldly divisions as a psychological breakage in

Oneness. In the pre-meeting reflection for meeting three on race and ethnicity, Baani Kaur articulated,

> Guru Ji reminds us that the Divine is pervading all around and within. The sun, trees, stars, planets, life; everything is Naam [Vaaheguru's qualities]. Each interaction and moment is a chance to praise Vaaheguru and connect with Naam through the hukam [Divine order] of recognizing the universal light. However, the root obstacle that often stops us is the ego of the "I am" mentality that creates an illusion of separation and superiority; a world filled with Maya, competitiveness, and duality. This further causes internalized racism. By supporting initiatives that value Black lives as less and perpetuating biases, we are engrossed in haumai [literally, I-me]. This illusion of separation is a bubble that needs to break so that the truth of IkOnkaar can be experienced. In order to break it, we must assess the cause of the illusion: actions are being driven by ego and not love.

Thus, similar to the division between maya and mukti, ego or haumai was noted as the barrier to experiencing or aspiring towards Truthful living. Addressing this psychological divide is the first step towards Truth-seeking, which bears fruit by manifesting Oneness in our material relations and comprehension of the world.

Still, participants were careful to note that this did not lend itself to a state of mind that ignored the consequences of material realities. Simrnjit Seerha shared, "one may be tempted to claim that there is no difference between us. We are one in the same. This is problematic because it erases the experiences of BIPOC. While we are all made of the same materials, we have different experiences, appearances etc. We need to recognize the Vaaheguru within each other and use empathy to understand their situation." Instead of erasure, an understanding and embodiment of Oneness served to manifest empathy through an absolution of the self-other-Vaaheguru mindset and offer a pathway to shift material realities through psychological reckoning. harnoor singh expanded on this further by teasing out the nuances in how the destruction of ego could play out through relationality:

> The creator is in the creation, the creation is in the creator, but we are Vaaheguru….There're shabads that verbatim say, when there's an I and there's a you, that's still ego. In the context of Gurbaani, it's always when it's *only* you, when it's only

Vaaheguru, then everything is one. With we, it becomes who would you include in the we, and with we, again, it's still plural. So we is not a oneness anymore, it's not – yes, we're all together, but, I think the Gurbaani understanding is trying to say that it's something beyond a we, it is literally there is one.

Here, harnoor singh articulates Oneness not only as a removal of divisions, but as a removal of plurality, in that pluralism actually still functions to base difference on a comparison to others (Mandair 2009). This idea of Truth-centered relations functioning through a complete absence of ego also resonated for participants in how they could truly work to eradicate internalized relations of difference. Mehr Kaur shared, "tweaking my perspective to not view identities as relative to others is my next step (of many) in continuing my process of re-education. Kabir Ji says, 'The clay is the same, but the Fashioner has fashioned it in various ways.' We are not relative to one another, but relative to Vaaheguru, from which we all come." Relationality was reconceptualized *through* Vaaheguru as a method to make meaning of the world through Truth (i.e., Oneness), rather than ego-centric conceptualizations of one's material positionality.

In their urgency for comprehending and making sense of Truth, the participants grappled with what it would mean to try and contain Vaaheguru, which they know to be uncontainable. As SK interprets, "Vaaheguru's Unseenness means that They can be seen in all; They don't have a solid form, so we can't say that someone is more worthy or deserving than another to follow the Path." While this immaterial element of Vaaheguru could then be used to break down social and material divisions, reestablishing inherent worth and relationality of all existence as SK does, deeper questions emerged in articulating a new form of relationality in the material sense. One framework the participants worked through was Begampura, the sorrow-free town popularized through Bhagat Ravidas Ji's divine poetry (Omvedt 2008). In this town, Bhagat Ravidas imagines no taxes or commodities, no inherent division based on social or material status, and a population liberated from fear and anxiety. As participants reflected on how Begampura could be manifested

149

today, and both the ways in which Ravidas Ji's imagining felt tangible and intangible, Ivraj offered, "is [Bhagat Ravidas Ji] also just trying to use the language in the description of his current polities? And does that mean that – like is our end vision of Begampura something that is maybe not describable by, by even his language? And do we have to go further? How do we go further?" One can hear Ivraj's insistence to "go further" as reaching towards the intangibility or immateriality of Truth-seeking, similar to SK's interpretation. While intangibility is fruitful for pushing beyond material limits of worldly relationality, it also pushes against the tensions of ੴ-centric imagination, where one is attempting to rebuild relationality through a framework made illegible through material violences. In analyzing the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, a list of demands to the Indian state made by Sikh politicians in 1973, harnoor singh sees a parallel to the prison abolition and the movement to defund the police:

> People are saying, okay, you don't want that? What do you want though? What are we going to do to replace it? And, kind of lending from the abolitionist movement, this freedom of imagination, like a new reality...it's really impossible to imagine Begampura existing, which is why I was really moved by, maybe this parallel of like, okay, let's define what the collective would look like, which I think this document does really well. Like what would a collective look like? What do we want our collective to be like? And then from that collective, can we imagine what a radical new future is?

Such radical new futures often seemed out of reach when manifesting imagination into reality – as Mehr Kaur said earlier, "you would have to change the whole world." However, perhaps without their realizing, participants did start to thrust into the imaginary to reckon the world with this framework of Truth.

In her re-imagining of the nation-state, Mehr Kaur offers one possible pathway to imagine a relationality that seeks out this "further" place:

> Gurbaani describes a border or a threshold as a doorway rather than a guarded wall. Guru Arjun Dev Ji says he has come to the Guru's doorway into the Guru's home (~home~ in all the ways we discussed in a previous class), helpless. This door is not guarded, but

150

instead is a welcoming sanctuary from our everyday world. Here is a threshold that is not harsh or dangerous. It gives a promise of safety and of love.

The notion of Gurmat-based love was referenced by many participants, as well as the centrality of this type of love to Truth-seeking. Jaskirat Singh, drawing from bell hooks, articulated "love as a practice of freedom, and not just freedom in a certain people or certain rights but harmony at the highest sense – following IkOnkaar. True freedom is the embrace of Vaaheguru. Until there is a

Figure 6.1 – Creative reflection from harnoor singh, Bunga 2020 participant.

generation that is free from the history of seeing people as inherently different, we will not be able to live together as one." Other participants also called upon Mehr Kaur's recognition of home as beyond this world, like harnoor singh who shared in his final creative reflection (included above), "One cannot love if they have nothing to call home, and this is not necessarily a material home...the revolutionary love that family has showed me which has freed me more times than one." The significance of community in experiencing this Truth-absorbed love emerged in Simapreet's

151

reflections, as well: "Guru Ji explains that Naam is difficult to obtain, but it is possible through Kirpa [mercy] and being in company with our Saadh Sangat [divine-oriented community]...If our efforts are rooted in love, we can uplift and support each other mutually as we strive to create a better, more just world." In the end, although the discussions around tangible embodiments of Truth did not fully resolve themselves, nor are they necessarily intended to in a Gurmat framework which recognizes Vaaheguru as the only entity who can understand this game of life, the participants' insistence that an ego-destroying love is central to Truth-seeking and Truthful meaning-making emerged consistently. Their identified space to practice this revolutionary love was with sangat (community), which we will explore next.

Sangat: "Everything Worthwhile is Done with Other People"[26]

The structure of Bunga Sikh Virsa is deeply rooted in sangat. In this first iteration, participants were specifically recruited from a camp community in which many campers start attending from age seven and continue their involvement in some capacity well into their post-undergraduate careers. Outside of Camp Sikh Virsa specifically, sangat has a large role in Sikhi. Guru Sahib teaches that sangat is the space through which liberation must be sought, for it is with and within sangat that one can remember and attain Naam:

> sa(n)t janaa mil sa(n)gatee gurmukh teerath hoi ||
> *Meeting with the community of Truth-oriented individuals is like making a pilgrimage to the door to the Guru.* (Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 597; translated by author)

Sangat provides the fuel and infrastructure necessary to train the mind in daily practice; without saadh sangat (Truth-oriented community), one is led astray by their own human desires and the transient yet enticing distractions of the world. Saadh sangat reorients one's desires towards Naam

---

[26] Quote by prison abolitionist Mariame Kaba, in conversation with Dr. Eve Ewing.

through a loving yet disciplined accountability and the expectation that one will always be seeking

out their highest potential – to be reabsorbed with Oneness.

Building off the importance given to sangat in Gurbaani, Bunga participants also

considered how Sikh historical institutions created by the Gurus also actively centered the

gathering of community in one's daily practice and recitation of Naam. SK pointed out that,

historically, the gurdwara "was not only about darbaar or divaan [where gurbaani is sung], it was

also a place to gather and to engage in physical activity as well. Investing in yourself...that's what

Sikhs were doing back then as well. They were trying to create that mental and physical strength

to be able to show up for the rest of their community and the people that they were trying to help

at the time." Ivraj conceptualized "sangat as a space to construct the reflection of the oppressed's

experiences in the context of one's relationship with the oppressed." In this way, participants

intimately linked the gathering of sangat to putting the practice of Naam into tangible action for

the sake of justice.

However, sangat was also conceptualized as a space to reflect upon differences in lived

experiences of ੴ and use that as a method to raise collective consciousness. For example, Bunga

participants recalled camp conversations around gendered disparities in labor as an example of

sangat being a space to realize shortcomings in consciousness. Although the CSV community had

engaged in several dialogues about disparate expectations for counselors based on patriarchical

roles, there had been no obvious shift in behavior. Seerat articulated the inability to resolve this

tension as one of consciousness:

> So many of us [women] are thinking so proactively that we're living the future. What I've
> noticed in a lot of my male friends, and even our counselors at camp, is that they live very
> much in the present where they're thinking about what I have to do in this moment. They
> seem to not be thinking so much about what's happening five minutes from now, or, you

know, what's happening two years from now. I'd like to see just more proactive thinking in terms of, what can I do to be available?

Jaskirat Singh, in response, highlighted another tension of expecting a behavior shift without consciousness-raising first: "I don't know what the solution is exactly. Cause how do you fix something that you're unaware of? Because *now* that my brain is like, okay, how is work a form of patriarchal oppression? Now I'm starting to think like, oh, what else is a form of oppression that I'm not aware of?" As the group meditated on this, harnoor singh offered a notion of sangat as an entity that shifts one's personal responsibility and path of Sikhi beyond themselves:

> In gurbaani, it's this idea of, if you yourself are reciting Naam, that's fine, but you also have to make sure others are reciting Naam, right? So, it's not that your own responsibility has been fulfilled and now your job is done. That's not the way it works. It's – so like, let's assume someone like me, I have a very small amount of awareness that I am part of the problem, and I'm contributing to the patriarchy in these ways. I have this group of boys and men around me who maybe are not at the same level that I am, even if it's a very low level. So for me, I see my responsibility as beginning those conversations in my own home. Whether that literally be my home or just be the circles that are closest to me where I see problematic behavior.

These articulations of sangat as a space for consciousness-raising emerged not solely as a way to "jap Naam" or recite and embody the qualities of Vaaheguru in an immaterial sense. Participants also immediately worked to apply what they envisioned as Gurmat-based justice to the world around them. This notion of Gurmat praxis will be expanded further in the next section, but here I want to reflect more intimately on how participants conceptualized sangat as manifesting an ethic of responsibility to work towards a collective realization of potential.

In several Bunga Sikh Virsa meetings, participants grappled with what they perceived as a core tension in the responsibilities of sangat to witness the Jot (Divine Light) in all and contemporary cancel culture that manifests in many of their social circles. As Simrnjit Seerha put succinctly, "cancel culture doesn't allow for opportunity for redemption or growth." Participants felt an irresolvable tension between the Sikh responsibility to serve each element of creation as an

154

embodiment of Vaaheguru and cancel culture as a manifestation of accountability which permanently rejects people from being recognized as such. Instead, Mehr Kaur posed, "How do we lift everyone? Not cancel the person, but be like, let's help you grow, but also be like, what you did is still very wrong. How can you show both the victim of abuse empathy and the abuser empathy? How do we hold that much nuance in our lives at the same time?" Mehr Kaur further pondered that, "if Naam is the hardest thing that we can get in this world, and the only way that we can get it is through our saadh sangat, what does it mean to be in a saadh sangat? What makes it a saadh sangat is that they love you back and it's about mutual growth and you have a stake in each other's experiences." This notion of mutual stakes seemed to take hold as a way to articulate the material ways in which sangat worked as a collective of individuals to reach further towards a Naam-centered existence, even when a person had caused harm. harnoor singh made a distinction that, in addressing harm through Gurmat, there is a

> difference between loving someone, but still knowing that you can't be in community with them and you can't actually have that authentic relationship with them yet. And that's not on you, that's on the other person because they haven't seen your full humanity. There definitely should always be a centering of, what was the harm done and how is the victim perceiving that? But I do think there's still a difference between loving someone and actually being community, cause I don't see loving someone automatically meaning that you're in community with them or that you can even be in community with them.

What harnoor singh conceptualizes as a distinction in maintaining an ethic of love versus maintaining community, Ivraj articulated as a project of consciousness-raising through autonomy: "thinking about how I can be more genuinely autonomous is awareness, which is good. But being deeply concerned with how autonomous other people can be is where love comes in. If we're all working on liberating each other in different ways, we're bound to lift each other to a state of truer autonomy." These ideas of centering autonomy alongside accountability and love became core to how Bunga participants visualized a sangat that could be prepared to take on consciousness-raising

and support all sangat members in reaching further towards Naam. In these reflections, participants developed an understanding of sangat from the role that transformative love had played across different communities to which they belong.

Mayher Kaur and Mehr Kaur conceptualized two types of love in sangat, although not distinct from one another. Mayher Kaur, in sharing her experiences around breaking out of gendered expectations of her behavior and body, as well as witnessing a friend do the same, spoke to how love transformed her fear into power to revolt:

> It was love that helped me revolt against every stereotype that was shoved down my throat growing up, and still to this day. It was our love for [my friend] that helped her revolt. The idea behind this is to highlight that the same love by the same people resides in all of us, no matter where they're placed or how we may prioritize them. Relationships based on love are unconditional and forever. Revolting rooted in love is miniscule compared to love itself.

For Mayher Kaur, whose creative reflection is to the right, ego-destructive love is one that centers sangat and the realization of each sangat member's full potential as a source of Divine light. This type of love has the capacity of revolution. Mehr Kaur also describes the role that a truly transformative love has when considering social transformation of the self and community: "What is the role of Love (capital L) in activism? This type of love is not fickle; it goes deeper than what the object of your love can do for you. It has to do with seeing the jot in others. I think this
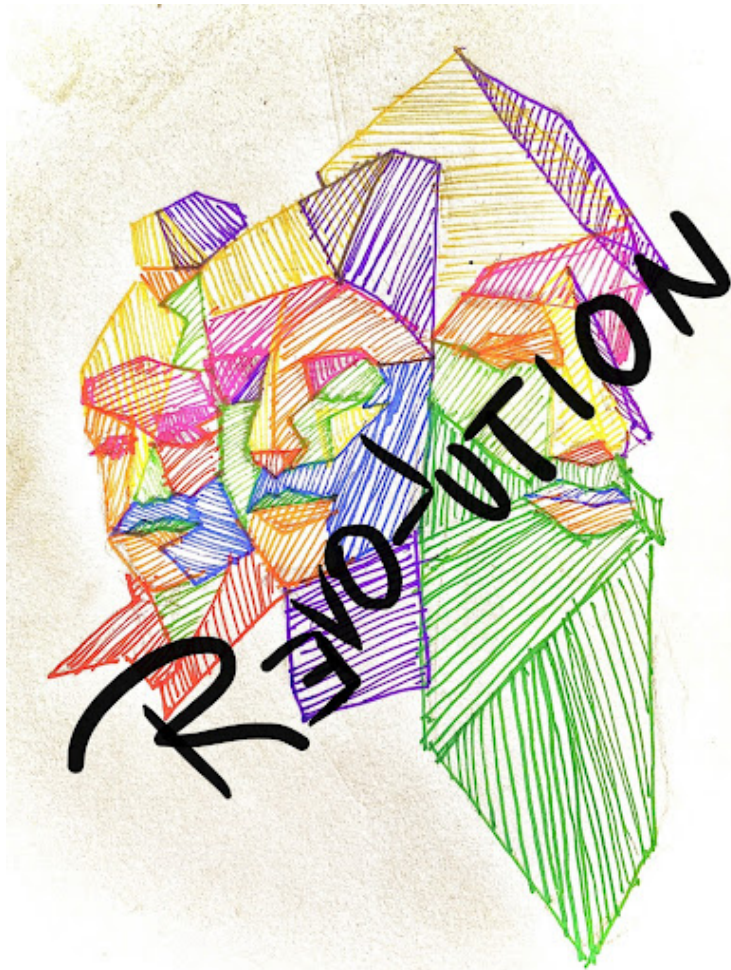

Figure 6.2 – Creative reflection from Mayher Kaur, Bunga 2020 participant.

type of love exists in saadh sangat." This ethic of love continued to maintain salience throughout each element of Sikh liberation praxis that participants imagined. Ego-destructive love was the pathway to envision and embody Truth-seeking, and practicing this love in sangat allowed one to imagine their liberation from the social expectations that had been thrust upon them in community spaces not centered on this same ethic of love. Still, while participants had imagined how to transform themselves and the community they chose to maintain, the larger reckoning with the world and all its illusions remained.

