

# **Racialized Migrant Women: Experiences of Community Organizers**

by

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## Ethics Statement



The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the experiences and identities of self-identified racialized migrant women working in community advocacy sectors. Using feminist critical race theories and approaches, I conducted three community conversations and three interviews where participants explored an array of topics including Indigeniety, self-care, sexism, homophobia and settler – migrant relationships. This research includes two themes: 1) the implication of migrant bodies in the systemic dispossession of Indigenous Nations by exploring the ways in which we (as migrants working in advocacy sectors) contribute to the solidification of colonial and neo-colonial narratives; and 2) offers a model of participatory feminist methods and approaches described in this work as a means to provide alternative ways of engaging migrant communities in research.

**Keywords:** Critical race theory; racialized migrant women; settler – migrant relationships; solidarity with indigenous peoples; participatory approaches

*Dedico este trabajo a mi madre Carmenza Neira Nempeque, a mis abuelas Barbara Herrera Cantor y Ana Jacinta Nempeque Quintero y a mi familia elegida, mi pareja Francisco y mis amigos y amigas quienes me apoyaron, me retaron y me dieron la fuerza necesaria para sobrepasar las barreras que encontré durante este trayecto.*

*I dedicate this work to my mother Carmenza Neira Nempeque, to my grandmothers Barbara Herrera Cantor and Ana Jacinta Nempeque Quintero, and to my chosen family, my partner Francisco and my friends who encouraged me, challenged me and gave me strength to overcome the challenges that I encountered throughout this journey.*

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I am eternally grateful to the women who participated in this study for making the time to share their knowledge, insights and reflections. Their passion and openness to contribute the perspectives and experiences of their social justice journeys made it possible for me to delve into these reflections in a more complex manner. Each participant brought unique contributions to the project and I am grateful they entrusted me to reflect and represent their voices.

In both community and academic work, I have an innumerable number of Indigenous and Racialized women who have paved the way for someone like me to be able to exist in these spaces. Whether I have been able to learn from them personally or through their activist or academic, I am acutely aware that this work would not have been possible without validating my experiences and feeding my soul through their work.

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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

### 1.1 Context

Through this research project, my aim is to create a space for self-identified racialized migrant women activists and community workers to explore their wellbeing in relation to their experiences in community organizing framed in the context of the solidification of a 'white settler society' (see 1.2). In addition to an analysis and reflection of the findings, this project seeks to provide concrete tools for migrant communities to engage in conversation and action about some of the particular challenges racialized women face when engaging in social and migrant justice activism.

Racialized migrant women face particular challenges when working with immigrant and refugee communities while navigating interlocking systems of oppression based on their own experiences and identities. According to Ng (1987) in canada<sup>1</sup>, migrant women have been constructed as by-products and commodities that become part of a labour market system in which community agencies play an important role in their exploitation. Moreover, encounters with oppression need to be explored on the understanding that they are rooted in the establishment of colonial, imperialist and neo-liberal states, which sustain their hegemony through racial and colonial practices (Razack, Smith and Thobani, 2010). As such, there is a strong connection between the commoditization of migrant women's labour and the work they perform in community settings.

<sup>1</sup> canada, vancouver and other names of colonial places and languages are not capitalized intentionally as a means of resistance to the modern nation state and the legacies of colonization in our language and culture attributing different levels of significance between colonial and traditional terminology. In MS word, auto correct automatically capitalizes english, canada and other colonial names while correcting Indigenous nations' and languages.

Engaging self-identified racialized migrant women, refers to the unique realities they face when doing activist and/or community work. Hence, spaces that explore what Spivak calls *epistemic violence* (colonial and systemic power oppression) faced by racialized migrant women advocates is instrumental when reflecting on some of the successes and challenges in community organizing (Razack, 2010). Exploring these women's experiences whilst navigating advocacy circles provides insights about relationships of power and privilege amongst community groups as implications of those power relations are often reproduced even if the end goal is to critique, resist and transform them (Smith, 2010). These associations, as Mahrouse (2010) describes them, illustrate the dynamics amongst community groups seeking to challenge systemic oppression but also serve as sites that reveal the extent in which neo-colonial white hegemonic systems impede shifts in power relations (169).

## **1.2 Setting the Ground: White Settler Society**

This research project is rooted in contextualizing Canada as a white settler society, a concept used by Sherene Razack to refer to the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous populations as a means to establish Europeans on non-European soil (2002, p. 1). Within the context of a white settler nation building project, citizenship and immigration policies are strategically used to regulate the flow of bodies, in a way that further displaces Indigenous Nations and advances imperialist and neo-colonial projects across Canada. Historically, the displacement, land-appropriation and genocide of Indigenous peoples has been further reinforced through the imposition of borders and other confining systems inherent to colonial state formation such as education, political, immigration, etc. Additionally, as Razack states, the expansion of a white settler society is structured by racial hierarchies that run the overall labour apparatus, thus allowing for the gender exploitation of Indigenous and racialized migrants (2002, p1). However, the complexity of the systemic dispossession of Indigenous Nations across Canada also implicates migrant bodies as complicit in solidifying colonial and neo-colonial projects. This angle of analysis is instrumental to this project as it provides a foundation to understand Canada as a white settler state constructed on what Sunera Thobani (2007) refers to as

the *exaltation process*, in which specific characteristics are meant to differentiate the nation and its subjects from each other.

In general, racialized migrant bodies face different levels of exploitation both in Canada and in their countries of origin. However, despite the extent of the oppression and displacement that racialized migrant peoples have endured from the Canadian state and other colonial powers, both nationally and overseas, our participation in re-enforcing systems that further dispossess Indigenous peoples in Canada is undeniable. In the book *Feminism For Real*, Jessica Yee (Danforth) calls this 'truth telling', based on Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred's quote "There needs to be struggle in order to lay out a path to co-existence, and that the process of being uncomfortable is essential for non-Indigenous people to move away from being enemy, to adversary, to ally." (2011, p11). Thus, recognizing the impact of settler colonialism is an essential first step towards exploring the experiences of the racialized migrant women who participated in this project whether they migrated willingly or unwillingly to the land.

Acknowledging our presence as migrant settlers does not negate our past and present encounters with violence, dispossession and genocide at the hands of white-settler colonial powers in our home lands; and the multiple levels of oppression and exploitation we face as we re-build our lives in this land. Conversely, establishing this connection, does allow us to expose the state's use of immigration and settlement systems as tools that reinforce 'white settler' nation building and sustain racial hierarchies by mythologizing settlement, citizenship and integration into 'Canadian society' as the "ultimate immigrant goal."