157

Miri-Piri Praxis as an Ethic of Sovereign Love

> "Maybe the distance between just saying what I did personally and saying
> I cannot confront every system is, in the moments where that system is
> placed in front of me, what do I do with it?"

In reflecting on a well-told story of Bhagat Puran Singh Ji, a Sikh Punjabi environmentalist in

Amritsar in the 1900s, who was often mocked for cleaning up every piece of trash he came across,

harnoor singh addressed the group's anxieties around how to manifest an ego-destructive political

praxis in the world, particularly through an engagement with long-standing, oppressive

institutions. As Bunga participants worked towards manifesting their theorizing around Gurmat-

based liberation into a tangible framework, the Sikh praxis of Miri-Piri was brought into

conversation repeatedly as a guiding "compass" for one's political and spiritual ethic. Miri-Piri

was coined by the sixth Guru Hargobind Sahib, who declared upon receiving the guru-ship that

Sikhs must live in the world through a perfect balance of a commitment to worldly and spiritual

justice. This was represented physically by his choice to carry two long swords, rather than the

previously-common one sword practice. Bunga participants, in conceptualizing how Gurmat

liberation praxis would manifest in the real world, used Miri-Piri as a measuring stick to determine

along which lines they should shift their thinking. SK shared,

> Rather than using patriotism and nationalism as a moral compass, I need to look towards
> Sikh history and our Guru's teachings to achieve balance of Miri-Piri and participate
> politically in a way that aligns with my Sikhi. Especially this election year, I have wondered
> how I can participate, or create my political stance outside of just being a democrat or
> republican. If state-sanctioned violence occurs, then is there any point to participating in
> state politics? At the same time, as Sikhs we abide by Miri-Piri, and we cannot remove
> ourselves from worldly affairs. We have a duty to participate and make a difference, with
> our Guru's teachings guiding our decisions. Rather than subscribing to a bipartisan system
> which puts us in political boxes, we could reimagine what political movements and policies
> we support based on how they align with the values of the Panth. Our loyalty is to our
> Guru. So then the dilemma becomes how can we be political within the nations we live in
> without compromising on our values of equality, sovereignty, and justice? How can we
> participate in politics through a Sikh lens? One possibility would be to participate in social
> movements, mutual aid networks, and grassroots organizations to create change in our

communities, while also putting pressure on governments and institutions to listen to the voice of the people.

SK's re-imagining of politics through a lens of Gurmat shifts the obligation from upholding state structures and legal order to the sovereignty and full realization of people's humanity. As Seerat phrased it, "we need a love ethic to disrupt our current conceptions of relationality rather than a love of allegiance." This love ethic is one that participants continued to ponder as a way to translate their commitment to liberation through ego-destructive love into a political praxis in their daily realities.

In conceptualizing tangible frameworks for a Miri-Piri praxis, participants focused on three components: (1) Vaaheguru as the source of resistance, (2) manifesting an ego-destructive framework for action, and (3) being led by a logic of ethics rather than one of legality. In the first component, pulling from Patricia Hill Collins' idea that "power as energy can be fostered by creative acts of resistance" (1990:223), SK shares, "when a community is created, they obviously get more power. But, I think of it as more of a transformation of energy rather than just creating it. That's how I see Vaaheguru manifesting in this – as energy transforming into a resistive energy. That can be as a collective and also a combination of a collective and internal energy." Imagining Vaaheguru as a transformative energy source means that, not only are individuals transformed in their presence in this world, but structures and institutional relationships are also transformed through an understanding of each individual's inherent worth. Ravjot offered unique insight on how understanding ੧ੳ transforms ideologies around wealth redistribution:

> I remember learning that the general stance a society takes on redistribution depends largely on its fundamental belief of how the money was acquired. For example, when people believe that those who work hard will earn the rewards they deserve, society usually favors lower redistribution policies. However, when people believe that both hard work and outside factors (e.g. luck, corruption, higher power AKA Vaaheguru) determine wealth, society favors higher redistribution policies. Since the Sikhi perspective falls more

159

in line with the latter, it makes sense to me why we as a society generally lean towards Dasvandh being used as wealth redistribution.

Dasvandh, the Sikh practice of redistributing at least 10% of one's wealth, was remarked upon by other participants as well, as a way to conceptualize how worth in Sikhi was rooted in one's embodiment of Vaaheguru. As Mehr Kaur phrased it,

> 1) a person's worth is not determined by their economic output. All people are deserving of basic needs and liberties. Full stop. And 2) "Profit" is about more than capital return on capital investment. Profit is measured in something more than currency, like good contributed to the world.

Thus, dasvandh became a key way to measure tangible practice of Truth-seeking and practicing Miri-Piri in the world. While Piri (spiritual praxis) could guide individuals to understand the inherent and equal value of all of creation, Miri (worldly praxis) allowed them to transform current practices to better represent ੴ. This double-sworded power of justice meant a constant reassessment of whether both one's ideology and actions were lining up with the energetic forces of Vaaheguru.

In the second component, participants returned again to the idea of ego-destruction as central to a Sikh's journey in the world. However, ego-destruction also became a measuring stick for whether one was responding to the world through a self-serving framework or one that was truly in line with Gurmat. Given the parallel events of the summer 2020 uprisings, participant conversations often returned to police brutality and what a Sikh stance should be on policing in general. At one point, Simrnjit Seerha offered the following reflection on policing and Sikhi:

> We are regulating people. We're not solving their problems. There's a distinct difference in what Ivraj was saying when he was like, I'm witnessing injustice. With that, I'm thinking about how I can help this person versus a literal police officer being like, I need to police this person....we need to be more compassionate and holistic thinking. I think that's where Miri Piri comes in, where you're doing a holistic thinking of looking at this.

Envisioning Miri-Piri as a holistic practice meant no longer understanding an individual's experience of the Truth, Vaaheguru, or ੴ as occurring within a vacuum, but as representative of the structural and institutional relations that had been formed to create duality and the illusion of separation in the world. While noting the false reality of this duality was key, it had to occur simultaneously alongside a realization of the falsehood of the ego. Situating the outcome of a political situation or battle within the context of one's individuality would also not lead to fruitful outcomes rooted in Truth-seeking. As Ivraj reflected,

> In what ways is my own ego getting in the way of my ability to respond in the clearest manner? Guru Gobind Singh Ji has been described as having his sword *come* to the throat of his enemy, as opposed to him actually attacking his enemy. And I remember thinking a lot about how, wow, you're so abstracted away from the situation. How can I have that same level of clarity, that same level of detachment, in how I'm currently acting?

In this conceptualization, although unspoken, Miri-Piri becomes central to Gurmat political praxis. If one is acting through a detachment from self and ego, they must be guided by another more rooted compass of action. Miri-Piri reorients desires of political action towards Oneness and a realization of Truth through embodied thought and action.

Finally, given participants were most concerned with establishing a way to enact Gurmat justice *given* limitations of institutional and structural frameworks of action in the US, a key component of a Miri-Piri praxis dealt with how to use Sikh history and discipline to guide an ethic of engagement with the state. At one point, Ivraj considers, "I don't seem to recall a time where a Guru has said, 'Oh, apologies, I'm in your Kingdom, therefore I'm going to respect your oppressive law!' Instead, we routinely see the Gurus dissenting, even if it means becoming an enemy of the state." Mehr Kaur also thinks about how Sikh practices of weapon carrying resist state legality to offer a new mode of sovereign being: "Tilly (1985) also explains that the Government has a monopoly on violence within the state...I think the idea of the Kirpan as a Kakar comes from

notions of personhood as individual sovereignty." In these instances, Bunga participants drew from Sikh history and embodied practice to reckon with Sikh relationality to the state, both in how it manifests now and what they could imagine as the intended origins. Sikh engagement with the state was one which did not bend or bow to a power solely for its structural existence, but one that remained ready to challenge any rejection of Truth or Oneness from anywhere.

The centering of a Miri-Piri praxis arrived most saliently through an exercise of liberation imagination in the penultimate gathering, where participants used the framework to conceptualize alternatives to policing that centered personal sovereignty. Bunga participants reimagined state structures through Sikh relationality, particularly the fully-realized amritdhari Sikh, also known as Khalsa – the pure ones. Khalsa are those who have materialized sovereignty on and through their bodies, in that their physical body and tangible actions are constantly resisting any instance of oppression, within and outside of themselves. Participants reflected in a collective exercise on reimagining policing through Miri-Piri: "Given cops administer punishment and correction after 'crime' has occurred, and given police are tools and instruments of the state and beholden to the state, what would structurally look different if you replaced police with Khalsa?" Participants reminded themselves that, in relation to police, Khalsa are beholden to only Akaal Purakh (literally, the Timeless Creator, or Vaaheguru) and are, instead, instruments of Vaaheguru (rather than the state). Participants recalled that, while in Sikh thought, shastar (weapons) are seen as instruments and manifestations of Vaaheguru, police are only granted legitimate authority by the state and thus do not hold autonomy. Instead, Khalsa does not regulate or police, nor simply offer protection; Khalsa works to realize Akaal Purakh for all living beings through physical and spiritual mercy – represented by the kirpaan. By acting on the legitimate authority of Vaaheguru, Akaal Purakh, the Timeless Creative Entity, Khalsa can manifest an eternal Truth of Oneness into

162

our reality rather than policing a community based on the limited framework of civil or human rights. For Ravjot, Miri-Piri was the key element of a Sikh liberation praxis, as shared in her final creative reflection (included below): "I chose to build my approach to love as a practice of freedom on a foundation of miri and piri. I believe the balance between spiritual power and political power beautifully encompasses the role love can play in peace and justice….Love needs to be a balance of peace and justice."

In Sum: Creative, Creations, Creator

Bunga Sikh Virsa was an exercise in creative pedagogy, liberation praxis, and youth-led/centered consciousness-raising.

Through these joint endeavors of creation, participants collectively

Figure 6.3 – Creative reflection from Ravjot, Bunga 2020 participant.

strived towards seeking the Creator and developing a better relationship with this im/material Truth beyond comprehension. While the project was grounded in making sense of the contemporary struggles of Sikh youth through various texts and epistemological orientations, the nature of Sikh meaning-making resulted in a constant orientation towards an "otherwise", a "going further" in which, as Jaskirat Singh framed it, "Until there is a generation that is free from the history of seeing people as inherently different, we will not be able to live together as one….True freedom is the embrace of Vaaheguru." Envisioning liberation as the warmth of an embrace, the light emerging

from the threshold of a door as Mehr Kaur imagined it, disrupts the notion of allegiance as the utmost type of devotion as constructed through US norms of power. In her final reflection, comparing political statements with the texts we engaged, Seerat put it as: "we need a love ethic to disrupt our current conceptions of relationality rather than a love of allegiance". Love as disruption, love as an ethic, and love as revolt were all imagined as parts of a Gurmat liberation theology. However, so long as love is central to this theology, it will always entail community and praxis; these two social and political commitments ensure that it is a pathway towards liberation that will never stop evolving towards a world that is otherwise, outside of the capacities of our current imagination.

PART THREE

Sikh-Centered Methods

THE IM/MATERIAL, THE INTIMATE, AND THE ETHNOGRAPHER:

Considering Practices of Ethnography for Racialized Religious Communities

> "My shoes off at Gurdwara, my shoes off at the airport."
> > \- Swet Shop Boys, "Shoes Off" (2016)

> "One of the constants among Sikh communities in the diaspora is the
> space of the gurudwara, which doubles as a spiritual home and a
> community center. The violation of the gurudwara space by the gunman
> Wade Michael Page and the killing of worshipers inside reflects an
> intimate and invasive form of violence. Indeed, this transgression of
> sacred space is linked to traumatic memories among diaspora Sikhs
> surrounding the 1984 attack on the Golden Temple in Amritsar."
> > \- Anneeth Kaur Hundle, "AFTER WISCONSIN" (2012:289)

Much of my desire to pursue a sociological inquiry of Sikh subjectivity in the US emerged in

reaction to the 2012 Oak Creek shooting, referenced in the epigraph from Hundle, during which

my childhood gurdwara community was attacked by Page, a founder and member of several white-

power music bands. Training in ethnographic methodology during my first year of graduate school

in 2017, I became increasingly bothered by my use, and the encouragement of my use, of

participant observation within the gurdwara setting. Although this was a different gurdwara space

altogether, similar markings of intimacy, community, and embodied practice tied the spaces

together in more ways than one. My growing, and unaddressed, discomfort led to an abrupt pause

in data collection, a quick compartmentalization of the experience(s), and a shift into "safer"

qualitative methodologies. And, yet, while I have not yet returned to ethnography as a tool for my

scholarship, the specter of my ethnographic training remains within my perceived possibilities of

a study of Sikh subjectivity within the US nation-state. In other words, I became curious about

how the training to shift my gaze, particularly as a Sikh studying sacred Sikh space, intertwined

with gunman Wade Michael Page's own "study" of the Oak Creek gurdwara prior to his execution

of the shooting. Thus, in this paper, I grapple with the implications of pursuing academic research as a balm, or at the very least a productive response, after witnessing white supremacist violence unfold in intimate community space.

Specifically, this paper examines the possibilities of ethnography to examine transient intersections of race and religion that emerge in the simultaneous making and unmaking of sacred and precarious space. I contend that ethnography, in its most expansive iterations, holds immense possibility to embody the resonances between seemingly oppositional spaces. Take, for example, the mirrored removal of shoes before entering both spiritual homes and TSA security lines that is at the center of Swet Shop Boys' 2016 song "Shoes Off"; these oppositional yet mirrored experiences of reverence and surveillance could be richly depicted through an ethnography of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu communities in the US surveillance state. Incorporating analyses of white supremacy into ethnographies of religion is increasingly vital as hate violence is both a function of grassroots white supremacy and the xenophobic rhetoric that has been crafted for racialized religious communities through the "War on Terror" (Joshi 2006; Kumar 2020; Singh 2013). The challenge remains, however, in balancing both the material implications of racialized religious space and the immaterial possibilities for which these spaces are formed.

In pursuit of a new framework to explore the aforementioned tensions, I first summarize relevant literature on surveillance, autoethnographies, and religion to create an interdisciplinary framework of how power, violence, and the belief of a world beyond them come together in ethnographies of racialized religious space. I then use data from my ethnographic training and field research to explore three possible frameworks of ethnographic inquiry – participant observation, bearing witness, and embodied conviction – as theorized through attempted ethnography in the gurdwara. Through a self-reflexive approach to ethnography in the gurdwara, I argue ethnographic

inquiry contains the possibility to develop more capacious frameworks of embodiment, faith, and practice by developing methodological approaches rooted in the embodied practices of the space being studied.

Surveillance, power, and religion

Ethnography and surveillance mirror each other in their attempts to capture the movements, behaviors, social routines, and social space that an individual or community occupies, thus lending ethnographic methodology well to the study of surveillance itself (Green and Zurawski 2015; Walby 2002). Beyond formal mechanisms of surveillance, however, surveillance strategies are also taken up by individuals as they codify and identify those who are seen as not belonging to the spaces they claim as their own, often rooted in ideologies of socially constructed identity, in order to protect the boundaries of their imagined communities (Kurwa 2019; Lowe, Stroud, and Nguyen 2017). It is therefore imperative that, when ethnographic practices are embedded within communities who are always-already experiencing surveillance by the state and its formal and informal actors, the constant possibility of re-establishing community interlocutors within the gaze of the surveillance state must be taken more seriously as an ethical implication (Ali 2016; Lincoln and Cannella 2009). Further, given the implications for "psychic maiming", or the replication of physical precarity in spiritual conceptions of self, through knowledge production on racialized religious communities haunted by the specter of their presumed suspicion and terror, researchers must be immensely conscious and cautious of the responsibility of conducting ethnography in these precarious yet sacred spaces (Mian 2021).

While one might consider a potential solution to place the gaze of ethnographic fieldwork into the hands of participants, through a collective community auto-ethnography for example, participants and researcher(s) still remain within the framework of capturing quotidian elements

of one's life for the production of knowledge (Prins 2010). In fact, some argue that there is "no possibility of ethical purity in ethnography […] when its methods seek, by and large, to emulate the common life themes of others in scholarly fashion" (Neves, Holligan, and Deuchar 2018:248). In this way, alternative productions of ethnography through *self*-surveillance do not actually address the dynamics of power, violence, and dehumanization at hand, but rather engage in a game of musical chairs of surveillance in which the ethnographer always has the last say when they return to their office to write the legible field note memo (Guhin and Wyrtzen 2013). This is significant since, for ethnography specifically, many tensions of self-surveillance emerge not solely in the theory or methods, but also in the writing process. For example, Kemi Adeyemi (2019, forthcoming) recalibrates our desire towards the ethnographic anecdote – the push for ethnographic writing to create comprehension through detail, to demonstrate a sense of feeling and experience of the revelatory event of our findings; instead, she moves toward an ethnography that captures slowness and the seemingly mundane (2021). Jason De León (2015), on the other hand, interrogates the capacity for ethnographic methodology and writing to fully articulate the witnessing of other people's experiences of structural violence and resultant trauma in a way that does not occlude the structures of violence they are experiencing, but instead captures the discomfort around displaying and documenting violence. Thus, contending with how the methods of ethnography and surveillance map onto each other, ethnographers can better consider the potential ramifications of their methods of inquiry. While not engaging in qualitative research or ethnography at all within these communities would be a false solution, a commitment to *addressing* rather than *resolving* tension in ethnography can allow ethnographers the space to practice the same self-reflexivity they desire for their respondents (Friberg 2019; White 2001).

Rather than refusal of its occurrence, then, an active embrace of the shifting dynamics of power within researcher field experiences as a productive site for knowledge production can serve as a transformative framework for epistemological formulations of power, place, and identity-formation. Autoethnographies have become a significant framework for ethnographers to evaluate and reconstruct the ways they experience power relations along the axes of race, gender, sexuality, class, citizenship and more, particularly for those whose positionalities run directly counter to the status assumed by and for most tenured faculty (Behl 2017; Smith-Tran 2020). Engaging with autoethnography as a feminist praxis allows the researcher to legitimate long-term productions of identity and self that are experienced, and perhaps articulated more precisely, in the process of doing ethnographic work (Crawley 2012). "Invading ethnography" is one such reflexive framework which identifies studying hierarchies of belonging that are often solidified through the ethnographer's "invasion" of the social setting of research (Adjepong 2019). By allowing space for the practice of autoethnography *within* ethnography, some researchers have moved beyond the individual autoethnography into the collective, understanding how a joint praxis of self-reflexivity can give even more insight into the ways in which standardized social categories as axes of quantitative and qualitative research flatten the dynamic nature of social reality (Spieldenner and Eguchi 2019; Wężniejewska et al. 2019). Allowing for this tension and nuance through data collection, analysis, and writing creates entirely new possibilities for research, understanding institutional hierarchies, and our social world (Löwenheim 2010; Moors 2017; Tomaselli 2001). Across these formulations, the physical presence of the ethnographer in the field becomes a salient embodied site through which multidirectional confluences of power can be examined.

Considering embodiment as a paradigm for autoethnographic inquiry produces a new phenomenological location from which researchers can conceptualize the(ir) body as a productive

site of analysis and theorizing (Csordas 1990). Particularly, the ethnographer who is able to mobilize embodiment as a framework for epistemic multiplicity "to attend to the differences between the embodiment one begins with, and the one generated by acquiring the skills and competencies of others" in the field site (Pitts-Taylor 2015:23). Thinking through taught, practiced, and internalized movements of ethnography allow the researcher to bridge the perceived gap between the construction of ethnographer, ethnographic site, and method. From a Sikh standpoint, the body acts as a temporary holder for the spirit, which is present in the world for the purpose of realizing Oneness through constant praxis (kehal 2020). Like Black liberation theology, this is inspired by the remembrance of historical embodiments of freedom and the reminder through divine poetry that each body is equally capable of manifesting Oneness through discipline, action, and reflection (Cone 2000). For the gurdwara specifically, autoethnography is particularly salient as it replicates Sikh "ancestral forms of sense-making" by centering a deliberation of embodied wisdom through imagined theoretical space and the grounded production of knowledge (Kaur-Bring 2020:11). Therefore, in racialized religious communities and their constructed community spaces, embodiment is a mechanism to both study limitations placed upon the body and practices of the body that aspire beyond worldly limitations.

Applying these literatures to ethnographies of religion, a key site of tension is the use of the term religion itself, historically presumed as a static category of inquiry. This formulation of religion has been thoroughly critiqued by many scholars, particularly the use of religion as an analytically identifiable, discursive framework that exists separately from notions of power, temporality, and location (Asad 1993; Carrasco Miró 2020; Geertz 1966; Saliba 1974). Jeff Guhin's (2014) theorizing on religion as *site* rather than *category* provides a useful starting point to consider the ways ethnographers can use religion as a social location through which theories of

social life can be both generated and tested. Guhin posits religious concepts could be more widely applicable if not confined to the category of religion; for example, prayer could serve as a framework through which the study of human and nonhuman interaction could be empirically studied. Moving past an essentialized understanding of "what religion is [to spend] more time talking about what religious people do", ethnographers can understand the study of religion as a study of the material and immaterial that is both informed by one's social world and a concerted method to make meaning of it (Guhin 2014:591).

A well-cited example of this is Saba Mahmood's ethnography on the women's piety movement in Cairo, which embraces self-reflexivity in ethnographies of religion quite openly. Mahmood urges:

> my readers and myself—embark upon an inquiry in which we do not assume that the political positions we uphold will necessarily be vindicated, or provide the ground for our theoretical analysis, but instead hold open the possibility that we may come to ask of politics a whole series of questions that seemed settled when we first embarked upon the inquiry. (2004:39)

Mahmood grapples with turning "the critical gaze upon ourselves" and being "remade through an encounter with the other" (2004:37). In doing so, she entertains Asad's thesis that religion in its discursive and disciplinary forms is very much a project of power – both in our own political conceptualizations of religion, agency, freedom, and equality and in how these preconceptions determine our approach towards constructing alternative formulations of said categories (1993). However, Mahmood also resists theorizing power as a force which moves in a singular direction; while her writing "is motivated by the desire to challenge the adequacy of our inherited analytical tools in understanding political challenges that we currently face in the world", she draws upon Abu-Lughod (1990) to understand power as shaping the field of social relations, thus grounding meaning-making around social relations within their particular relational context (S. Mahmood

1996:507). Considering these formative scholars' works, rather than continue to elide the tensions between seemingly oppositional forces of power in social relations, what would it entail to enact an ethnography of religion that contends even with the confines of its formulation? Beginning the theoretical foundation, instead, from localized and particular "religious" or spiritual frameworks perhaps offers a more holistic understanding of how visible and nonvisible manifestations of "belief" guide everyday actions and behaviors, especially the ways in which they are limited by fields of power. Although belief, too, must be contended with as emerging out of Protestant ideologies and being haunted by Anglo-Christian language frameworks, it still captures a great deal of what we mean when we hope to witness how individuals position themselves in relation to what is tangible and intangible in the world (Blankholm 2020; Derrida 2002).

For Sikhi, then, and many other South Asian-based philosophies, the interaction of material and immaterial emerges through the concept of dharam, most easily defined as a morally driven discipline. That is, not simply beliefs or actions, but a consistent and repeated *set* of actions, both meaningful and mundane, guided by a moral conviction that is simultaneously invested in material justice and immaterial righteousness (Miri-Piri). For Sikhs, the crucial element of this is also the movement towards a state of constant consciousness of *how* one is engaging with this morality and discipline, ensuring that one's actions do not fall into ritualism nor one's belief into dogma. For Sikhs, by remaining continuously attached to and conscious of Gurmat[27], one remains in a constant state of learning and developing their consciousness from engagement with the material world around them (grist jeevan). On its face, this reads in line with the Aristotelian notion of habitus upon which Mahmood draws: "an acquired excellence at either a moral or a practical craft, learned through repeated practice until that practice leaves a permanent mark on the character" and thus

---

[27] Eternal wisdom of Shabad Guru, manifested through transcendent poetry, writing, and reflections of Sikh Gurus and other mystics to reflect the universality of Oneness.

173

developing moral virtues through outward and inward coordination (2004:136). Yet, returning to Asad's argument of the universalized concept of religion itself reflecting a historically specific construction of discursive power requires us to consider a more specific application of Mahmood's, or Aristotle's, construction of habitus and Sikh dharam (Asad 1993:28–29). In brief, while Mahmood and Aristotle conceptualize embodied practices of belief as an acquired excellence, perhaps more significant is that the Sikh practitioner is not aiming for excellence – a quality generally denoted through increased worldly status –, but rather a full absorption into divine love. Where material renderings of the immaterial translate repeated practice into increased quality, Sikhi manifests dharam through darshan, the witnessing of Oneness through the ultimately attained consciousness.

Methods & setting

Embracing these contributions to ethnographic theory, method, and writing, I consider how physical practices of ethnographic inquiry emerge through theoretical foreclosures that enact themselves in movement through religious space, as well as the disruption and invasion of space that occurs through this inquiry. My data draws from considering the site of the gurdwara as intimate, sacred, and already-invaded space alongside my own attempts at participant observation in this community space of gathering, learning, and remembrance of Vaaheguru (Sikh name for ultimate Creator and teacher of all creation). In this analysis, I return to my own field notes and use frameworks of participant observation and bearing witness to consider the resonances between reverence and surveillance that emerge in the space constructed as both racialized and religious. In doing so, I reckon with what is reimagined, transformed, and remains uncertain through an ethnographic form that takes up the shifting forms of materiality, surveillance, precarity, embodiment, religion, and belief. Finally, I utilize the embodied practices of Sikhi within the

gurdwara to theorize and offer possibilities for an ethnography of embodied conviction that illustrates the immaterial and more readily considers a theory of methods grounded in the surveilled, racialized, religious space.

FIELD NOTES: REVERENCE AND SURVEILLANCE

Participant Observation

10/9/17 Lecture:[28]
- *first days are most important because you won't ever capture as much detail*
10/16/17 Lecture:
- *there's a narrative of self that can be broken by ethnography*
- *whatever you study, your goal is to unravel the assumed narrative*

As a first-year graduate student, I enrolled in a 20-week ethnographic methods course which would thoroughly train me in the method through a review of literature, classroom lectures and discussions, and practice in the field. My training primarily focused on participant observation – engaging in behaviors of the site while also notating my surroundings, both at a level deemed appropriate by site members and my reproduction of their normative behavior. My classmates and I were trained to take on the least disruptive note-taking practices to our research environment, from typing on our phone to handwriting to memorizing what we could. Classroom conversations homed in on a grounded theory approach, in which we would familiarize ourselves with the theory enough to be able to discover a "puzzle" within the field site. Then, through our ethnographic observations, we could offer a contribution to the literature and perhaps offer the research subjects something about their lives they did not already know. Thus, compensation was usually restricted to visibility via scholarship or, in the rare case where graduate students received additional research funds, monetary. Each student was required to come up with a project for the duration of the course, which for many resulted in data for the mandatory year two thesis or the eventual

---

[28] These and subsequent lecture notes have been copied verbatim from my handwritten class notes during UCLA Sociology's ethnography methods sequence from October 2017 through March 2018.

dissertation project. Fully confident that my doctoral research would engage with processes of identity-formation amidst precarity for the US Sikh diaspora, I thought, *where better to practice ethnography than in the gurdwara?* As a newcomer to Los Angeles, it was my main site of interaction with the local community, and my training did not move beyond the traditional considerations of insider-outsider bias or benefit, so I had no warning of the psychological wage that "studying" my community from the "inside" would initiate.

Intimacy immediately became a perceived tension. In the guide-quote, Hundle posits the intimacy of violence that takes place within spiritual and community spaces (2012:289). I, too, experienced intimacy as a problem, a violation, as I was called into homes for family meals, invited to children's birthday parties, and asked to take part in significant community dialogues and events within weeks of joining the sangat (community). Although we were told on the first day of class to make sure we were transparent about our intentions in the research site, particularly as a form of reciprocal trust, notions of transparency did not map onto a community setting in which all are welcomed unquestionably and positive representation is often lacking. These two mentalities combined became an unintended cover for my ethnographic inquiry, as the community soon forgot that I was both Harleen Kaur the researcher and community member – or perhaps they never fully understood what this could mean to begin with, and, most likely, neither had I. Participant observation felt questionable at best and intrusive at worst, as conversations from "public" spaces in the gurdwara were carried over into "semi-private" social conversations at a café or even more "private" discussions over family dinners. The boundaries of the field blurred as I went along with my participants, and my ability to demarcate an observable field blurred alongside them. Intimacy and privacy became relative concepts to emulate; as my ethnographic training focused on becoming a trusted member of the site to avoid altering the nature of the site for inquiry, I began

to wonder – what happens when I am granted too much trust? What would even classify "too much trust" if, ultimately, I am the one conducting the fieldwork, collecting the field notes, and determining the final writing of my findings? Can I still conduct ethnography when I am "too" inside?

Intimacy constructed as an affective register to embody and capture through one's ethnographic positionality raises questions about the narrative inquiry to which the method is committed. The public and private as frameworks of surveillance, and legacies of settler-colonialism, have been considered as means to rethink our conceptualization of governance, legality, and autonomy (Glenn 2015; Goldstein 2008; Richards 2012; Seawright 2014). As an undergraduate intern at a New York City advocacy organization in 2013, I vividly recall being present for the announcement of a multi-plaintiff lawsuit against the NYPD, whose counterterrorism surveillance program had planted informants claiming to be recent converts in need of guidance within city mosques and Muslim student organizations. An imam shared the protective tactics they had taken on, taping their own sermons in case the NYPD used anything out of context, while a college student who had been made to believe that the NYPD informant trained to follow him was his new best friend shared how his trust in the community had been forever broken. What does it mean to break or unravel an assumed narrative of self that does not place one's invasion of the field site, of its preexisting intimate encounter, at the forefront? How authentic can an ethnography be that does not automatically assume their understanding of the "field" is ultimately depicted through their entry into it?[29] What does the continuous chasing and attempts to embody a feigned intimacy, trust, and authentic experience require of the

---

[29] As Octavia Butler tells us, "All that you touch/You Change. All that you Change/Changes You" (1993:3).

ethnographer? With hopes of something more capacious, beyond the imagined binary of participant observation, I started to ponder alternative approaches to ethnography.

Bearing Witness

<u>Nov. 20th Lecture</u>
- *as ethnographers, we are joining an existing conversation + need to consider how we will participate in that convo*

<u>Nov 27th</u>
- *what are the "problems" @ the site? (either defined by the site or by you)*
- *in what diff. ways do people use the site?*

A gurdwara manifests through the centering of Guru Granth Sahib Ji (compilation of divine poetry) in its physical space alongside the aspirational centering of Guru Sahib in the spirit and mind of the gathered saadh sangat (saintly community) through repeated actions of reverence and remembrance. As these practices which embody Gurmat (Guru-driven wisdom) are consciously intertwined in a Gursikh's day, they also manifest similar ontologies across gurdwara space and time. A Sikh, or anyone familiar with Sikh practices, could enter a gurdwara program at any time and join the sangat in their collective participation in remembrance of Vaaheguru. The resonance across gurdwara space is furthered by Sikh ideologies of openness to all and the desire to constantly "jap naam" or remember the Creator, mediating on Oneness through action and thought. More simply, the practices within the gurdwara are on a forever loop, open for anyone to join at any time, repeated across time and space for eternity. As a young Sikh woman, visibly identifiable through my dastaar, these were experiences that manifested quite tangibly whenever I entered a gurdwara space to which *I felt* a stranger – this phrased intentionally because neither the gurdwara or sangat ever saw me as such. A component of Gurmat is witnessing and embracing Vaaheguru in all creation, so my wellbeing and acceptance in the space thus became a part of Sikh practice for the local sangat. The strange was immediately rendered familiar through repeated practices, constructions of space, and greetings between sangat members.