### 1.3 Terminology

The terminology I use in my research will undoubtedly reflect social and political dynamics some of which align with the intents of this research and others that do not. For the purposes of this proposal, I use the term racialized migrants in order to encompass bodies of immigrant and refugee populations whose experiences and interactions are affected by a constructed notion of what Edward Said refers to as 'otherness' based on perceived 'racial/ethnic categories' (Murji and Solomos, 2005). Moreover, although

experiences of immigrant and refugee populations are vastly different and not interchangeable, I have decided to encompass them with the term migrant. Although there is a vast difference between those who migrated willingly and those who came seeking refuge I use the term migrant for ease of reference. However, one has to take into account participants' migration journeys when analyzing their particular experiences. Thus, throughout this research I have made a conscious effort to be aware of unique experiences as a result of the migration processes participants might have had; but utilized the term migrant to include those who might have been born in this land but who might identify under the migration experience of their families. Finally, I use the terms activists, community workers and advocates interchangeably to refer to the particular ways in which racialized migrant women enact their struggles to pursue transformations at the community, organizational, systemic and political levels. The terminology used in this thesis is closely linked to Mohanty's (2003) definition of the *Third World*, where the socioeconomic and historical experiences cannot be delineated by geography or identifiers but rather by the constructs that *Othered* them.

Self-identification throughout this research process was instrumental for participants to make choices about how their experiences and identities are reflected in this study. Although in the initial call out I included *self-identification* to be inclusive of Trans women whose experiences might otherwise be discarded, the term was taken beyond gender identity by the participants, as it provided flexibility in the identification process of the women in relation to their migration experiences and community work. As a researcher, I celebrate the unintentional openness that self-identification provided for the participants, however, I would also like to evaluate in more detail some of my shortcomings in ensuring that Trans racialized migrant women took part of this project. Given the small scope of this project, I could dismiss the absence of Trans folks in this project as a reflection of the transphobia that permeates all areas of society including social justice and community work settings. However, to do so would signify an erasure of the activist, political and theoretical work that Trans racialized people conduct in social justice settings as a means of survival and resistance to the multiple systems of oppression they face (Retzliff, 2007 in Aizure, Cotten, Balzer, Ochoa & Vidal-Ortiz, 2014). The absence of self-identified Trans women in this project, rather indicates my inability to establish long lasting relationships, allyships and solidarities with trans communities who most likely do not see my

involvement with migrant justice communities as inclusive of trans realities. Lugones' (2012, 77) concept of the 'coloniality of gender' articulates the ways in which gender and sex are seen in a binary that forgoes the multiplicity of identities, experiences and knowledge that can only solidify social justice movements as they are entangled with the capitalists, racists and gendering systems colonially imposed (Aizure, Cotten, Balzer, Ochoa & Vidal-Ortiz, 2014). It is thus one of the shortcomings of this project that the experiences recounted in this work fail to include the realities of Trans racialized migrant women in migrant justice organizing.

## **1.4 Project Rationale**

Overall within the racialized migrant justice communities of which I am a part, there is a profound mistrust and history of damaging interactions with academic research projects. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states, this is in part due to the ways in which research has historically been used to exploit Indigenous and racialized people by extracting and appropriating individual and communal experiences, ideas and knowledge used to sustain colonial legacies and hierarchies of power and oppression (Smith, 2012). My own personal involvement as a participant in several research projects, both as a migrant youth and community worker, allowed me to experience firsthand the ways in which researchers might appropriate my encounters with trauma and oppression, and use them to build their profiles and careers to reach 'expert' status. Thus, I decided to pursue a graduate degree in part due to my frustrations with research projects, which commissioned 'experts' far removed from our realities, to investigate a particular experience of migrant communities. In other words '...self-designated experts aimed to extract and retell [our] stories on and in their own terms' (Pratt in Kindon et al., 2007, p95). The outcomes of the interaction between researchers and me, my peers, and the youth that I worked with, resulted in very disrespectful, harmful and tokenizing approaches. Moreover, these research projects were often framed in ways that advanced political and financial interests of various levels of government actors, individuals and/or NGOs, sometimes at the expense of accurately reflecting the realities, complexities and diversities of the communities being researched.

There is tremendous trust that goes into sharing personal stories and experiences with anyone. Thus, the responsibility is on the research bodies to engage in a process that is collaborative, serious, respectful and that does not reduce participants' stories to data used to confirm academic theories or ideas. However, engaging in academic research also brings to light the ways race and 'otherness' is produced and regulated, which often silences and invisibilizes the knowledge Indigenous and racialized communities possess (Henry and Tator, 2009). Thus adding another level of complexity to the power-relations constructed by the neo-colonial project in academic narratives.

Problematizing academic research as one of the incentives for this thesis, does not exclude this project from engaging in the extractive practices I outlined above. Regardless of the approaches or the methodologies used, ultimately as researchers we have a certain degree of control over the questions, design, collection, analysis and documentation to help us convey particular ideas or expose challenges. In a sense, all research is constructed to transmit a message desired either by the investigators or by those who commissioned it. As academics, we make very poor revolutionaries because of the ways in which we are institutionalized in order to navigate academic settings. As Nicole Ouimette (February 10, 2014) states '[t]he revolution will not be cited' and I will not claim this thesis to be any different.

However, regardless of the limitations that I have thus far identified in this section, my hope is that this project is able to provide small insights of alternative ways of molding academic research into community settings. To do the work I do in academia, it is important to recognize the privileges I carry for being a part of an institution that legitimizes some ways of knowing over others, but I also have to remind myself that I am not personally responsible for the institutional failures (Razack, Smith and Thobani 2010, p27). The best I can do is to try to refrain from engaging in that expert mentality that permeates the academic world and to ensure that I continue resisting unequal relations of power both within my university and within my work as a community organizer. Like Razack, Smith and Thobani (2010, p26), I believe that the academic spaces I occupy have the potential to contribute to meaningful transformations and to destabilize power, otherwise I would be unable to continue engaging in academic work.

Finally, this research project served as a chance to create a unique space in which we were able to come together as racialized migrant women to share our frustrations, challenges, hopes and provide support for one another.

## **1.5 Research Goal and Development**

When I started my graduate degree, my initial intention was to explore how changes in immigration policy in Canada between 2010 - 2013 have impacted the experiences of racialized migrant women working as advocates with immigrant and refugee communities. Motivation for this research came from my own experience coming to Canada as a Government Assisted Refugee in 2000 through the Source Country class program. This inspiration was strengthened by my ten years of community experience engaging in migrant rights advocacy and community work with diverse groups of migrants in Coast Salish Territories (Vancouver Lower Mainland) through various collectives and not-for-profit organizations. My desire to explore this topic began after the elimination of the Source Country class in 2011, in which displaced persons could apply for refugee protection at a Canadian embassy from their countries of origin. This policy change meant that my presence in this land could no longer be possible. That possibility was a strong incentive to organize campaigns to bring community awareness about the elimination of the Source Country class category. Consequently, my interest grew when in 2012 the Conservative government introduced omnibus Bill C-31 *Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act*, which placed a strong focus on penalizing certain types of refugees and discouraged immigration to Canada particularly by racialized migrants. However, as this project moved forward, the focus shifted away from immigration policy into the experiences of the group of racialized migrant women involved in community organizing who participated in the project. Thus, their reflections about the successes and challenges faced in social justice settings became the primary focus of my research.

## **1.6 Positionality**

Discussions about neutrality and objectivity are common in social sciences research (Harstock 1987; Haraway 1991; Rose 1997). Such debates, have sought to

explore dynamics of power between researchers and participants throughout the design, collection, analysis and presentation stages of the research (Mullings 1999, p337). Through those examinations of power, the knowledge of the researcher is thus seen as constrained by their ontological and epistemological realities. Therefore, an important step in conducting research in the social sciences has become the self-reflexive process where we examine our multi-layered positionalities in relation to the research (Alcoff 1994). This exercise has become instrumental in understanding that objectivity is both irrelevant and impossible in research settings.

As this thesis is rooted mainly within a feminist critical race framework, establishing positionality becomes central in recognizing and resisting, rather than reproducing elements of power and oppression that structure academic research (Narayan 1988; hooks 1990). Therefore, discussing the ways in which I might influence respondents offers some unique opportunities to examine the ways in which I navigate multiple locations throughout this project (Brown and Strega 2005).

I engage in this research as a middle class, academically privileged, racialized migrant woman, who for over twelve years has been involved in different initiatives advocating for migrant justice rights but who in most recent years has become gradually distanced from community organizing to pursue a graduate degree. There are of course many more complexities to my identity, some explored in Chapter 4 and others, which will not be addressed due to length limitations. However, my life journey does not start with my arrival as a refugee to Coast Salish Territories, thus in attempting to describe who I am, I find it important to state that I was born in Muisca territory (in bogotá, colombia). As with most *Mestiza*<sup>2</sup> communities in latin america I do not identify as Indigenous, though I have roots that link my ancestry not too far back to Muisca<sup>3</sup> and Pijao<sup>4</sup> Nations. I made a conscious choice to include this aspect of my identity in this work since I see a necessity to discuss the experiences of migrant communities in canada by addressing colonialism,

<sup>2</sup> A racial identity used to describe those who are born mixed from both Indigenous and spanish ancestry.

<sup>3</sup> The Muisca Nation comes from a Chibcha speaking territory in the northern part of South America, predominantly in the provinces of Cundinamarca and Boyaca.

<sup>4</sup> In Pre-Columbian times, Pijao Nations inhabited the Central highlands in Colombia now known as the Huila, Quindío and Tolima departments.



displacement and the establishment of a white settler society as relevant factors to these experiences. However, at this moment of my life, I do not identify myself as Indigenous because I carry with me many systemic privileges that *Mestizaje* comes with in Colombia and because I only found out about the make-up of my ancestry in 2014. In addition, I have never experienced the world with any conscious connection to socio-historic realities of Muisca or Pijao Nations, hence though it might change in the future, at this moment any claims to Indigeneity would feel like appropriating an experience to which I am unfamiliar. Moreover, those overlaps of colonialism in my identity supersede my presence as a settler in Turtle Island, as I interpret my very existence as a direct product of colonization given that I would not physically exist had Spanish colonizers not been found by Indigenous Nations in the Caribbean Sea and later on welcomed throughout Latin America. In addition, the extent of colonial and neo-colonial legacies also intertwines with my displacement from the lands where I was born and grew up in and has direct connotations of my experiences first, as a refugee which to me is not a permanent label, and second as a migrant settler. Furthermore, I am aware of the epistemic but also academic privilege I possess because of my tumultuous engagement with academia (Narayan 1988, p35). Thus, my encounters with systems of oppression are indeed as layered and complex as my experiences with positions of privilege in relation to the racialized migrant women who participated in this research. Hence, my positionality flows between *insider-outsider* statuses as an academic racialized migrant woman involved in community organizing, conducting research to fulfill a graduation requirement but also aiming to create tools that can support community-organizing efforts. Described by Collins (1999, p86), the *outsider-within* identity links positionality to a contextual social justice framework where navigating social inequities and oppression are part of my daily encounters.

Furthermore, there are particular insights that as a researcher one understands more deeply than when one is situated as an outsider to the communities being researched (Harding 2003). Complexities in power relations are certainly inevitable in all research projects, as past experiences, histories and understandings shape the way we conduct research (Moss and Dyck 2003) from its inception to its analysis and presentation. Hence, positioning myself as an insider in regards to my organizing with migrant communities but as an outsider in relation to my academic work provides me with an opportunity to create a discourse that addresses the dichotomy of insider vs outsider

relations in community research. A dichotomy that exposes the complexity of the relationships and power dynamics involved. As Kerstetter (2012) affirms, much of the theorizing about insider power and positionality in research has focused on situations where researchers have relative power (99). However, positioning one's self in a purely dichotomous manner implies that these attributes are fixed rather than constantly negotiated (Kerstetter 2012, p100). Therefore, my positionality as both insider and outsider within this project is not static. For instance, I am an outsider to the group of women who participated in the research as I represent an institution that is far removed from their communities but I am also an outsider within the university because my histories and experiences are not at the core of the knowledge taught and produced. Conversely, I could be seen as an insider within the institution because of my credentials or academic entitlements but I could also be perceived as an insider because of the work and relations I have built with different communities of racialized migrant women over the years.

In addition, in feminist research, positioning oneself as a researcher has focused on reflecting on individual identities such as gender, race, class, sexuality, etc., in relation to participants. However, rarely do researchers position themselves in the context of the research to address the tensions that arise because of transgressing and often-conflicting spaces. Therefore, positioning myself in this research will result in an evolving process that might change as the chapters' progress. For instance, Rose (1997) referred to the existing power relations between researchers and those being researched as fluid interactions full of risks. Regardless, neither statuses set me up with a particular expertise but do provide an avenue to explore narratives, literature and tools to imagine ways of conducting academic research in support of community organizing efforts.