In reflecting upon my experiences of ethnographic training and practice, I began to consider how I was forced to alter this pre-existing relation to the gurdwara to conduct observations and interactions as an ethnographer. Although my gurdwara of study was physically distant from the Oak Creek gurdwara, the shooting occurred as a clear marker of transition between my existence solely as a community member into an ethnographer, meaning my journey towards academic research as a response to white supremacist violence was conscious. The understanding of the gurdwara as a space already-invaded set up for the possibility to become a space invader myself. The capturing of life that happened through physical violence then turned into my own attempts to capture and document Sikh life through intellectual violence, in which both my own positionality and community members' were evacuated from our relations to each other. Vancouver-based Sikh Punjabi artist Simranpreet Anand marks these shifts through her illustration of my theorizing [Figure 7.1], particularly in the bottom right tracking of my movement through the darbar hall, where Sikhs come to meet with Guru Sahib. My interactions with the looping time of the gurdwara and the open space became disjointed and truncated as I shifted from sangat member to ethnographer. I began to witness gurdwara space as a field site, noting practices to be notated rather than embodied and experienced. The space of the gurdwara was no longer a home but a laboratory for studying problems of the material rather than transcending into the immaterial.

I do not intend to argue that those who are not born into Sikhi or the Sikh community are not able to engage in an authentic manner, or that those who are immediately have the capacity to

Figure 7.1 - Gurdwara space-time as illustrated by Simranpreet Anand.

do so. Instead, I want to question whether there are possibilities of knowledge production that are

foreclosed through the process of pursuing training and indoctrination *prior to* observation and engagement. What would happen if observation and engagement came before ethnography? Or if they all occurred alongside each other and not training in the classroom and ethnography in the field (as I have attempted to disrupt using my class notes)? Perhaps more relevant, when do we consider our ethnographic training to begin? I often reflected with a classmate that many of our observational skills were already honed from a lifetime of being overpoliced due to racialized, sexualized, and gendered identities. What are the informal types of training we are considering as useful, whether it is through heightened awareness from precarious experiences or even already being engaged with the community with whom we want to jointly pursue a formal research inquiry?

Given that, I wonder further what types of ethnographic inquiry could I have produced if I sought out my Sikh community members as my educators in ethnographic inquiry, as opposed to simply participants or subjects of observation? Most trained ethnographers would agree they are joining an existing conversation, but the question remains – which dialogues and narratives are considered part of that conversation and where does the ethnographer consider themselves a conversation participant (11/20 class note) rather than a lecturer or documentarian (11/27 class note - how will you define the site)? What would emerge if the ethnographer simply observed, humbled, in waiting to be trained and asked to produce something by the community instead? What kind of ethnography could we imagine then?

Embodied Conviction

Khalsa Care Foundation (1/14/18)
Pacoima, CA
January 14, 2018, 6:55 AM

I almost miss the gurdwara because I'm coming from La Cañada instead of Palms, so the gurdwara is on my left instead of on the right [side of the road] as usual. I notice at the last

moment and quickly merge across and into the turn lane, pulling into the parking lot. It's emptier than usual, which makes sense since I normally come around 7:30[AM]. I drive further into the parking lot to try and get a shady spot, even though I know by the time I leave, my car will be sweltering as it always is. Taking a moment to stretch, I get out of my car and grab my chunni. I debate if I want to take my shawl, but I know it's supposed to be another hot day, so I leave it for now. I walk up to the gurdwara entrance and notice the shoe rack has been moved from where it usually is (this is my first time back since before winter break), but there are a few shoes there, so I just take mine off anyway. I turn around and see the sunrise is making a nice purple and blue background behind the nishaan sahib.

I walk inside the darbar hall at this point, but it's completely empty. I pause at the entryway to text B.S., "So what do I do if no one is here?" He immediately responds, "Start!" I laugh to myself as I shouldn't have expected anything else from him. I continue walking in to matha tek and, as I'm getting up, I see a young couple coming in behind me who I haven't seen before. They start to lay down the sheet, so I get to work bringing over the tabla and vaajaa while others set up the mic system. Once we're done, the young man greets me and asks if we should get started; I say yes. His wife sits down and starts to play a few keys on the vaajaa. She opens up the Amrit Keertan to Asa Ki Vaar and begins singing – "ੴ (IkOnkaar)"

In Sikhi, the quotidian is not mundane but yet another chance to connect with Vaaheguru – the creative force that resides in and is the connective tissue of all. When I stumble upon these field notes again, especially in pandemic when it has been over a year since attending gurdwara with the full sangat present, they feel like a familiar friend calling me back to what is most apparent in the unseen, the immaterial, the embodied. I can feel the sensations that are left out of the field notes – the energy of mind and body that crackles upon seeing the Nishaan Sahib wave across the sky, the birds chirping in the few silent breaths before the fingers hit the keys of the vaajaa, and the voice that yearningly and hopefully utters ੴ – One creative and pervasive Force – into the vast morning.

In thinking about the quotidian, Sikhi, and ethnographic inquiry, I recall Cynthia Mahmood's *Fighting for Faith and Nation*, a monograph that has been lauded in Sikh communities as the "right" way to study us. Mahmood voices her research commitment as an exploration of

"what are people capable of when the everyday is disrupted" (1996:2) through the humanity of Sikh militants in the decades after the 1984 Sikh genocide. She attempts to balance the space between what one chooses to make visible about their entry into community and the process of building those relationships through a candid reflection on her prior academic work and connections bringing her to the Sikh community for this timely project. Thus, the choice to engage with Sikhs as a community experiencing the social forces of the world from their unique position in history appears to be a productive site for inquiry. Mahmood's approach to a topic that has been written and rewritten is unique, as she makes clear her own positionalities in state and gendered violence broadly, as well as their intersection with the violences that Sikhs have and are experiencing. Most unique is her ability to hand the agency of storytelling and ethnographic inquiry back to her community interlocutors. Mahmood closes the book with her own nightmares of violence that continue, now tinged with violence from Punjab, while she acknowledges her ability to leave the violence behind in her subconscious. Leaving a paragraph break, she returns to the voice of Balraj, one of her participants, who says he does not like the ending for it does not account for hope: "We might be fighting, we might be suffering [but] we have God's love and we are filled with hope," he says. Mahmood responds, "I will end on that note" and closes the text (1996:275).

Jan 29th
- *how is your site driven by past, present, + future?*

February 12th
- *cultures + communities tell a story about themselves → are you going to go w/ that story or against it?*

The past, present, and future is embodied within and on the walls of gurdwaras (T. Kaur 2021). The Oak Creek gurdwara, similar to Darbar Sahib after the 1984 massacre, chose to memorialize a bullet hole in the doorway to the Darbar, a main hall where most programming takes

place. The walls of most gurdwaras maintain the collective memory of Sikh shaheeds, or sociopolitical martyrs who sacrificed themselves for justice throughout Sikh history, by lining the walls with paintings of these martyrs depicted in their moment of sacrifice (H. Kaur 2021). This collective memory is then vocalized through the daily ardaas in which the entire sangat stands before Guru Granth Sahib Ji and calls upon Sikh historical lineage of sacrifice, service, and devotion as a process of simultaneous remembrance, reverence, and hope to embody the same manifestations of self and collective. In this context, going "with" or "against" community narrative is not so simple, and, in the first place, tends towards a colonial understanding of objectivity that has made up existing academic literature on colonized communities since the early 1800s (Mudimbe 1988). Within Sikh Studies, too, contention around legitimacy of shared community knowledge and oral histories has a long history itself (Grewal 2017; McLeod 1980; Siṅgha 2004). What, then, would it mean to "go against" a community narrative that is being told and retold in every embodied element of a community's existence? Rather than the ethnographer entering as either an oppositional force or one to be incorporated discreetly into the fold, perhaps more fruitful would be approaching the "field" as a quiet student to understand how community interlocutors navigate and negotiate the same social forces in which the ethnographer is equally intertwined, although perhaps more beneficially so. These binary approaches to what it means to be an ethical or truthful ethnographer manifest in countless ways beyond the scope of this paper (e.g., what is the field versus not), but considering these false binaries and the ways they are replicated in like-minded or counter narratives of research will only further strengthen the capaciousness of ethnographic inquiry.

As I reconsider my relationship to ethnography as a method and site of inquiry, I instead turn towards Sikh embodiments of learning, observation, and engagement to imagine how I might

engage in qualitative research next. While some elements of these practices might mimic traditional ethnographic forms, I posit that without contending with pre-existing theoretical frameworks alongside methodological practices, both those from training and the field, ethnographies of racialized religious spaces will fall short in their conceptualization of these embodied experiences. These frameworks, in some way or another, attempt to capture Sikh dharam through praxis; in other words, they are working with reflection and action, theory and method, all at once:

> *Shoes off:* A commitment to leaving external debris and materials at the door; not forcibly bringing the "outside" into my methods. This extends a step beyond grounded theory ethnography in its commitment to also be more conscious about the preconceived lenses and notions with which researchers enter communities. Although these mindsets cannot be erased completely, and pretending they are would be equivalent to ignoring researcher positionality, "shoes off" is a way to recommit to prioritizing the community's theorizations about self and relationality rather than creating a grounded theory that is focused on legibility in the academic literature or canon. In this formulation, removing shoes is not a forced violation of embodied self, as with surveillance, but a humble acceptance of and respect towards what is required to be *in* community rather than be *inside* a community.

> *Matha tek:* Giving up any self-perceived sense of knowledge and committing myself to a research ethic that is rooted in radical humanity and Oneness. After committing to a "shoes off" methodology, a mentality of "matha tek" – or giving oneself up to the process of relearning their understanding of the world – can shift power dynamics of invasive ethnography back towards the community, reminding the ethnographer to learn from community first, offering their own skills, resources, and platform to amplify community ways of knowing and being.

> *Sangat:* Presence of mind and body in sanctity of community as the foremost site of interaction, inquiry, and wisdom. A way to ensure that the particularities of experience are not erased while committing to radical Oneness.

> *Guru Panth and Guru Granth:* While Sikhs within the community will have heterogeneous experiences of our social world dependent upon their own identities and material circumstances, Sikh frameworks of being place utmost significance upon Guru Panth – the collective of Sikhs who live embodying Gurmat. Since 1699, Guru Panth holds similar power to Guru Granth, the embodiment of divine poetry within a singular granth or book. Thus, ethnographic inquiry in Sikh spaces requires a concomitant understanding of collective and singular embodiments of lived reality. The immaterial is realized by an

individual but only through the collective. Ethnographic methods would be humbled through a similar approach (e.g., citation practice, epistemic orientations).

I propose the possibilities of knowledge production that can emerge from these methods are infinite, distinct, and never-ending, as they are working towards truly underlying the particular creativity, brilliance, and insight within modes of embodiment and the im/material that each community negotiates in their own way(s). So long as ethnography sticks too close to its foundation – in its etymology, a process to graph distinct races and groups, or in its method, to observe and capture through writing the distinct experiences of social forces –, it will fall short of the rich and expansive theories it can offer.

Material Consequences of the Immaterial

Through a self-reflexive engagement with my experiences of ethnographic training and fieldwork, I have highlighted current limitations of ethnography for racialized religious communities. In particular, I am concerned with the method's tendency to disaggregate practices of faith and material consequences of the body doing that practice, thus ignoring how these subjectivities merge to create experiences of violence, safety, and political decision-making for racialized bodies within religious communities. One such case to consider is Sikh precarity, as in entering the space of the gurdwara, embodied experiences of state violence and divine liberation intertwine – removing shoes in preparation for the inevitable experience of state surveillance before one's flight or in advance of engagement in meditation with community. While I have explored these questions explicitly through the analysis of ethnography within Sikh communities, I want to pose a theory of researching racialized religious communities through a lens of faith in a time of precarity. Understanding religious embodiment through the experience of precarity allows researchers to see how even religious spaces can embody precarity themselves; for example, gurdwaras in diasporic urban centers have been known to take on the physical elements of the locale rather than mirroring

186

historical gurdwara structures, thus symbolizing to the community how to embody a more muted embodiment of faith (Gallo 2012; T. Kaur 2021). By understanding how "the Sikh self," and other racialized religious bodies, "becomes constituted by a transformed subjectivity that responds in multiple ways to pervasive and sudden violence" (Hundle 2012:289), researchers can contextualize the practice of faith, embodied or not, within the context of threat and movement, peace and disruption, as a process of searching for power beyond a world that is constantly removing it.

Religions that practice visible personhood might seem to create easier pathways for the ethnographer to embody that experience beyond simply attending services and joining community functions, but the question of conviction remains as an immaterial factor in study. While researchers can embody the material facets of their interlocutors' experiences, they cannot capture the conviction and belief that drives them towards this embodiment in the first place (Carrasco Miró 2020; Parvez 2017). Thus, even in depicting the material consequences of their immaterial beliefs, researchers are unable to truly join the material and immaterial, continuing to engage in a secular-religious binary of understanding. For those that do attempt this decolonial knowledge production, the experience of precarity for racialized religious groups cannot be separated; instead, it must be studied within the context of their economic and geographic particularities (Shams 2019). Viewing nation-state ideas of liberalism and even equality as rooted in a Judeo-Christian heritage grants us a clearer framework to better understand how faiths marked as illiberal are then excluded from models of equality (Asad 2018).

Asad suggests that, in order to create an understanding of Islam rooted in conviction, rather than one driven by terror, researchers and academics must approach the project of translation "with the reverential attitude on the part of the believer toward the Creator, which is an act that combines

feeling and act through public visibility and private thought" (Solis 2020:2). To disrupt the binary of public and private, I have pursued "an act that combines feeling and act through" the im/material, the embodied, the routine discipline of dharam – repetitive and self-reflexive thought and action in pursuit of Oneness (Solis 2020:2). By centering Sikh embodied practices of belief and relationality, I contribute site-specific methodologies around ethnographic inquiry that take seriously community theories of social relation and power. Engaging with the immaterial and the material as a cycle of experiential being, ethnographers can produce knowledge that is not only more accurate of the communities whom they study, but also more indicative of the worldly systems they experience due to their embodied reality. Finally, in offering a unique analysis of ethnographic training itself, I hope the next generation of ethnographers can reimagine the method from its origin point; do we desire a method that captures, or one that enlivens, breathes life into, or embodies ways of life that are beyond current methods of scholarship?

GLORIFICATION & DEMONIZATION: HINDUTVA REGIME'S AGENDA

— 2020 —
Indian Army lionizes Gurtej Singh, 23, as a super-hero for killing 12 Chinese soldiers with a kirpan before dying in Galwan Valley

— June 1984 —
Indian Army Bulletin:
"*Amritdharis* are dangerous people pledged to commit murder, arson, and acts of terrorism."

"THE ARMY HAS DISPLAYED BANKRUPTCY OF CHARACTER AND HAS ACTED WITH HEARTS FULL OF ENMITY IN A MANNER INDICATING THAT IT WANTED TO WIPE OUT THE SIKHS."
— BHAGAT PURAN SINGH, ENVIRONMENTALIST & HUMANITARIAN —

"Breaking Their Skulls": Indian Army's Atrocities Against Sikhs

"Grenades and poisonous gas shells were thrown at the men, women, and children who had locked themselves in the rooms, bathrooms, and toilets of Guru Nanak Niwas, Guru Ram Das Serai, and Teja Singh Samundri Hall. Those who tried come out were pierced with bayonets and shot dead. Some soldiers, out of vengeance, caught hold of small babies and children by their feet, lifted them up in the air, and then smashed them against the walls and thus breaking their skulls."

That is the eyewitness account of the June 1984 attack on Harmandir Sahib as reported by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee's *White Paper* — that is how Sikhs were treated by the Army. But how were Sikhs *in* the Army treated?

During the 1982 Asian Games, India issued a ban on Sikh entry to Delhi. SGPC reported: "Every Sikh traveling to Delhi was stopped, searched, humiliated and insulted…. The Sikhs were made to feel as if they were passing through an enemy territory." Military members like Air Chief Marshal Arjan Singh and Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora were among those humiliated.