Moreover, in relation to positionality, the labels we chose for ourselves might intersect but even then, the ontological way we interact with those experiences will differ based on the language we use and on the encounters with others and with systems that shape our lives. Thus, though I trust that there was some comfort from the group of participants to share with me some of their perspectives, I am also acutely aware of the ways in which people might have refrained from expressing their opinions or experiences because of those shared commonalities. I wish to conclude this section by affirming that in locating myself in this research, I am not essentializing my identity, these are merely

labels that I have chosen to provide context about myself in relation to this research in a language that is limiting and reductive. Identities that have informed the design, collection and analysis of this data.

## **1.7 Theoretical Frameworks**

Since the early eighteenth century, race has been constructed as a socio political instrument throughout the West to categorize societies, cultures and individuals from 'primitive' and 'barbarians' to the 'modern' and 'civilized' (Arendt 1944). Thus, this research is constructed under the premises of Critical Race Feminist Theory (CRFT), a branch of Critical Race Theory, which clusters a host of theoretical standpoints in hopes of transforming relationships of power in relation to race (Delgado and Stefanic 2001). CRFT aims to explore the ways in which gender and race are socially constructed by exposing interlocking systems of oppression (Razack 2010, p9). In Canada, Critical Race Feminist Theory engages in discussions about the implications for women of colour as migrant settlers in a white settler colonial state and challenges the ways in which experiences around migration and citizenship are examined. More importantly, CRFT is rooted on the powerful community and academic contributions that Indigenous women have brought forward to expose Canada as a white settler society and to reflect on historic and ongoing colonial practices (Razack, Smith and Thobani 2010). The unique features that CRFT offers to this project are the flexibility of including multiple sites, identities, experiences and reflections based on dismantling white, hegemonic, capitalist colonial systems of oppression. According to Razack, Smith and Thobani (2010, p41), CRFT scholarship encompasses various fields of research across many disciplines from around the world. I am mainly guided by CRF scholars who engage in work of Indigeneity, intersectionality, identity politics and critical multiculturalism, in order to develop a critical analysis of the findings in relation to wider issues of migration, racism, hetero-patriarchy and colonialism. For me, their work has been vital in understanding the intersections of oppression that affect the experiences of racialized migrant women and to build solidarity amongst Indigenous and racialized communities to continue resisting, thriving and surviving.

## **1.8 Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis contains 5 chapters. In chapter two I review the literature on racialization, decolonization and migrant justice in Canada to provide a context for this research project. Critical race theory and exploring the formation of a white settler society offers an analysis of power dynamics amongst intersectional communities and individuals in social justice sectors. I argue that it is essential in any analysis or examination of migrant related experiences to start at the root of our identities and locate ourselves amid the fluid matrix of multiple identities to recognize our relationships or lack thereof to the Indigenous nations whose lands we inhabit. Since process to me is as important as the outcomes, chapter three reviews in detail the methods, tools and approaches used in the collection of the research data. As such, a strong focus is placed on the participatory nature of the research process as I try to hold myself accountable by being as transparent as possible of my successes and shortcomings in this research project. My interpretation of the participants' contributions is summarized in chapter four where reflections on migration, micro aggressions, settler perspectives and community accountability are explored. The final chapter, chapter five, draws on general conclusions of the research, reflects upon limitations and future research opportunities and provides some tools for social and migrant justice communities to better support the experiences of racialized migrant women.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Racialized migrant women**

There is a small but growing body of research conducted on communities of racialized migrant women across the vancouver Lower Mainland. In this chapter, I review the literature from key fields that have informed my approach to this research.

Scholars such as Dauvergne (2012), Zaman (2010), Sharma (2006), Bannerji (2000) and Sadrehashemi (2012) discuss the importance of centering research in the experiences of racialized migrant women within different subfields (employment, health, access to education, etc). However, some of the studies that do focus on said demographics, such as Moussa's (1998), Stetz' (2000) and Yohani and Hagen's (2010), tend to position racialized migrant women as victims in need of services rather than as women with resiliency and agency. For instance, Metropolis BC, one of the largest sources of research on migrant populations in BC published between 3-4 papers per year between 2001 – 2012 on the experiences of racialized migrant women most of them taking a needs based approach in their findings. Research contributions focusing on the needs of racialized migrant women are instrumental in doing advocacy and influencing policy to improve the lives of migrant women. However, studies that only focus on the needs of a population rather than on exploring their experiences through an asset-based approach have the potential to feed off rescue narratives, victimize racialized migrant women and identify systemic intervention as the only viable solution to the issues exposed.

#### **2.2 Research on immigrant and refugee women in the vancouver Lower Mainland**

Research on immigrant and refugee racialized women in the vancouver Lower Mainland is limited in scope and quantity. Most of the publications found from 2000 onwards focus on the socio-economic needs of migrant women often centering on specific

ethnocultural groups. For instance, exploring the experiences of Chinese immigrant women in Vancouver, Ling (2011) examines their social and economic integration due to language barriers; Chiu (2005) focuses on the challenges of job transferability and Frisby (2011) looks at their physical activity. In addition, Bigdeli (2007) offers an insight into language challenges faced by professional Iranian women. These studies neglect to engage in systemic conversations of racialization and racism while offering alternatives to those challenges through a needs based lens. Other studies that engage in more complex examinations of racialized migrant women identities and experiences include: Pratt's (2003) work on the experiences of domestic migrant workers; Han's (2009) research on the impact of Citizenship and Immigration policies; Chan's (2008) exploration of immigrant women's fears of criminal victimization; Dossa's (1988, 2009) work on the marginalization of Ismaili and Muslim women and Jiwani's (2001) study on the multiple challenges that immigrant women of colour face accessing the health care system; none of these studies focus on community workers or those engaging in social activism.

There were however, two research reports found where racialized migrant women in the Vancouver Lower Mainland served as key informants, and only one of those focused on women's experiences in relation to the community work they engaged in. The first one is Escolar and Nizher's (2008) report on engaging immigrant women in the legal system from the perspective of community workers. The second one, Lee's (1999) study that explores migrant women's experiences in relation to the organizations where they work and examines the working conditions of the women as they constitute the majority of workers in settlement, multicultural and immigrant serving sectors. The high level of dissatisfaction and frustration from working in the sector is highlighted by Lee's (1999) study where she places emphasis in the temporary and exploitative nature of the work. Although these publications involve migrant women as community workers and as research subjects, there is a clear gap on studies that focus on the overall experiences of racialized migrant women engaged in community work and activism.

## **2.3 Racialization in research**

Teelucksingh affirms that racialized migrant women populations are often excluded from the possibility of accessing better paying jobs, affordable housing, educational

opportunities and other resources (2006). This type of exclusion is understood by Spivak (2012) as a process of subalternization where subjects, in this case racialized migrant women, do indeed speak, organize and resist but where state and non-state actors refuse to recognize their metaphorical voice. For Spivak, the subaltern individual is defined as one who is cut off from the structures of the state and/or social mobility; Spivak calls for the building of infrastructure on the part of the state so that voices that have been disengaged from the discussion may have an impact in transforming inequitable social relations that often result in oppression.

Most of the research on migrant women in Canada centers in one specific issue or gap identified do not alter the subaltern state of those populations. Thus, participatory and asset based research approaches have the potential to amplify those voices by lending the academic legitimacy that a university or research institute provides. For example, while Teelucksingh (2006) theorizes experiences and processes of racialization in Canadian urban spaces, other scholars such as Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou & Moussa (2008) challenge dominant forms of extractive research by working with participatory approaches that give space to racialized migrant women to speak to the complexities of their experiences and to represent themselves as agents of their own narratives.

## **2.4 Racializing immigration policies 1860s – 2012**

In 1862 the first group of British women arrived in British Columbia under a project that sought to 'whiten' and 'feminize' the west coast (Epp, Iacoveta and Swyripa 2004, p1). From then on, the arrival of newcomer women was based in very overt racist policies where the immigration of those categorized as 'mothers of the state', white, Christian women was encouraged; while those coming from 'non-preferred' races encountered numerous restrictions entering Canada (Thobani 2000, p16). In 1867 Canada's Prime Minister John A. Macdonald first stated, that the Aryan race would only be maintained by further marginalizing Indigenous peoples and ensuring the exclusion of racialized immigrants in order to ascertain a 'white man's country' (Dua 2006, p5; "Commentary: Macdonald's white supremacist views", 2012). Moreover, in 1908 Mackenzie King as Deputy-Minister of Labour, affirmed:

[t]hat Canada should desire to restrict immigration from the Orient is regarded as natural, that Canada should remain a white man's country is believed to be not only desirable for economic and social reasons but highly necessary on political and national grounds (Price 2007, p70).

Beyond the racial biases that Macdonald's and King's statements reveal, it is important also to note the invisibilization and dehumanization of Indigenous peoples who are not even considered to be a part of the nation even though they are the original inhabitants of the land. Moreover, their statements aid to expose the way in which Canada was built as a white nation through immigration policies thus, racializing Indigenous and 'undesirable' migrants. As a result, Canada implemented policies such as the *Gentlemen's Agreement* (1907), limiting the immigration of Japanese people to 400 per year; *The Continuous Journey Act* (1908), placing limitations particularly to people coming from Asia by requiring all immigrants to arrive directly from their countries of origin; and the *Chinese Exclusion Act* (1923) prohibiting Chinese people from migrating to Canada. Up until the 1960s and 70s overt racist policies dominated the regulation of immigrant bodies by categories of 'preferred' and 'non-preferred' races (Thobani 2000, p16).

In 1962, some of the racist language was removed and an emphasis on labour market and family reunification was instated (Thobani 2000, p17). The implementation of the *Immigration Act* of 1976, also known as the point system is seen as the official end of racist immigration policies in Canada. This shift officially institutionalized changes to remove overt racist language from immigration policies but also reinforced other discriminatory categories (i.e. classist, ableist, homophobic, etc). Under this *Act*, family, the independent and refugee classes emerged as the main official immigration categories in Canada (Thobani 1999, p11). Despite the non-racist perceptions of the *Act*, scholars such as Abu-Laban (1998); Das Gupta (1995) and Jakubowski (1997) point at the disproportionate processing and recruitment of immigrants coming from countries with large demographics of white populations and the biased manner in which point allocation and selection of potential migrants was made by immigration officials. Thobani (2000, p19) notes the inability for any *Act* to meaningfully transform already established processes of racialization without challenging colonization and altering the white racial order of the nation. Thus, immigration policy was seen as a way to strengthen a white settler nation project by welcoming those with 'similar' socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics and



othering those who shook the foundation of a 'colonial construction of "canadian-ness"' (Thobani 1999, p12). Until the immigration changes of 2010, the biggest amendment to the 1976 *Act* came in 1993 (Kelley and Treilcock, 1998) where provincial labour markets and population targets were prioritized as part of the criteria to qualify to immigrate to canada.

In 2012, the House of Commons and the Senate approved the *Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act* mainly impacting those applying to come or stay in canada as refugees fleeing violence or persecution. Under this *Act*, refugee claimants overall have increasingly shorter timelines to submit their applications, limited options, if any, to appeal a rejection decision and for the most part are unable to work to sustain themselves their families, pay for medical care or cover legal expenses. The most significant change under this *Act* is the creation of the following two categories that has been assigned to some refugee claimants depending on set criteria: Designated Foreign Nationals (DFN), coming from countries deemed as 'safe' from violating human rights by the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration; and Designated Countries of Origin (DCO), arriving in groups of two or more, particularly if the group cannot be processed in a timely manner or if the Minister of Public Safety suspects that the asylum seekers came to canada with the support of human smugglers (Alboim and Cohl, 2012). Designating countries as being safe from ever producing refugees completely disregards how democratic institutions sometimes fail to protect minorities and communities at the margins (Lozano 2012, p8). Overall, the immigration policy changes implemented in the past few years have solidified the canadian immigration system as having some of the harshest policies for those migrating to the global north (Ibid. p9).

Understanding the historical development of immigration policy in canada is important when discussing migrant matters regardless of the subject or theme focus. However, the approach in this dissertation uses Walia's (2013) focus in linking border structures and policies to a larger understanding of systemic inequities of global economic disparities, colonialism, and hierarchies of oppression (p8).

## 2.5 Migrant justice anti-racism and decolonization

As initially established in Chapter 1, to effectively explore any experiences linked to migration one must first frame the topic in the context of a white settler nation (Razack 2002, p5) given that the connection between Canada as a 'nation of immigrants' and its formation as a white settler state is undeniable. Under this model, white citizens are seen as original owners of the land and in control of Indigenous peoples and all racial Others (Thobani 2000, p16).