Even upstanding non-Sikh Army officers who refused to attack the Sikhs were sidelined. In 1983, Lt. General SK Sinha was in line to be the new Chief of Army Staff (COAS). Over previous years, he refused orders of Indira Gandhi to attack Sikh gurdwaras. He was passed over and the COAS position was awarded to Lt. General AS Vaidya — a compliant officer willing to kill Sikhs.

Sikhs in the Army are also used to do Hindutva's dirty work. One example is Major Avtar Singh, who was used to torture Kashmiris and break the resistance to the occupation in Kashmir. Six months after police murdered Jaswant Singh Khalra in Punjab, Major Avtar Singh murdered human rights activist Jalil Andrabi in Kashmir. Afterwards, he fled the country and hid away in Fresno, California.

When Major Avtar Singh was discovered in 2011, he faced extradition charges to India. "I am being made a scapegoat," he said. "There is no question of my being taken to India alive, they will kill me… The agencies, RAW, military intelligence, it is all the same… If the extradition does go through, I will open my mouth, I will not keep quiet."

After he threatened to open his mouth, Major Avtar Singh and his family all died in an alleged murder/suicide. Journalist Mihir Srivastava reported: "The Andrabi family believes that Avtar Singh was just small fry in a bigger conspiracy involving senior Army officers. Since Singh was merely an officer of the Territorial Army, the Indian Army could easily disown him, letting him be the fall guy for other bigwigs."

Sikhs in Kashmir have also fallen at the hands of the Indian Army. Who can forget the Chittisinghpura massacre of 35 Sikhs by militants dressed in Indian Army uniforms? Punjab's International Human Rights Organisation reported: "Sikh organizations world-wide have accused the Indian intelligence agencies and counter-insurgency force for the killings."

Today, the Indian Army uses Sikhs as faces for its propaganda. It tries to control Sikhs by recruiting them for the armed forces and using them as cannon fodder for its ideological battles. The Hindutva regime calls Sikhs the "sword-arm of Hinduism," but it wants to destroy the teachings of the Gurus, deny Sikhs their identity, and assimilate Sikhism. The path of New Delhi sharply contradicts with the teachings of Guru Nanak, who said: "The lowliest of the lowly, the lowest of the low born, Nanak seeks their company."

The Hindutva regime in New Delhi despises the call of the Gurus to align with and uplift the oppressed peoples of this world. New Delhi wants to erase the memory of the atrocities which the Army committed against Sikhs with impunity. It wants to keep Sikhs as hired guns. No Sikh, Muslim, or Christian living in India should contribute to the creation of Akhand Bharat.

Today, the Indian Army declares Gurtej Singh as a hero for using his kirpan against the Chinese — but it does not want Sikhs to remember that the same Army once said that Sikhs who keep kirpans are dangerous terrorists. A June 1984 Army bulletin claimed: "Some of our innocent countrymen were administered oath in the name of religion to support extremists and actively participated in the act of terrorism. These people wear a miniature kirpan around their neck and are called 'Amritdharis.' … Any knowledge of the 'Amritdharis,' who are dangerous people and pledged to commit murder, arson, and acts of terrorism should immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities. These people may appear harmless from outside but they are basically committed to terrorism. In the interest of us all, their identity and whereabouts must always be disclosed."

When common Sikhs dared to demand protection of their human rights, the Indian Army declared that it would treat as a terrorist every Sikh who wore a turban and kept a kirpan.

Ram Narayan Kumar reported: "Operation Bluestar was not only envisioned and rehearsed in advance, meticulously and in total secrecy, it also aimed at obtaining maximum number of Sikh victims, largely devout pilgrims unconnected with the political agitation." Amrit Wilson reported: "On 4th June, a day of pilgrims for Sikhs when thousands had gathered at the Golden Temple, army tanks moved into the Temple Complex, smashing into the sanctum and shooting everyone in sight. Those left alive were then prevented from leaving the building, many wounded were left to bleed to death and when they begged for water, Army Jawans told them to drink the mixture of blood and urine on the floor."

When Sikhs from around Punjab attempted to march to Harmandir Sahib during the siege, SGPC reported that they were "subjected to bombing and machine gunning from the air, resulting in the killing of hundreds of unarmed protesters." After the siege ended, Kumar reported: "The soldiers were in a foul mood… After the destruction of the Akal Takht, they drank and smoked openly inside the Temple complex and indiscriminately killed those they found inside. For them, every Sikh inside was a militant."

The Army took hundreds of Sikhs captive, tied their hands behind their backs with their turbans, lined them up, and shot them. Even one soldier who participated in the siege said, "On the morning of June 6, 1984, the Golden Temple complex was like a graveyard… The civilians who died, about 1500 of them, were piled in trollies and carried away. A lot of them were thrown into rivers."

Sangat Singh reported: "Between 100,000 to 120,000 Sikhs died in five days, June 3-7, in Operation Bluestar. Army atrocities, however, continued beyond June 7, as was demonstrated in firing with tanks on the Sikhs congregating on Amritsar in the next few days." He adds: "The desertion of 4,000 Sikhs soldiers from different parts of India constituted high water mark of the Sikh reaction to the government's severest censorship at its atrocities in Punjab."

After Operation Bluestar ended, the Army commenced Operation Woodrose to mop up Sikh dissent all over Punjab. Mary Ann Weaver reported: "The pattern in each village appears to be the same. The Army moves in during the early evening, cordons a village, and announces over loudspeakers that everyone must come out. All males between the ages of 15 and 35 are trussed and blindfolded, then taken away. Thousands have disappeared in the Punjab since the Army operation began. The government has provided no lists of names; families don't know if sons and husbands are arrested, underground, or dead."

No Chinese have ever attacked any Sikh gurdwaras, raped Sikh women, or killed Sikh youth. The Chinese are not the enemies of the Sikhs of Punjab. The real enemy of Sikhs is Hindutva from New Delhi.

WWW.SIKHINFORMATIONCENTRE.ORG

189

Appendix B: Bunga Sikh Virsa Syllabus

1.1.1 ਬੁੰਗਾ ਸਿਖ ਵਿਰਸਾ // bunga sikh virsa

1.1.1.1 structure

This syllabus will outline expectations & protocol. In each meeting's folder, you will find a worksheet with details on the learning objectives and goals, assigned content, as well as potential areas for reflection if you need inspiration/guidance. Use these worksheets to assist your preparation for each meeting and reach out to me or other co-knowledge producers with any questions.

In some folders, you will see additional resources if there are readings I really enjoy but did not decide to assign. You are more than welcome to add to this folder yourself.

Finally, the assigned content will be finalized by the meeting prior to their discussion and the worksheet uploaded at that time. You will be alerted if it is done sooner.

1.1.1.2 overview

Each meeting, we will focus on a broad topic with the hope of using ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ (gurbaani), ਤਵਾਰੀਖ (history), ਮਰਜਾਦਾ (tradition), and global theory to guide us to a sikh-specific approach to that political concept. These topics are as follows:
1. power, privilege, and positionality
2. gender and sexuality
3. race and ethnicity
4. class and capitalism
5. nationalism and borders
6. protest and resistance

We will explore these issues with the end goal being to co-create a curriculum to learn and develop gurmat-driven plans for action to address issues of oppression & move closer to collective liberation.

1.1.1.3 expectations for engagement

You are expected to…
1. engage fully with all the assigned content for discussion.
   a. *ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani*: do your best to complete a word by word translation and engage with at least one ਟੀਕਾ (interpretation) of the shabad. possible resources are iGurbani, SikhiToTheMax, Guru Granth Darpan, Mahankosh, and Isher Micro Media.
   b. *ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history:* read at least one telling of the saakhi. a link is included in the case of less commonly known selections.

     c. *ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition:* reflect on the selected practice and how it connects to that meeting's topic and other selected content.

     d. *ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory:* engage fully with all readings/videos/selections.

2. post a 2-page, double-spaced reflection in the appropriate Google Drive folder 48 hours prior to our meeting. Please acknowledge and reflect on all 4 areas of assigned content in your discussion.
3. read the reflections of your co-knowledge producers prior to our meeting.
4. come to each meeting on time and ready to engage and produce knowledge!

1.1.1.4   group protocol

1. This group will be taught with [critical pedagogy](#), or the method that teaching and learning is a political act that should mirror the social conditions and disruption of power dynamics it wishes to inspire. Therefore, while I acknowledge the role I have taken on in building a syllabus and bringing us all together, from this point forward I hope to establish us all as co-knowledge producers who are building a framework for ਗੁਰਮਤ/gurmat-driven political thought and action. I invite and encourage reading recommendations, discussion suggestions, and your voice to be fully present while acknowledging your own privileges in this space.
2. This process, if done right, will challenge us all intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. I simply ask that you all stay committed and disciplined for the duration.
3. In being cognizant of your engagement, consider some of the following – where is your thought emerging from? who planted the seed of it & when? what feelings are emerging for you with this thought or in reaction to another's thought?
4. We do not shame emotional reactions to this work, nor difficulties in grasping concepts or ideas. we only require the acknowledgement of one's positionality and the biases that come with it. From this point we can engage in productive (un/re)learning.

Appendix C: Bunga Sikh Virsa Worksheets

1.1.2   meeting 1: privilege, positionality, and power

goals (participants will understand):
1. the connection of social positions to attaining and maintaining power and resources across privileged identity groups;
2. how identity functions as a way to categorize and distribute power & resources; and
3. how these systems of power have structured the core functions of our world & societies allowing any and all to participate in oppression regardless of their identities.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. apply these theories to various categories of social identities;
2. identify how power, privilege, & positionality are relevant across varying social issues; and
3. connect these interconnected oppressions to Sikh practices of justice and humanity.

assigned content for discussion:

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

- ਮਨ ਰੇ ਰਾਮ ਜਪਹੁ ਸੁਖੁ ਹੋਈ ॥ ਅਹਿਨਿਸਿ ਗੁਰ ਕੇ ਚਰਨ ਸਰੇਵਹੁ ਹਰਿ ਦਾਤਾ ਭੁਗਤਾ ਸੋਈ ॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥ (link)

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

- Guru Nanak Dev Ji, Malik Bhago, & Bhai Lalo

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

- accessibility of community educational resources (e.g. camps, Khalsa schools)

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory

- Combahee River Collective Statement (5 pages)
- "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination", Patricia Hill Collins (11 pages)
- "Power Causes Brain Damage", Jerry Useem (5 pages)
- "Op-Ed: White progressive parents and the conundrum of privilege", Margaret A. Hagerman (5 pages)
- Health and Justice: The Path of Liberation through Medicine, Rupa Marya, from 4:48-22:23 (17.5 minutes)

possible areas for reflection:
1. Select an identity axis in which you have privilege/power and one in which you do not. How does your consciousness on these identities vary? In which spaces are you most aware of your privileged identity? Your oppressed identity?

2. In what ways can we distinguish equity and accessibility from pity and lack of belief in someone's ability? Is it possible to come from a place of privilege in making change and do it in a way that does *not* dehumanize those you are trying to include?
3. Can we be empathetic and acknowledge our privilege simultaneously?

1.1.3 meeting 2: gender and sexuality

goals (participants will understand):
1. differences between sex, gender, and sexuality, and how all three categories are used to police and regulate intimacy, power, and belonging;
2. the construction of normative ideas around gender and sexuality which results in the shaming or exclusion of "non-normative" or non-binary identities; and
3. how rigid categories of gender and sexuality are built to uphold systems of power.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. understand how gender-based violence is a tool to uphold patriarchy (and also relies on the participation of those who are harmed by patriarchy);
2. conceptualize how gender interacts with other identities like race and class; and
3. demonstrate their own role in ending gender-based violence based on positionality.

assigned content for discussion:
ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

● ਭੰਡਿ ਜੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਨਿੰਮੀਐ ਭੰਡਿ ਮੰਗਣੁ ਵੀਆਹੁ ॥ ([link](#)/[audio](#))

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

● Guru Nanak and the B40 Janamsakhi – [The Meeting with Sheikh Sharaf](#)

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

● seva roles becoming gendered/seen as gender-specific

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory

● "Chapter 4: FEMINIST EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS", *feminism is for everybody*, bell hooks (6 pages)
● ["I'm Gender-Nonconforming. Do I Now Have a Place in WOC Spaces?"](#), Nazlee Arbee
● "Adjudicating Intimacies on U.S. Frontiers", Nayan Shah from *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (20 pages)
● ["You Should've Asked"](#), *The Mental Load: A Feminist Comic*, Emma
● ["The Consequences"](#), *Seven Stories*, Emma
● GLSEN, [Gender Triangle Education Guide](#) (more as a resource than reading)

possible areas for reflection:

1. Given last week's conversations on theory versus action/practice, how do you interpret bell hooks' discussion of women's studies as a discipline and different approaches to feminist education? How do we apply those lessons to our space?
2. How do the creation and maintenance of gendered roles and societal expectations act as a type of gender-based violence? What is the real harm in creating assumptions about one's purpose, roles, and utility based on the construct of gender?
3. What do nations and/or communities have to gain by defining acceptable forms of sexuality and gender? Does it matter if these identities are overt or covert?

1.1.4 meeting 3: race and ethnicity

goals (participants will understand):
1. differences between race and ethnicity and their role in establishing belonging to a nation or bordered community;
2. construction of racial categories as a way a way to distribute and allocate resources and capital power; and
3. white supremacy and anti-Blackness as global frameworks used to justify white superiority and the inclusion of those who uphold it.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. conceptualize how race interacts with other identities like gender and class;
2. discuss how communities outside the black-white binary act in response to racialization; and
3. challenge Sikh & Punjabi complicity and participation in white supremacy and anti-Blackness.

assigned content for discussion:
ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

- ਲੋਗਾ ਭਰਮਿ ਨ ਭੂਲਹੁ ਭਾਈ ॥ ਖਾਲਿਕੁ ਖਲਕ ਖਲਕ ਮਹਿ ਖਾਲਿਕੁ ਪੂਰਿ ਰਹਿਓ ਸ੍ਰਬ ਠਾਂਈ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
  ([link](#)/[audio](#))

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

- Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji's shaheedi: "ਰੰਗਰੇਟਾ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਾ ਬੇਟਾ" ([link](#))
  - *Important context:* ਰੰਗਰੇਟਾ is another term for Mazhabi caste, or people who became Sikhs after growing up in the untouchable Hindu caste

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

- How do we imagine our Sikh community? What are the biases that can emerge when we only assume or envision a Punjabi, or even South Asian, Sikh community? (Those of you who saw my SYANA workshop have a bit of a hint here!)

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory

- To read:
  - "The Racial Contract", Charles W. Mills (19 pages)

- ○ "Introduction: Abolition Constitutionalism", Dorothy E. Roberts, *Harvard Law Review* (5 pages)
  - ○ "Decolonizing empathy: why our pain will never be enough to disarm white supremacy", Sherronda J. Brown (2 pages)
  - ○ "Avoiding Racial Equity Detours", Paul Gorski (4 pages)
  - ○ "Being Black & Sikh", Gurpreet Kaur, *SikhNet* (3 pages)
  - ○ "My caste privilege in India blinded me to the reality of racism in the US", Mauktik Kulkarni, *Scroll.in* (2 pages)
  - ○ "South Asian Americans Have To Go Beyond Performative Activism And Embrace Solidarity, Empathy, And Reparations", Thenmozhi Soundararajan, *Wear Your Voice* (4 pages)
- To listen:
  - ○ "We Cannot Stay Silent About George Floyd", Hasan Minhaj, *Patriot Act* (12 min)
  - ○ "White liberals and conservatives", Malcolm X (7 min)
- To explore:
  - ○ Look through the #8toabolition website and read about their 8 points for police abolition.

possible areas of reflection:
1. Look through the Internalized Racism Inventory. What experiences, emotions, and thoughts are coming up for you? How do these questions make you reconsider how racism functions? What understanding did you have of internalized racism before this versus now?
2. Consider symptoms of the intertwined system of white supremacy & anti-Blackness such as, but not limited to, colorism, casteism, and wealth gaps. How does the racial position of South Asians and/or Sikhs exacerbate these inequalities?
3. Using the resources above, write a script for talking to a Sikh elder or peer about why police brutality is driven by anti-Blackness and why/how Sikhs need to stand in opposition to it.