Engaging in social justice activism and community work especially around migration without exploring the role of non-Indigenous bodies on the lands in which we work, live, study and form relationships on is both contradictory and detrimental to any type of socio-economic transformation. Canada as a nation was and continues to be undoubtedly constructed through the dispossession, exploitation and colonially imposed Canadian and US borders on Indigenous populations primarily in Turtle Island (Walia 2013, p7). In addition, as Spivak (2010) reminds us, the genocide of Indigenous peoples across the globe is not a historical event but it remains actively decimating Nations in the present. Andrea Smith (2006) also notes 'In fact [Indigenous people] must *always* be disappearing, in order to allow non-Indigenous peoples rightful claim over the land' (p68). As a result, those of us involved in migrant justice activism whose roots are not directly connected to Indigenous populations in Turtle Island must negotiate with the self and with our communities, the role and identities we *occupy* as settlers or visitors in the lands in which we live.

Antiracism work, in addition to an intersectional understanding of oppression, is key to migrant justice activism. Fiske and George (2006) ascertain the role that racialization plays in questioning the "Canadian authenticity" of those who do not conform to a racial identity ideal, regardless of their length of stay or Canadian birth certificate; that is white, male, without an accent, heterosexual, able bodied, of a Western religion, etc. (p147). The further away one performs or is perceived to be from that ideal, the more entitled those who are at the top of the racial hierarchy feel to 'Other' bodies they read as racialized.

Understanding the racialization process and ‘Othering’ of migrants highlights a colonial mentality where Indigenous peoples in Turtle Island are not seen as the original inhabitants. A land where speaking English is seen as Canadian but speaking an Indigenous language of the territories we inhabit is not required, and as per Walia (2013) where immigration policies legalize colonial impositions and land displacement of Indigenous peoples (p9). Therefore, several anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars, as outlined by Andrea Smith in Walia’s (2013) book, argue the following:

Immigration is an Indigenous issue because settler colonialism ultimately depends on an exclusivist concept of nation based on control and ownership of land and territory that is demarcated by borders. (xiii)

Under this conceptualization, individuals and groups seeking migrant social justice must understand that the racial injustices they fight against are rooted in racial oppression, white supremacy and settler colonialism in ways that further foster the division among interest groups organizing to transform society in similar ways (Walia 2013, p9). To engage in anti-racism work without establishing points of solidarity with Indigenous Nations both locally and overseas solidifies colonial agendas as the ultimate goal becomes achieving racial equality without meaningful systemic transformation (Lawrence and Dua 2005, p123).

As a result, decolonization is often used to connect anti-racist work to Indigenous sovereignty and solidarity. Decolonization is a framework that allows social justice groups to imagine a society where socio-economic systems are set by Indigenous peoples under principles of solidarity and allyship without the interference of white supremacist colonial mentalities. Walia (2013) affirms that “decolonizing grounds us in an understanding that we have already inherited generations of evolving wisdom about living freely and communally while stewarding the Earth from anticolonial summoning” (Walia 2013, p11). As such, anti-racist scholars Sium, Desai and Ritskes (2012) ascertain the multilayered aspects of decolonizing by encompassing material, psychological, ontological and spiritual forms to the process (xii). In addition, Sium, Desai and Ritskes (2012) also emphasize that engaging in frameworks of decolonization does not assume seamless alliances or acknowledges the complexities that imagining those possibilities entail.

In *Decolonizing Antiracism* (2008), Mi'kmaw scholar Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua explore anti-racist theory through an anti-colonial lens. The authors argue that migrant social justice activists have further contributed to the domination of Indigenous populations in Turtle Island by failing to engage in meaningful solidarity efforts when advocating for a more just system for people of colour (Lawrence & Dua, 2008). In this process, racialized folks seek fairer treatment by the systems that rule society without contesting the legitimacy of the empire built through the continuous genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Lawrence and Dua (2008) argue that a first step in creating meaningful allyships between racialized and Indigenous peoples is acknowledging migrant presence in the land as settlers who have certain privileges and who contribute to the solidification of a neo-colonial state, even if concurrently racialized people encounter marginalization from a white settler nationalist project (128, 133). Furthermore, Lawrence and Dua (2008) identify broad differences among migrant settlers as those brought to the land forcefully, those who arrived as migrant workers, and those who came seeking refuge have broadly different experiences of marginalization, violence and oppression than those who immigrated willingly (134). However, regardless of a person's migrant experience, they assert that our presence as racialized individuals can only be categorized as settlers in a land where nationhood and sovereignty is denied to Indigenous peoples (Lawrence & Dua 2008, p123). As such, even in the face of marginalization, racialized folks have been complicit with an ongoing colonial project where 'canadian' nationalist sentiments invisibilize Indigenous Nationhood (Lawrence & Dua 2008, p132). To further complicate the notion that all migration processes are forms of settler colonialism, I will refer to Sharma & Wright's (2008) journal and Walia's (2013) book on decolonization and imperial borders, where the authors differentiate between those who migrate as a result of displacement and those who do so seeking to colonize.

Displacement and precarious migration are products of colonialism and capitalism, and it would be a mistake to identify all those who migrate, whether as refugees or immigrant workers, as those seeking to colonize. (Walia 2013, p129).

Although this project has been established under the premise that as migrants to Turtle Island we are all settlers to this land, I would like to emphasize that I recognize that there is a clear distinction between different processes of migration and identities and how we visualize our presence on the territories we inhabit. By no means this work intends to

homogenize individual experiences or impose labels based on a person's identity or their migration journeys. It is my personal belief that Indigenous people from other territories are visitors and therefore communally or individually negotiate their relationships to the Nations in the territories in which they live. In addition, albeit migration journeys do alter the way migrants conceptualize our presence to the Indigenous peoples whose lands we *occupy*, we must also reflect on the fluidity of the migrant identities we chose to identify with as they tend to be temporary. For instance, the way in which I view my arrival into Coast Salish territories as a displaced refugee and a minor, differs from how I currently see my continual presence as a settler of this land because I benefit from the imperialist colonial system currently established in Canada. That is, I own a Canadian passport which allows me to more or less freely move across different territories, I pay taxes to an illegal state founded on the dispossession of Indigenous Nations land and I do not study or speak a word of hən̓q̓əmiñəm<sup>1</sup>.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methodology and Methodological Considerations**

Academic institutions are exclusionary sites where dominant groups' voices, experiences and histories are constantly legitimized (Verjee 2013, p23). Academic research has also served as a tool to establish neo-liberal white settler states, often disregarding the realities and experiences of racialized and Indigenous people. As a result, those at the margins have often been constructed as objects of studies while unable to become authors or knowledge creators of their own experiences (Brown and Strega 2005, p7). Positivists and empiricist approaches that create unequal power divisions in research, also contribute to the legitimization of the 'expert', 'knowledge producer' and 'marginalized knowledge source' (Vaz 1992, p70). As a response, this work takes on the draws upon elements of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1999) to explore the experiences of racialized migrant women in community organizing to generate theory based on their contributions rather than constructing the research with hypotheses to prove or disprove.

It is in light of intersecting processes of oppression identified by Spivak (2012), Teelucksingh (2006), Crenshaw (1999), Thobani (1999) and Lorde (1984), that positivist and essentializing approaches to data collection in research methodology become problematic. Researchers using positivists approaches tend to request information that is detached from the complex realities of racialized migrant women as if they were bystanders of their own experiences (Blackburn, 2009). Surveys and structured interviews search for a particular 'truth' to respond to a researcher's question without providing a space for research subjects to offer information they deem relevant or that provides a more holistic portrayal of their experiences. Moreover, positivistic approaches, have the potential to ignore key questions about ways in which knowledge is produced and whose interests it serves (Brown and Strega 2005, p7). In turn, this contributes to the reinforcement, homogenization and invisibilization of the multiple spaces racialized migrants transgress (Berger 2004; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, et al., 2008; Pratt and PWC 2007). As Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' (1998) states, using methodology and epistemology that accounts for a multiplicity of locations is instrumental in conducting ethical research. It is my belief that academic methodologies need to take into account the

experiences of racialized migrant women more respectfully. In his study of *Refugee Community Oral Histories*, Gabriel (2008) emphasizes the importance of using methodology that maintains the voices of research participants at the forefront. Therefore, I have attempted to do so in this research by shifting participants as subjects towards the centre of the research. Dorothy Smith (1990) refers to this practice as emancipatory in nature.

Furthermore, the constant criticisms about academic research I encountered in community organizing, pushed me to use a mixture of methodologies and methods based on social justice research as a tool to deter me from engaging in traditional extractive and detached research practices. As Griffiths (1998, p12) describes, social justice research sets the ground to explicitly address the values and political positions of the researcher as a means of creating a positive contribution for the communities of the participants. In addition, research rooted in social justice practices also sets the ground for a space where a multiplicity of ways of knowing and experiences are valued and where fundamental approaches to research are disrupted. Pratt and the Philippines Women Centre (PWC) emphasize the importance of engaging in a research process that is responsive to the circumstances of potential participants (2007, p102). Thus, counter story narratives have the potential to challenge information and ways of knowing that have otherwise become normalized, as they are told by those at the margins speaking about social injustices (Verjee 2013, p23). In addition, collecting and telling stories of marginalization can be powerful sites to understand systemic oppression rather than individualizing a particular experience. Finally, as Olivier (2001) stated, narrative story telling under a supportive environment can undo some of the violence caused by oppressive systems and dynamics. However, the aim in this project is not to romanticize one particular method or approach to conducting research with racialized migrant women but to challenge methodologies that assume a 'truth' or 'path' to conducting research. Research methods with a social justice focus, do not signify a separate set of methodologies but rather an evolving discussion within the social science fields about the ontological and epistemological foundations of knowledge (Brown and Strega 2005, p8). In this case, a flexible and evolving approach to research methods places value in what participants have to say about their own lives, experiences and brings about potential routes for transformation (Brown and Strega 2005, p7).

The intention to create a space where racialized migrant women come together to share some of their experiences in community organizing shaped the design of this study. The project involved ten self-identified racialized migrant women who identify as community workers or advocates in exploring their encounters with community work as they navigate their professional, personal and activist lives. The research consisted of two stages: 1) a series of three community conversations with the same seven participants over the course of a month, where the women engaged in discussions about their experiences as racialized migrant organizers. And 2) three semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants unable to attend the community conversations, in which they built upon themes identified during the group meetings. The approaches used throughout this research varied in order to meet the particular circumstances of this specific group. Finally, beyond creating a space for racialized migrant women to come together, as a result of this thesis three tools have been created to enhance the women's experiences in community organizing and strengthen the incredible work that grassroots, community and social justice groups engage in.

Overall, using elements of oral history both in the community conversations and interviews, such as narratives and story telling proved to be an important tool to explore the experiences of racialized migrant women in community settings. Providing spaces for these women to share some of their narratives in relation to community organizing, could be categorized as a political act as knowing that there are commonalities in the experiences shared has the potential to spark action (Freire 1967; Razack, Smith and Thobani 2010).

### **3.1 Intersectional Feminist Frameworks in Research**

For this project I incorporated elements of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and Feminist Oral History methods through a lens of Intersectional Feminist Frameworks (IFF) in order to recognize and address systems of power as exclusionary sites (Morris and Bunjun 2006, p22). According to CRIAW's 2006 publication, an important aspect of IFF is the commitment to thoroughly consider the way in which we are engaging with potential participants and the approach to collecting and presenting their experiences and perspectives.



Discussing power is an important aspect of Intersectional Feminist Frameworks. Most literature using these methods, calls for diminishing dynamics of power when conducting research (Morris and Bunjun 2006; Lagan and Morton 2006). The push for resisting power dynamics in feminist research tends to favour in a positive light those projects which claim to have succeeded in contesting them. However, the reality of the colonial and imperial systems of power that have become inherent in our world, make it impossible for any one of us, especially those in academia to resist power. Given the intangibility of power, I argue that it is present in all interactions regardless of the location of our identities and our experiences or connections to others. Therefore, my response as a researcher to mitigate some of these dynamics centred on setting all aspects of the research in a flexible manner. For instance, during each of the community conversations, I had a series of activities and possible themes prepared but it was the participants who were able to decide upon the order of activities and to steer the conversation in the direction that best met their expectations.

What makes feminist research feminist is not the fact that another woman conducts it but that that the researcher intends to construct new knowledge and work towards social change. As feminist researchers, it is equally important to acknowledge that most often research is conducted within systems that are oppressive in nature and to aim to examine data through a trans/interdisciplinary manner (Olivier and Manon, 2000). Thus, using the IFF lens, I structured the community conversations using elements of Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) and Feminist Oral History methods for the one-on-one interviews.

## **3.2 Inviting Participation**

The main approach of establishing criteria for participation in this project is purposive sampling based on the work of Denzin and Lincoln (2005). These scholars argue for 'recruiting methods' of participants based in multiple social locations and intersecting experiences and identities to draw light to the fluid processes of representation in research (Lemon 2013, p47). Informed by this approach, I aim to present the findings in a way that does not essentialize the identities of the participants, and that respects their individual perspectives and experiences.