1.1.5 meeting 4: class and capitalism

goals (participants will understand):
1. the deep impact wealth inequity has on all other forms of oppression by limiting possibilities for social and physical mobility;
2. the instrumental role that workers' struggles, workers' unions, and low wage laborers have played in social movements globally; and
3. how capitalism restructures understandings of human value and worth based on productivity and labor.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. conceptualize how class interacts with other identities like race and gender (e.g. racial capitalism, wealth equity in the workplace);
2. theorize and debate organizational concepts like wealth (re)distribution, reparations, and mutual aid networks; and
3. utilize Sikh concepts like dasvandh, Guru sahib's golak as the mouth of the poor, etc. to organize around Gurmat methods of wealth equity.

assigned content for discussion:

ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

- ਧਨੁ ਜੋਬਨੁ ਅਰੁ ਫੁਲੜਾ ਨਾਠੀਅੜੇ ਦਿਨ ਚਾਰਿ ॥ ਪਬਣਿ ਕੇਰੇ ਪਤ ਜਿਉ ਢਲਿ ਢੁਲਿ ਜੁੰਮਣਹਾਰ ॥੧॥
  ([link](#)/[audio](#))

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

- Sacha Saudaa sakhi ([v1](#) and [v2](#)—feel free to interrogate the discrepancies in your discussion)

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

- dasvandh as wealth redistribution and/or gurdwaras as mutual aid network centers

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory -- for this time, I ask that you engage with the material in the order listed

1. ["(Why) Americans Don't Understand What Capitalism Really Is"](#), umair haque (6 pages)
2. [Lecture on Marx's Theory of Alienation](#), Asher Horowitz (4 pages)
3. [Richard Pryor and Bill Boggs on racism, greed, & capitalism](#) (2 minutes)
4. ["Why Capitalism and Feminism Can't Coexist"](#), Nicole Aschoff (5 pages)
5. ["To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice"](#), Walter Johnson (14 pages)
6. Gloriosa Victoria, painting by Diego Rivera — read analysis & see painting [here](#)
7. ["Rebuilding the US Labor Movement and the Need for a Third Reconstruction"](#), interview with Bill Fletcher Jr. on Counterpoint radio show (24 minutes)
   a. The article being discussed is ["5 Ways to Rebuild Labor and Transform America"](#) if you want to reference it while you listen.

possible areas of reflection:

1. What is the role of ego in dismantling systems of oppression based on/rooted in accumulation of wealth (personal or collective)?
2. Across a few pieces, we see the importance of recognizing the full weight of history on the present and how our normative structures can make us unwilling to see other possibilities—in your own life, how would you go about building an anti-capitalist practice for yourself, your friends, your family, etc.? What steps would you take towards education and praxis?

1.1.6 meeting 5: nationalism and borders

goals (participants will understand):

1. how the nation-state and borders were constructed through settler-colonial methods to ensure domination of colonizing peoples;
2. how borders are ever-shifting and arbitrary, demarcating the area and people that a nation-state will protect from and defend against; and

3. how nationalism functions to build a sense of inclusion that protects the state and its interests at the expense of the humanity of its people/non-citizens.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. identify how state structures and institutions are utilized to establish boundaries and inclusion amongst populations;
2. analyze state action and policies within the framework of exclusionary politics; and
3. challenge nationalism and the nation-state as a normative framework for belonging, particularly within Sikh spaces/contexts.

assigned content for discussion:
ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

- ਅੰਮ੍ਰਿਤਾ ਪ੍ਰਿਅ ਬਚਨ ਤੁਹਾਰੇ ॥ ਅਤਿ ਸੁੰਦਰ ਮਨਮੋਹਨ ਪਿਆਰੇ ਸਭਹੂ ਮਧਿ ਨਿਰਾਰੇ ॥੧॥ ਰਹਾਉ ॥
  (link/audio)

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

- Banda Singh Bahadur & Khalsa Raj

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

- Amrit sanchar/Khande baate ki pahul

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory (in suggested order of engagement)

1. "fresh off the boat", Jasmin Kaur
2. Harsha Walia in Conversation with MM&D Editor Jo-Anne Lee (10 pages)
   a. If you prefer audio/visual, you can watch the interview (~35 minutes) here—please note videos are posted out of order.
3. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime", Charles Tilly (9 pages)
4. "Why does the U.S. support Israel?", Noam Chomsky (7:40 min) - suggested by harnoor :)
   a. *Suggested background:* explore the "Palestine is Here" database by RAIA—search your hometown, college town, etc. If you're curious about other transnational IDF ties, check out "Israel's invisible hand behind Operation Blue Star of 1984".
5. Kwame Ture on Zionism and Imperialism (3:44 min)
6. "On Women and their Wombs: Capitalism, Racialization, Feminism", Françoise Vergès (4 pages)
7. "The history of Puerto Rico shows that nationalism can be liberatory rather than xenophobic", Margaret Power (2 pages)
8. "Raj Karega Khalsa: The Khalsa & The Rule", Harinder Singh (6 pages)

possible areas of reflection:
1. What does freedom look like when imagined through Gurmat? What about victory (can think through historical examples, use Harinder Singh's piece)? How does freedom materialize on the body of a Sikh? What are new formations of statehood from a Sikhi framework?
2. Think through how Sikhs in the diaspora can address their responsibility for reparations. Be clear about the various positionalities you are including and holding accountable.

3. How does gender manifest through the state? Think back to Nayan Shah, but also through the Vergès piece and the intertwined military/policing projects of nation-states.
4. Is there anything to be salvaged from nationalism? What did the piece on Puerto Rico change in your perspective and how does it speak to the other theories presented?

Padlet link from our meeting: https://padlet.com/harleenkaur5/bunganationalismborders

1.1.7 meeting 6: protest and resistance

goals (participants will understand):
1. narratives and tactics of protest and resistance that are rooted in ending oppression (historical and present);
2. processes for determining and stating intentions in community care, safety, and liberation; and
3. how identity consciousness is crucial to practicing a liberatory model of resistance and healing.

learning objectives (participants will be able to):
1. brainstorm and build coalitions within and outside of the Sikh community to address various axes of oppression;
2. recognize personal privilege and operationalize tools and resources from one's positionality to deconstruct systems of oppression; and
3. connect theory to lived experiences to conscious action in the struggle for liberation.

assigned content for discussion:
ਗੁਰਬਾਣੀ/gurbaani

- ਨਚ ਦੁਰਲਭੰ ਧਨੰ ਰੂਪੰ ਨਚ ਦੁਰਲਭੰ ਸ੍ਵਰਗ ਰਾਜਨਹ ॥ (link/katha by Giani Pinderpal Singh ji)

ਤਵਾਰੀਖ/history

- Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji & Bandi Chhor

ਮਰਯਾਦਾ/tradition

- Miri Piri

ਸਿਧਾਂਤ/theory

1. "Black Riot", Raven Rakia, *The New Inquiry* (5.5 pages)
2. "I Won't Vote", W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Nation* (2.5 pages)
3. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House", Audre Lorde (3 pages)
4. Black Panther Ten-Point Program (3 pages)
5. "Abolition Cannot Wait: Visions for Transformation and Radical World-Building", K. Agbebiyi, Sarah T. Hamid, Rachel Kuo, and Mon Mohapatra (6 pages)
6. "Accountability In A Time Of Justice", Vivette Jeffries-Logan, Michelle Johnson, and Tema Okun (4 pages)
7. "Love as the Practice of Freedom", *Outlaw Culture*, bell hooks (7 pages)
8. "Measuring Love in the Journey for Justice: A Brown Paper", Shiree Teng and Sammy Nuñez - **Skim through this, but we will work through it together in our meeting.**

Reflection assignment: explore the idea of love as the practice of freedom through a creative representation of what you have learned throughout these meetings. Throughout this conversation of love, I challenge you to really push yourself to consider love from a Gurmat, rather than worldly, perspective (or perhaps compare the two, but our centering should be on a Gurmat one).

Some questions to consider:
- Can you love someone and still erase their trauma or oppression? Can someone who loves you cause you harm? What does justice and freedom look like in these relationships?
- How does love manifest in actions like the Black Panther Ten-Point program? What about in Du Bois's "I Won't Vote"?
- Can love and disruption co-exist? Is love always peace? Is love always justice?
- Pick one of the axes of oppression that we focused on. Reconceptualize this identity or your relationship to/understanding of it through a framework of love.

"Length" requirements Because it's harder to give a particular length for a creative project, I'm including a few guidelines based on what type of format you choose. If your project is one that elapses over time, I'd like for it to fall within the 3-5 minute range. If it is a still piece, I'd like you to include a 1-page single-spaced reflection to give your artist's rendering of its significance.

Possible formats: This list is NOT all-inclusive, but simply to give some examples for those of you who would like it.
- Visual art: drawing, collage, making something on canva or powerpoint or prezi, photography, sculpture (can even be made with things you have around the house)
- Musical: song, dance, theater
- Film: animation, interviews, video clips with voice over...feel free to even do a voice over of a video of yourself presenting what you made

Written: poetry, prose, script, perhaps even with illustrations?

References

Abdul Khabeer, Su'ad, Arshad Ali, Evelyn Alsultany, Sohail Daulatzai, Lara Deeb, Carol Fadda, Zareena Grewal, Juliane Hammer, Nadine Naber, and Junaid Rana. 2017. "Islamophobia Is Racism Syllabus."

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17(1):41–55. doi: 10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030.

Adeyemi, Kemi. 2019. "Beyond 90°: The Angularities of Black/Queer/Women/Lean." *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 29(1):9–24. doi: 10.1080/0740770X.2019.1571861.

Adeyemi, Kemi. 2021."On the Black Queer Ordinary," April 23, UCLA Department of Gender Studies + Ralph Bunche Center for African American Studies.

Adeyemi, Kemi. forthcoming. *Feels Right: Black Queer Women's Choreographies of Belonging in Chicago*. Duke University Press.

Adjepong, Anima. 2019. "Invading Ethnography: A Queer of Color Reflexive Practice." *Ethnography* 20(1):27–46. doi: 10.1177/1466138117741502.

Ali, Arshad Imitaz. 2016. "Citizens under Suspicion: Responsive Research with Community under Surveillance." *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 47(1):78–95. doi: 10.1111/aeq.12136.

@AmarDeepSinghD. 2019. "Khalistan to Me Is a Dream of Sovereignty That Condenses a Matrix of Oppressions." *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/AmarDeepSinghD/status/1145423053888872449).

Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso.

Anon. 2021. "The Soldiers' Archive Reconnecting Punjabis with Their Ancestors." *Newsday*.

AP. 1981. "Religious Exceptions In Army Uniform End." *The New York Times*, August 22.

Arondekar, Anjali. 2009. *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*. Duke University Press.

@arshallow. 2021. "1984 Was Not Just an Event but a Structural Form of Violence." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://mobile.twitter.com/arshallow/status/1390054094761570314).

Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. JHU Press.

Asad, Talal. 2018. *Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason*. Columbia University Press.

Atwal, Priya. 2020. *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire*. Oxford University Press.

Axel, Brian Keith. 2001. *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora."* Duke University Press.

Bal, Jaspreet Kaur, and Santbir Singh. 2017. "Sikh Sovereignty on Indigenous Land." *Kaur Life*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://kaurlife.org/2017/05/02/sikh-sovereignty-indigenous-land/).

Beaman, Jean. 2017. *Citizen Outsider: Children of North African Immigrants in France*. Univ of California Press.

Behl, Natasha. 2017. "Diasporic Researcher: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Gender and Race in Political Science." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5(4):580–98. doi: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1141104.

Berlant, Lauren. 2011. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press.

@beynaaam. 2021. "Sikhs in North America [Are] pro Police." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 16, 2021 (https://mobile.twitter.com/beynaaam/status/1389752470801317892).

Bhaumik, Subir. 2020. "The Supreme Hero Of Galwan." *The Eastern Link*, August 23.

@bikethewind. 2022. "Reveals the Conditions Produced by the Indian State, in Both Life & Death." *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/bikethewind/status/1493652566919372805).

Blankholm, Joseph. 2020. "Belief." *SSRC The Immanent Frame*. Retrieved March 5, 2021 (https://tif.ssrc.org/2020/01/31/belief-blankholm/).

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1987. "What Makes a Social Class? On The Theoretical and Practical Existence Of Groups." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32:1–17.

Brown, Wendy. 1993. "Wounded Attachments." *Political Theory* 21(3):390–410.

Brunner, Michael Philipp. 2018. "Manly Sikhs and Loyal Citizens: Physical Education and Sport in Khalsa College, Amritsar, 1914–47." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 41(1):33–50. doi: 10.1080/00856401.2018.1389235.

Buffam, Bonar. 2021. "Sacred Distinctions: Law and the Political Regulation of Sikh Gurdwaras in British Columbia." *Law & Society Review* 55(2):343–58. doi: 10.1111/lasr.12549.

Butler, Octavia E. 1993. *Parable of the Sower*. New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing.

Byrd, Jodi A. 2011. *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*. U of Minnesota Press.

Cacho, Lisa Marie. 2012. *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*. NYU Press.

Carrasco Miró, Gisela. 2020. "Encountering the Colonial: Religion in Feminism and the Coloniality of Secularism." *Feminist Theory* 21(1):91–109. doi: 10.1177/1464700119859763.

Cheng, Anne Anlin. 2019. *Ornamentalism*. Oxford University Press.

Chhibber, Kavita. 2005. "Sikh Lives The Sikh American Experience as Told by Those Who Lived It." *KavitaChhibber.Com*. Retrieved December 9, 2020 (https://www.kavitachhibber.com/2005/07/29/sikh-lives-the-sikh-american-experience-as-told-by-those-who-lived-it/).

Chopra, Radhika. 2010. "Commemorating Hurt: Memorializing Operation Bluestar." *Sikh Formations* 6(2):119–52. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2010.530509.

Cocke, Karl E., Detmar H. Finke, James E. Hewes, Jr., James S. Nanney, Edgar F. Raines, Jr., Paul J. Scheips, and Billy C. Mossman. 1988. *Department of the Army Historical Summary Fiscal Year 1981*. edited by C. O. Hardyman. Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Unwin Hyman.

@comrade_marcus. 2021. "KPS Gill and Derek Chauvin Are the Same." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://mobile.twitter.com/comrade_marcus/status/1389973844425801728).

Condos, Mark. 2017. *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cone, James H. 2000. *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998*. Beacon Press.

Coulthard, Glen S. 2007. "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory* 6(4):437–60. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300307.

Crawley, Sara L. 2012. "Autoethnography as Feminist Self-Interview." in *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*, edited by J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti, and K. D. McKinney. SAGE.

Cruz, Rocio. 2020. "Honoring Deputy Sandeep Singh Dhaliwal Nearly One Year After His Death, Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher's Bill to Rename Houston Post Office in His Memory Passes House of Representatives." *U.S. Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher*.

Retrieved October 29, 2020
(https://fletcher.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2788).

Csordas, Thomas J. 1990. "Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology." *Ethos* 18(1):5–47.

Dalrymple, William. 2015. "The Mutual Genocide of Indian Partition." *The New Yorker*, June 22.

Das, Santanu. 2018. *India, Empire, and First World War Culture: Writings, Images, and Songs*. Cambridge University Press.

De León, Jason. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. Univ of California Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 2002. *Acts of Religion*. edited by G. Anidjar. Routledge.

Devgan, Shruti. 2018. "A Haunted Generation Remembers." *Contexts* 17(4):36–41. doi: 10.1177/1536504218812867.

Dhamoon, Rita, Davina Bhandar, Renisa Mawani, and Satwinder Kaur Bains. 2019. *Unmooring the Komagata Maru: Charting Colonial Trajectories*. UBC Press.

Dickstein, Corey. 2017. "More Bearded, Turbaned Sikhs Join Army as Pentagon Reviews Religious Articles Ban." *Stars and Stripes*, February 24.

@_dkaur. 2019. "What Are We Mourning & What Are We Also Normalizing?" *Instagram*.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*. A.C. McClurg.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1920. *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1938."Revelation of Saint Orgne the Damned," June 8, Fisk University.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1940. *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. Harcourt, Brace and Howe.

Du Bois, W. E. B. 1947. *The World and Africa*. Martino Publishing.

Edmondson, Locksley. 1976. "Trans-Atlantic Slavery and the Internationalization of Race." *Caribbean Quarterly* 22(2–3):5–25. doi: 10.1080/00086495.1976.11671898.

Ensaaf. n.d. "Publications." *Ensaaf*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://ensaaf.org/publications/).

Epstein, Kayla. 2019. "A Sikh Airman Petitioned the Air Force to Let Him Wear a Turban and Beard. He Just Won." *Washington Post*, June 7.

Erll, Astrid. 2011. "Travelling Memory." *Parallax* 17(4):4–18. doi: 10.1080/13534645.2011.605570.

Fanon, Frantz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.

Fields, Barbara Jeanne. 1990. "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review* (181):95–119.

Fields, Karen, and Barbara J. Fields. 2012. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. Verso Books.

Foner, Eric. 2003. *Who Owns History?: Rethinking the Past in a Changing World*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Frayer, Lauren. 2020. "The Long, Perilous Route Thousands Of Indians Have Risked For A Shot At Life In U.S." *NPR.Org*, July 9.

Freire, Paulo. 2014. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Friberg, Torbjörn. 2019. "Exploring Tensionless Ethnography." *Ethnography* 1466138119859378. doi: 10.1177/1466138119859378.

Gallo, Ester. 2012. "Creating Gurdwaras, Narrating Histories: Perspectives on the Sikh Diaspora in Italy." *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* (6). doi: 10.4000/samaj.3431.

Geertz, Clifford. 1966. "Religion as a Cultural System." in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, edited by M. Banton. Routledge.

Gera Roy, Anjali. 2016. "Immobile Mobilities and Free-Flowing Sikh Movements from Punjab." *South Asian Diaspora* 8(2):223–38. doi: 10.1080/19438192.2016.1175748.

Gill, Harjant S. 2020. "Transnational Hair (and Turban): Sikh Masculinity, Embodied Practices, and Politics of Representation in an Era of Global Travel." *Ethnography* 0(0):1–23. doi: 10.1177/1466138120923712.

Gill, Parmbir Singh. 2014. "A Different Kind of Dissidence: The Ghadar Party, Sikh History and the Politics of Anticolonial Mobilization." *Sikh Formations* 10(1):23–41. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2014.890800.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2011. "Constructing Citizenship: Exclusion, Subordination, and Resistance." *American Sociological Review* 76(1):1–24. doi: 10.1177/0003122411398443.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2015. "Settler Colonialism as Structure: A Framework for Comparative Studies of U.S. Race and Gender Formation." *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 1(1):52–72. doi: 10.1177/2332649214560440.

Glissant, Édouard. 1997. *Poetics of Relation*. University of Michigan Press.

Goldstein, Alyosha. 2008. "Where the Nation Takes Place: Proprietary Regimes, Antistatism, and U.S. Settler Colonialism." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107(4):833–61. doi: 10.1215/00382876-2008-019.

Gonzales, Richard. 2014. "Shooting Of Sikh Army Veteran Divides Community." *NPR.Org*, May 29.

Govt. of India. n.d. "Research & Reference." *National Archives of India*. Retrieved September 17, 2021 (http://nationalarchives.nic.in/content/research-reference).

Green, Nicola, and Nils Zurawski. 2015. "Surveillance and Ethnography: Researching Surveillance as Everyday Life." *Surveillance & Society* 13(1):27–43. doi: 10.24908/ss.v13i1.5321.

Grewal, Harjeet. 2017. "Janamsakhi: Retracing Networks of Interpretation."

Griswold, Eliza. 2019. "The Violent Toll of Hindu Nationalism in India." *The New Yorker*, March 5.

Guhin, J. 2014. "Religion as Site Rather Than Religion as Category: On the Sociology of Religion's Export Problem." *Sociology of Religion* 75(4):579–93. doi: 10.1093/socrel/sru054.

Guhin, Jeffrey, and Jonathan Wyrtzen. 2013. "The Violences of Knowledge: Edward Said, Sociology, and Post-Orientalist Reflexivity." Pp. 231–62 in *Postcolonial sociology*. Vol. 24, *Political power and social theory*, edited by J. Go. Bingley: Emerald.

@GurvirShinda. 2021. "I Don't Commit Crimes." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://twitter.com/GurvirShinda/status/1390579227897090051).

Hall, Stuart. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by J. Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

Hall, Stuart. 2001. "Constituting an Archive." *Third Text* 15(54):89–92. doi: 10.1080/09528820108576903.

Hammer, Ricarda. 2020. "Decolonizing the Civil Sphere: The Politics of Difference, Imperial Erasures, and Theorizing from History." *Sociological Theory* 38(2):101–21. doi: 10.1177/0735275120921215.

Haney Lopez, Ian. 1996. *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*. NYU Press.

Haripriya, Soibam. 2018. "Married to Martyrdom: The Remarried Widow of a Sikh Martyr (Punjab, Post-1984)." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 52(3):263–82. doi: 10.1177/0069966718785323.

Hartman, Saidiya. 2008. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe* 12(2):1–14.

Hirsch, Marianne. 1992. "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory." *Discourse* 15(2):3–29.

Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. "The Generation of Postmemory."

Hochberg, Gil Z. 2021. "An Archive of the Present."

Hoskins, Andrew. 2013. "The End of Decay Time." *Memory Studies* 6(4):387–89. doi: 10.1177/1750698013496197.

Hundle, Anneeth Kaur. 2012. "After Wisconsin: Registers of Sikh Precarity in the Alien-Nation." *Sikh Formations* 8(3):287–91. doi: 10.1080/17535654.2012.751239.

Imy, Kate. 2019. *Faithful Fighters: Identity and Power in the British Indian Army*. Stanford University Press.

Itzigsohn, José, and Karida L. Brown. 2020. *The Sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois: Racialized Modernity and the Global Color Line*. NYU Press.

Iwata, Miho, and Bandana Purkayastha. 2011. "Reflections on Cultural Human Rights." Pp. 113–24 in *Human rights in our own backyard: injustice and resistance in the United States*, edited by B. Purkayastha, W. T. Armaline, and D. S. Glasberg. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Jakobsh, Doris R. 2003. *Relocating Gender in Sikh History: Transformation, Meaning and Identity*. Oxford University Press.

James, Joy. 1996. *Resisting State Violence: Radicalicism, Gender, and Race in U.S. Culture*. U of Minnesota Press.

Jamil, Busharat Elahi. 2016. "The Sikh Dilemma: The Partition of Punjab 1947." *Pakistan Vision* 17(1):89–118.

@jap_the_jyot. 2019. "The Mind 'Is' Khalistan." *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/jap_the_jyot/status/1145815282063237122).

Jawaharlal. 2015. "A Closer Look At How Partition Changed Punjab's Religious Map." *South Asia Blog*. Retrieved November 1, 2020 (https://southasiablog.wordpress.com/2015/07/03/a-more-detailed-punjab-religion-map/).

Joshi, Khyati Y. 2006. "The Racialization of Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism in the United States." *Equity & Excellence in Education* 39(3):211–26. doi: 10.1080/10665680600790327.

Judge, Rajbir Singh, and Jasdeep Singh Brar. 2021. "Critique of Archived Life: Toward a Hesitation of Sikh Immigrant Accumulation." *Positions: Asia Critique* 29(2):319–46. doi: 10.1215/10679847-8852098.

Kalsi, Kamal S. 2017. "The Right To Wear Beards And Turbans Is A Victory For More Than Sikhs." *Task & Purpose*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://taskandpurpose.com/community/right-wear-beards-turbans-victory-sikhs/).

Karimi, Faith. 2019. "Body of a 6-Year-Old Girl from India Is Found in the Arizona Desert." *CNN*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/14/us/arizona-indian-girl-body-found-in-the-desert/index.html).

Karni, Annie. 2020. "Latest Crop of West Point Graduates Includes First Observant Sikh Cadet." *The New York Times*, June 12.

Karuka, Manu. 2019. *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*. Univ of California Press.

Kaspersen, Lars Bo, and Jeppe Strandsbjerg. 2017. *Does War Make States?: Investigations of Charles Tilly's Historical Sociology*. Cambridge University Press.

Kaur, Harleen. 2020. "Making Citizenship, Becoming Citizens: How Sikh Punjabis Shaped the Exclusionary Politics of Belonging." *Amerasia Journal* 46(1):107–22. doi: 10.1080/00447471.2020.1772186.

Kaur, Harleen. 2021. "Legacies of a Martial Race: Sikh Punjabi Investment and Implication in the Police State."

Kaur, Harleen. Forthcoming. "Radical Narrative Traditions: Communal Storytelling as a Praxis for Liberation." in *Small Axe Fall Big Tree: The Pedagogy of Action*, edited by N. Z. Haniff. Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Kaur, Harleen, Katie Byrd, Nadia Davis, and Taylor Williams. n.d. "Small Revolutions: Methodologies of Black Feminist Consciousness-Raising and the Politics of Ordinary Resistance."

Kaur, Harpreet. 2011. *A Little Revolution: A Story of Suicides and Dreams*.

Kaur, Mallika. 2019. *Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Kaur, Ravleen. 2015. "1984 Sikh Killings: What The Media Couldn't Tell You 31 Years Ago." *Youth Ki Awaaz*. Retrieved November 1, 2020 (https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2015/06/1984-sikh-massacre/).

Kaur, Tavleen. 2020. "Ungovernable and Inviolable: Acts of Resistance in and against Immigrant Detention." *Amerasia Journal* 46(1):101–6. doi: 10.1080/00447471.2020.1760463.

Kaur, Tavleen. 2021. "Ji Aya Nu: Gurdwaras as Refuge and Target in the Islamophobic World Order." Pp. 60–78 in *Religion and Senses of Place*, edited by G. Harvey and O. K. Takhar. Equinox Publishing (Indonesia).

Kaur-Bring, Narinder. 2020. "Autoethnography: A Potential Method for Sikh Theory to Praxis Research." *Religions* 11(12):681. doi: 10.3390/rel11120681.

kehal, prabhdeep singh. 2020. "Policing the Bodies of Transgender & Queer Sikhs." *Kaur Life*. Retrieved June 7, 2021 (https://kaurlife.org/2020/09/27/policing-the-bodies-of-transgender-queer-sikhs/).

King, Tiffany Lethabo, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith, eds. 2020. *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness*. Duke University Press.

Krieger, Nancy. 2005. "Embodiment: A Conceptual Glossary for Epidemiology | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 59:350–55.

Kumar, Deepa. 2020. "Terrorcraft: Empire and the Making of the Racialised Terrorist Threat." *Race & Class* 62(2):34–60. doi: 10.1177/0306396820930523.

Kurwa, Rahim. 2019. "Building the Digitally Gated Community: The Case of Nextdoor." *Surveillance & Society* 17(1/2):111–17. doi: 10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.12927.

La Brack, Bruce. 2005. "Sikhs in the United States." Pp. 1094–1104 in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World*, edited by M. Ember, C. R. Ember, and I. Skoggard. Boston, MA: Springer US.

Leonard, Karen. 1994. *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans*. Temple University Press.

Lincoln, Yvonna S., and Gaile S. Cannella. 2009. "Ethics and the Broader Rethinking/Reconceptualization of Research as Construct." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 9(2):273–85. doi: 10.1177/1532708608322793.

Logan, William. 2016. "A Guide to Research at the National Archives of India." *WillyLogan.Com*. Retrieved September 17, 2021 (http://www.willylogan.com/?p=935).

Lowe, Lisa. 2015. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Duke University Press.

Lowe, Maria R., Angela Stroud, and Alice Nguyen. 2017. "Who Looks Suspicious? Racialized Surveillance in a Predominantly White Neighborhood." *Social Currents* 4(1):34–50. doi: 10.1177/2329496516651638.

Löwenheim, Oded. 2010. "The 'I' in IR: An Autoethnographic Account." *Review of International Studies* 36(04):1023–45. doi: 10.1017/S0260210510000562.

Maan, Ajit. 2005. "Post-Colonial Practices and Narrative Nomads: Thinking Sikhism beyond Metaphysics." *Sikh Formations* 1(2):217–27. doi: 10.1080/17448720500412728.

Macauliffe, Max Arthur. 1909. *The Sikh Religion: Its Gurus, Sacred Writings and Authors*. Clarendon Press.

MacMunn, Sir George Fletcher, and Alfred Crowdy Lovett. 1911. *The Armies of India*. A. and C. Black.

Maghbouleh, Neda. 2017. *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race*. Stanford University Press.

Mahmood, Cynthia, and Stacy Brady. 2000. *The Guru's Gift: An Ethnography Exploring Gender Equality with North American Sikh Women*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. 1996. *Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants*. 44844th edition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Mahmood, Cynthia Keppley. 2001. "Terrorism, Myth, and the Power of Ethnographic Praxis." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 30(5):520–45. doi: 10.1177/089124101129024259.

Mahmood, Saba. 1996. "Cultural Studies and Ethnic Absolutism: Comments on Stuart Hall's 'Culture, Community, Nation.'" *Cultural Studies* 10(1):1–11. doi: 10.1080/09502389600490421.

Mahmood, Saba. 2004. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton University Press.

Majumdar, R. C. 1963. *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*. Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.

Mamdani, Mahmood. 2020. *Neither Settler Nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*. Harvard University Press.

Mandair, Navdeep. 2009. "An Approximate Difference: Proximity and Oppression in the West's Encounter with Sikhism." *Sikh Formations* 5(2):85–101. doi: 10.1080/17448720903408281.

Mankekar, Purnima. 2015. *Unsettling India: Affect, Temporality, Transnationality*. Duke University Press.

Marx, Anthony W. 1998. *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of South Africa, the United States, and Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.

Marya, Rupa. 2018."Health and Justice: The Path of Liberation through Medicine." Presented at the National Bioneers Conference, October 19, San Rafael, California.

Mawani, Renisa. 2018. *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire*. Duke University Press.

Mazumder, Rajit K. 2003. *The Indian Army and the Making of Punjab*. Orient Blackswan.

Mazumder, Rajit K. 2011. "From Loyalty To Dissent: Punjabis from The Great War To World War Ii." P. 32 in *The Indian Army in the Two World Wars*, edited by K. Roy. Brill.

Mbembe, Achille. 2002. "The Power of the Archive and Its Limits." Pp. 19–27 in *Refiguring the Archive*, edited by C. Hamilton, V. Harris, J. Taylor, M. Pickover, G. Reid, and R. Saleh. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

McLeod, W. H. 1980. *Early Sikh Tradition: A Study of the Janam-Sākhīs*. Clarendon Press.

Mediratta, Sangeeta. 2012. "The Affair of the Greased Cartridge: Traveling Stories, Unraveling Empires, and the Sepoy Revolt of 1857." *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 14(3):8–16.

Mian, Ali Altaf. 2021. "Racialization and the Maiming of Psychic Life." *Political Theology Network*. Retrieved May 14, 2021 (https://politicaltheology.com/racialization-and-the-maiming-of-psychic-life/).

Miller, Todd. 2014. *Border Patrol Nation: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Homeland Security*. City Lights Publishers.

Mills, Charles W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press.

Mooney, Nicola. 2020. "'In Our Whole Society, There Is No Equality': Sikh Householding and the Intersection of Gender and Caste." *Religions* 11(2):95. doi: 10.3390/rel11020095.

Moors, Annelies. 2017. "On Autoethnography." *Ethnography* 18(3):387–89. doi: 10.1177/1466138117723354.

Morris, Aldon. 2015. *The Scholar Denied: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. Univ of California Press.

Mudimbe, Vy. 1988. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Indiana University Press.

Muñoz, José Esteban. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. U of Minnesota Press.

Murphy, Anne. 2005. "Materializing Sikh Pasts." *Sikh Formations* 1(2):175–200. doi: 10.1080/17448720500442592.

Murphy, Anne. 2013. "Defining the Religious and the Political." *Sikh Formations* 9(1):51–62. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2013.774706.

Nash, Katherine. 2021. "Remembrance Sunday Sikh History." *Channel 5 News*.

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-a. "About." *National Sikh Campaign*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.sikhcampaign.org/about).

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-b. "Mission." *National Sikh Campaign*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (http://www.sikhcampaign.org/mission).

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-c. "Our American Dream." *We Are Sikhs*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.wearesikhs.org/american_dream).

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-d. "Our Lifestyle." *We Are Sikhs*. Retrieved February 26, 2021 (https://www.wearesikhs.org/lifestyle).

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-e. "Our Values." *We Are Sikhs*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (http://www.wearesikhs.org/values).

National Sikh Campaign. n.d.-f. "Polling & Focus Groups - National Sikh Campaign." Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.sikhcampaign.org/research).

@navabikaur. 2022. "Worst Part Is That This Will Just Be Another Mystery Murder." *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/navabikaur/status/1495823751631577093).

NBC Asian America. 2015. "Sikhs Who Serve: Texas County Sheriff's Office Makes History." *NBC Asian America*, February 11.

Neves, Tiago, Chris Holligan, and Ross Deuchar. 2018. "Reflections Concerning Ethnographic Ethical Decisions and Neo-Liberal Monitoring." *Etnografica* (vol. 22 (2)):241–58. doi: 10.4000/etnografica.5270.

Ngai, Mae M. 2014. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America - Updated Edition*. Princeton University Press.

Nopper, Tamara K. 2020. "Military Service as Liberal Policing: A Brief Racial History of Project 100,000." *The Abusable Past*. Retrieved October 31, 2020 (https://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/military-service-as-liberal-policing-a-brief-racial-history-of-project-100000/).

Noriega, David, and John Templon. 2016. "America's Quiet Crackdown On Indian Immigrants." *BuzzFeed News*, January 31.

@nun2mee. 2021. "What People Fail to Realize Is That the Police Actively Cooperated with the State." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://mobile.twitter.com/nun2mee/status/1390394700964761608).

O'Brien, Jean M. 2010. *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England*. U of Minnesota Press.

O'Connor, Paul. 2019. "The Unanchored Past: Three Modes of Collective Memory." *Memory Studies* 1–16. doi: 10.1177/1750698019894694.

Ogden, Johanna. 2019. "White Right and Labor Organizing in Oregon's 'Hindu' City." *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 120(4):488–517. doi: 10.5403/oregonhistq.120.4.0488.

Omi, Michael A. 2001. "The Changing Meaning of Race." Pp. 243–63 in *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, Volume 1*, edited by N. J. Smelser, W. J. Wilson, and F. Mitchell. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

Omvedt, Gail. 2008. *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*. New Delhi: Navayana Pub. : Distributed by IPD Alternatives.

Omvedt, Gail. 2011. *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.

Osborne, Myles. 2014. *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race among the Kamba, c.1800 to the Present*. Cambridge University Press.

Parvez, Z. Fareen. 2017. *Politicizing Islam: The Islamic Revival in France and India*. Oxford University Press.

Pitts-Taylor, Victoria. 2015. "A Feminist Carnal Sociology?: Embodiment in Sociology, Feminism, and Naturalized Philosophy." *Qualitative Sociology* 38(1):19–25. doi: 10.1007/s11133-014-9298-4.

Portelli, Alessandro. 1991. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. SUNY Press.

Prashad, Vijay. 2001. *Karma Of Brown Folk*. U of Minnesota Press.

@preetypants123. 2021. ""well I'M Not Being Harmed Here"." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 17, 2021 (https://mobile.twitter.com/preetypants123/status/1390362719509827584).

Prins, Esther. 2010. "Participatory Photography: A Tool for Empowerment or Surveillance?" *Action Research* 8(4):426–43. doi: 10.1177/1476750310374502.

Puar, Jasbir K. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Duke University Press.

Ramnath, Maia. 2011. *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire*. University of California Press.

Rand, Gavin. 2006. "'Martial Races' and 'Imperial Subjects': Violence and Governance in Colonial India, 1857–1914." *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 13(1):1–20. doi: 10.1080/13507480600586726.

Rand, Gavin, and Kim A. Wagner. 2012. "Recruiting the 'Martial Races': Identities and Military Service in Colonial India." *Patterns of Prejudice* 46(3–4):232–54. doi: 10.1080/0031322X.2012.701495.

@rasans_. 2019. "He Gave a Bigger Sacrifice than Any of the Ones Who Are Opposing Dhaliwal." *Instagram*.

Richards, Neil M. 2012. "The Dangers of Surveillance Symposium: Privacy and Technology." *Harvard Law Review* 126(7):1934–65.

Rifkin, Mark. 2017. *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination*. Duke University Press.

Rothberg, Michael. 2019. *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*. Stanford University Press.

Roy, Kaushik. 2013. "Race and Recruitment in the Indian Army: 1880–1918." *Modern Asian Studies* 47(4):1310–47. doi: 10.1017/S0026749X12000431.

@Sabi_Singh93. 2021. "It Would Have Been Harder for the Government to Carry out What They Did." *Twitter*. Retrieved June 30, 2021 (https://twitter.com/Sabi_Singh93/status/1390018854357807109).

Said, Edward W. 1978. *Orientalism*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Saliba, John A. 1974. "The New Ethnography and the Study of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 13(2):145–59. doi: 10.2307/1384376.

Saluja, Anshu. 2015. "Engaging with Women's Words and Their Silences." *Sikh Formations* 11(3):343–65. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2015.1102554.

Sandhu, Akhtar Hussain. 2012. "Sikh Failure on the Partition of Punjab in 1947." *Journal of Political Studies* 19(2):215–32.

Savarkar, V. D. 1923. *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* Bombay: Savarkar Sadan.

Scheffauer, Herman. 1910. "The Tide of Turbans." *The Forum* 43(6):616–18.

Seawright, Gardner. 2014. "Settler Traditions of Place: Making Explicit the Epistemological Legacy of White Supremacy and Settler Colonialism for Place-Based Education." *Educational Studies* 50(6):554–72. doi: 10.1080/00131946.2014.965938.

@shabdsingh. 2019. "What Is Khalistan to You?" *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/shabdsingh/status/1145405723997888514).

Shah, Nayan. 2012. *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West*. University of California Press.

Shams, Tahseen. 2019. "Successful yet Precarious: South Asian Muslim Americans, Islamophobia, and the Model Minority Myth." *Sociological Perspectives* 00(0):1–17. doi: 10.1177/0731121419895006.

Shani, Giorgio. 2005. "Beyond Khalistan? Sikh Diasporic Identity and Critical International Theory." *Sikh Formations* 1(1):57–74. doi: 10.1080/17448720500132565.

Shankar, Soumya. 2020. "India's Citizenship Law, in Tandem With National Registry, Could Make BJP's Discriminatory Targeting of Muslims Easier." *The Intercept*, January 30.

Sharma, Arvind. 2002. "On Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism, and Hindutva." *Numen* 49(1):1–36. doi: 10.1163/15685270252772759.

Shiva, Vandana. 2016. *The Violence of the Green Revolution: Third World Agriculture, Ecology, and Politics*. Reprint edition. University Press of Kentucky.

Sikh American Veterans Alliance. n.d. "SAVA - About." *Sikh American Veterans Alliance*. Retrieved December 4, 2021 (https://www.sikhvets.org/about).

Sikh Coalition. 2017. "#LetSikhsServe Adds 5 New Accommodations." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2017/letsikhsserve-adds-5-new-accommodations/).

Sikh Coalition. 2019a. "In Memory of Deputy Dhaliwal." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved October 29, 2020 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2019/memory-deputy-dhaliwal/).

Sikh Coalition. 2019b. "Sikhism Police Training Reaches 30,000." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2019/sikhism-police-training-reaches-30000/).

Sikh Coalition. 2020a. "Sikh Coalition's Policy Principles Regarding Civil Rights and Law Enforcement."

Sikh Coalition. 2020b. "Steps Forward for Sikhs in Law Enforcement." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/blog/2020/steps-forward-sikhs-law-enforcement/).

Sikh Coalition. n.d.-a. "About Us." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/about-us/).

Sikh Coalition. n.d.-b. "Sikh Advocate Academy." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/our-work/empowering-the-community/sikh-advocate-academy/).

Sikh Coalition. n.d.-c. "Sikhs in the U.S. Armed Forces." *Sikh Coalition*. Retrieved December 9, 2020 (https://www.sikhcoalition.org/our-work/ending-employment-discrimination/sikhs-in-the-u-s-armed-forces/).

Singh, Anantdeep. 2014. "Caste and Marriage Among the Sikhs of Southern California: Observations from a Statistical Analysis." *Sikh Formations* 10(3):393–424. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2014.979676.

Singh, Balbir K. 2019. "Decoding Dress: Countersurveillance Poetics and Practices Under Permanent War." *Surveillance & Society* 17(5):662–80.

Singh, Bhupinder. 2020. "Aspects of Sikh Axiology: Three Essays." *Sikh Formations* 16(4):448–64. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2020.1804196.

Singh, Dawinder S. Sidhu, Rajwant. 2018. "Cultural Appropriation Not Always a Bad Thing." *The Baltimore Sun*, March 18.

Singh, Gajendra. 2014. *The Testimonies of Indian Soldiers and the Two World Wars: Between Self and Sepoy*. A&C Black.

Singh, Gurnam. 2006. "Sikhism's Emancipatory Discourses: Some Critical Perspectives." *Sikh Formations* 2(2):135–51. doi: 10.1080/17448720601061382.

Singh, Guru Gobind. 2003. *Sri Dasam Granth Sahib Translation*. Birmingham, U.K. : Amritsar.

Singh, Jaideep. 2002. "'No Sikh Jose': Sikh American Community Mobilization and Interracial Coalition Building in the Construction of a Sacred Site." *UCLA Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 8(1):173–201.

Singh, Jaideep. 2013. "A NEW AMERICAN APARTHEID Racialized, Religious Minorities in the Post-9/11 Era." *Sikh Formations* 9(2):115–44. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2013.822138.

Singh, Jasmine K. 2008. "'Everything I'm Not Made Me Everything I Am': The Racialization of Sikhs in the United States." *Asian Pacific American Law Journal* 14(1):33.

Singh, Kanwalroop Kaur. 2017. "Queering Colonial Power: Sikh Resistance in the Ghadr Movement." *Sikh Formations* 13(4):268–90. doi: 10.1080/17448727.2017.1309756.

Singh, Kanwalroop Kaur. 2020. "Sikh Sovereignty as Food Sovereignty: Toward a Sikh Jurisprudence to Fight Climate Change in Punjab." *UCLA Law Review*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://www.uclalawreview.org/sikh-sovereignty-as-food-sovereignty-toward-a-sikh-jurisprudence-to-fight-climate-change-in-punjab/).

Singh, Khushwant. 1963. *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-1964*. Princeton University Press.

Singh, Khushwant. 1966. *A History of the Sikhs: 1839-1964*. Princeton University Press.

Singh, Naureen. 2020a. "In 1979, My Dad Began an Application to Serve in the U.S. Army. He Didn't Look like a Typical Candidate." *LinkedIn*. Retrieved December 9, 2020 (https://www.linkedin.com/posts/naureensingh_in-1979-my-dad-began-an-application-to-serve-activity-6686071176940331008-d4wW/).

Singh, Naureen. 2020b. "Meet Naureen Singh: Second Lieutenant, U.S. Air Force."

Singh, Prabhjot, and Simran Jeet Singh. 2013. "Let Sikhs Serve in the U.S. Military." *The Hill*, August 5.

Siṅgha, Kirapāla. 2004. *Janamsakhi Tradition: An Analytical Study*. Singh Brothers.

Smith-Tran, Alicia. 2020. "Exploring the Benefits and Drawbacks of Age Disclosure among Women Faculty of Color." *Teaching Sociology* 48(1):3–12. doi: 10.1177/0092055X19869983.

Soboslai, John. 2018. "Sikh Self-Sacrifice and Religious Representation during World War I." *Religions* 9(2):55. doi: 10.3390/rel9020055.

Sohi, Seema. 2013. "Repressing the 'Hindu Menace': Race, Anarchy, and Indian Anticolonialism." in *The Sun Never Sets: South Asian Migrants in an Age of U.S. Power*, edited by V. Bald, M. Chatterji, S. Reddy, and M. Vimalassery. NYU Press.

Sohi, Seema. 2014. *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*. Oxford University Press.

Solis, Josiah. 2020. "Asad Talal, Secular Translations: Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason." *Critical Research on Religion* 0(0):1–4. doi: 10.1177/2050303219900235.

Spade, Dean. 2015. *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*. Duke University Press.

Spieldenner, Andrew R., and Shinsuke Eguchi. 2019. "Different Sameness: Queer Autoethnography and Coalition Politics." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 00(0):1–10. doi: 10.1177/1532708619884962.

Stoler, A. L. 2011. "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France." *Public Culture* 23(1):121–56. doi: 10.1215/08992363-2010-018.

Stoler, Ann Laura. 2010. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press.

Streets, Heather. 2004. *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*. Manchester University Press.

Swet Shop Boys. 2016. *Shoes Off*.

Tatla, Darshan Singh. 2004. "The Rural Roots of the Sikh Diaspora." *People on the Move: Punjabi Colonial, and Post-Colonial Migration* 45–59.

The Sikh Research Institute. n.d. "State of the Panth - Reports on Sikh Matters for a Global Sangat | Sikh Research Institute (SikhRI)." Retrieved January 24, 2022 (https://sikhri.org/sotp).

@theNSYF. 2022. "Deep Sidhu Has Died in a Car Accident." *Twitter*. Retrieved March 3, 2022 (https://twitter.com/theNSYF/status/1493622648139620356).

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime." Pp. 169–87 in *Bringing the State Back In*, edited by P. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer, and T. Skocpol. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tomaselli, Keyan G. 2001. "Contradictory Subjectivity: Movies, Apartheid, and Postmodernism." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 1(2):139–56. doi: 10.1177/153270860100100201.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press.

UK Punjab Heritage Association, and University of Greenwich. 2021. "Punjab and World War One Archive." *Punjab and World War One*. Retrieved March 2, 2022 (http://punjabww1.com/).

Veerhood. n.d. "Discussion with UK Singhs & Kaur."

Vimalassery, Manu, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein. 2016. "Introduction: On Colonial Unknowing." *Theory & Event* 19(4).

Wagner, Kim A. 2016. "'Calculated to Strike Terror': The Amritsar Massacre and the Spectacle of Colonial Violence." *Past & Present* 233(1):185–225. doi: 10.1093/pastj/gtw037.

Walby, Kevin T. 2002. "Institutional Ethnography and Surveillance Studies: An Outline for Inquiry." *Surveillance & Society* 3(2/3):158–72. doi: 10.24908/ss.v3i2/3.3498.

Walia, Amarjit Singh. 2014. "I Lived through the Sikh Riots—and 30 Years Later, I'm Not Ready to Forgive or Forget — Quartz India." *Quartz India*, October 31.

Walker, Franchesca. 2012. "'Descendants of a Warrior Race': The Maori Contingent, New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, and Martial Race Myth, 1914–19." *War & Society* 31(1):1–21. doi: 10.1179/204243411X13201386799091.

Wang, Jackie. 2012. "Against Innocence: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Safety." *LIES: A Journal of Materialist Feminism* 1:145–72.

Warwick & Warwick Auctioneers of Collectables. n.d. "A Guide to Indian Mutiny Medals." *Warwick and Warwick*. Retrieved December 11, 2020 (https://www.warwickandwarwick.com/news/guides/a-guide-to-indian-mutiny-medals).

We Are Sikhs. 2018. *Sikh Neighbors (Funny)*.

Weber, Max. 1919."Politics as a Vocation," January 28.

Wężniejewska, Paulina, Oskar Szwabowski, Colette Szczepaniak, and Marcin Pławski. 2019. "The Praise of Collective Autoethnography:" *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 00(0):1–14. doi: 10.1177/1532708619863447.

White, Hayden. 1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. JHU Press.

White, Sue. 2001. "Auto-Ethnography as Reflexive Inquiry: The Research Act as Self-Surveillance." Pp. 100–115 in *Qualitative Research in Social Work*. 6 Bonhill Street, London England EC2A 4PU United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.

@WilliamMParis. 2021. "I Think This Is Why I Focus on Utopia." *Twitter*. Retrieved July 1, 2021 (https://twitter.com/WilliamMParis/status/1375814887025344513).

Williams, Corey, and Tammy Webber. 2019. "Slain Deputy Devoted Life to Sikh Faith, Serving Others." *AP News*, September 28.

Wisser, Katherine M., and Joel A. Blanco-Rivera. 2016. "Surveillance, Documentation and Privacy: An International Comparative Analysis of State Intelligence Records." *Archival Science* 16(2):125–47. doi: 10.1007/s10502-015-9240-x.

Wynter, Sylvia. 2003. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3(3):257–337. doi: 10.1353/ncr.2004.0015.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40(3):197–214. doi: 10.1080/00313220600769331.