The poster called out for *Self-identified Racialized Migrant Women Advocates* working with migrant communities in Coast Salish Territories (see appendix A). The graphics and format of the poster was contracted out to a racialized migrant woman who herself has been very active in community organizing groups. I draw especial attention to the poster because it was my main form of outreach and the first opportunity I had to state where I positioned myself in this research project. Creating the poster posited a series of challenges in regards to the criteria for participation outlined as I wanted to ensure that the language and terms included in the poster acknowledged the complex and multiple identities of the potential participants. At the same time, I did not want to make the criteria so broad that people who had not experienced a racialized migrant reality would want to participate. The content of the poster itself was created by me in consultation with the graphic designer and although the wording was carefully chosen there is a possibility that there were potential participants that felt limited by it. Although I am critical of the terminology used in the poster as it privileged certain forms of communication and ways of knowing related to the mergence of academia and community work; I believe that using these labels provided a frame of commonality among participants, instrumental in getting the group together and advancing the conversations.

Moreover, the poster outlined the possible topics of conversation which included discussing our relations to Indigenous Nations, immigration policy changes in the past three years, our experiences navigating community organizing (both grassroots and non-for-profit). The poster also stated that there was room to talk about anything else related to their experiences as organizers. In the call-out, I also included a paragraph where I recognize the exploitative and extractive ways in which academic research has functioned in our communities and committed to create tools to support other racialized women and community groups working for migrant justice. In addition, the poster advertised home cooked meals, financial resources for childcare support, some financial resources in case participants wanted to organize an event or a project and expressed my openness to discuss other ways in which I could contribute to their communities. Throughout the poster I positioned myself as a member of the migrant justice community organizing sector and identified myself as a racialized migrant woman. In addition, I also clarified that I was conducting this research to complete a requirement for my Master of Arts degree. In stating my positionality in the poster my intention was to get past the mistrust that

academic researchers typically generate in our communities. From personal experience I knew that conducting research as a member of the community at an academic level was relatively new and innovative and though it provided me with an opportunity to get people interested in the thesis, it also placed a great deal of pressure on how I conducted the research process and how I disseminated the findings.

The outreach process, included the poster mentioned above, alongside the information letter and consent forms which placed as ten the maximum number of people in the community conversations series and clarified that I would sign people up in the same order they expressed interest to participate. I circulated the outreach materials through different social media pages of migrant justice groups, as well as through email contacts of people who worked with immigrant and refugee communities. Through this process, ten people showed interest in participating, one of them was unable to commit as their availability was very limited and two of them notified me that they were unable to make it the day of the community conversations due to unexpected events. The three participants unable to participate in the community conversations were then interviewed through a semi-structured format using elements of oral history methodology. Getting people interested in the research was fast and straightforward, participants quickly emailed me to express their interest in being a part of the research. I believe that the quick response to the call out had to do with my insider status, as I had in the past worked with some of the participants or gotten to know their work even if I had not yet met them personally. However, what proved more challenging and time consuming was coordinating with participants a date and time to meet. Participants had various community, paid and unpaid work and family commitments that made it difficult and lengthy to find a time to meet that worked for everyone involved. Using online scheduling tools and a month after the initial contact, we were able to find a time to meet. I am thankful to the women for their generosity and willingness to participate in the project because even though we met in the early evenings after work or school, the participants still had to reschedule several commitments to participate in the research activities.

### 3.3 About the Participants

Although I am using the terms racialized, migrant, women, community workers/organizers/advocates to refer to the group, we established throughout the community conversations that participants identified only with some or none of the labels. Thus, the following pseudonyms, descriptions about themselves and about how they got involved in community work for the community conversations and interview sections were drafted by participants in their own words to self describe aspects of their identities relevant to this research.

#### 3.3.1 Community Conversations

*Blue: 1<sup>st</sup> Generation Immigrant Bangladeshi young woman, youth worker, someone who believes art/design has the capability to bring change.* My own background as an immigrant woman and all my experiences lead me to be involved in immigrant and refugee youth community. I look back ten years ago when I first moved in Canada and see what are the supports I received and because of those supports I became who I am now and where I am now. Not just education and jobs but as a person I make good decision and able to move forward in a positive way. I want to provide the same support to other newcomers so they can also build a strong ground for themselves and their own family. It's really a passing the support method which anyone can do even without the title "Youth Worker" or "Settlement worker".

*Fatima: Serbian-Turkish, woman, refugee, Muslim.* I started by participating in a youth leadership and facilitation training, and from there I went on to co-facilitate a number of trainings as an intern as well as a lead facilitator. I got involved with the program at a very young age, when I was still developing my identity and experimenting with different roles (although I still am today). I felt at home. I was surrounded with people I can see myself in, I could see my experience intertwined with, and it impacted me greatly. I felt like I found my calling: learning. One of my greatest passions in life is learning; learning about people and life outside of what I may normally be limited and exposed to. Community work allows me to do this. I am not involved in community work because I want to change lives. I think people can only do so for themselves. I am doing the work that I am doing because it

allows me to grow and at the same time maintain close ties to the identity that I never want to let go of. I think that I am more culturally tied to my country in Canada than when I was there. I guess this is because I am immersed in the culture and perhaps I never noticed any difference. Here, I have to fight to keep my own culture. As much as I try and do so, I recognize that I am participating in the very systems that encourage the opposite. This is something that I have struggled with and continue to struggle with, as it is a never-ending act of balance. This work almost *requires* me to identify with that huge part of my identity as a refugee so I guess in a sense, my reasons for doing this work are also self-serving. Sometimes through our work, we are forced to practice and encourage institutionalization. Although this could not be further from my intentions, I am also aware that good intentions do not negate the consequences that follow, especially when oftentimes, the ones responsible are not privy to all the consequences that can follow those who are affected. These consequences can be so far-reaching that we are not even aware of the impact they have on the people that we work with. This point hits very close to home, and my hope is that throughout my work I continue to keep this in mind. I say “keep it in mind” because I don’t think that I can anticipate it, but I *can* keep reminding myself, which is a skill that has kept me as sane as I have been able to remain.

Gabriela: *Filipino-Canadian woman from an immigrant/settler family radical anti-racist feminist.* In university I became increasingly politicized and was exploring ways to get involved through the student activities. During a clubs day at my university I learned youth organizing groups that had been formed in BC. From there I became very active for 8+ years.

Lila: *Latina/mestiza, immigrant woman.* First through student activist groups while doing my undergrad, then through my work at women’s & settlement organizations, & community centres.

Janina: *Young racialized woman.* While I was studying in my undergrad program, I was part of an on-campus group that sponsors and supports refugee students at the university and draws awareness to a variety of international development issues. Once I graduated, I was looking to get involved in the broader community and not just on campus. I was also looking to move away from some ideas about “community work” and “support” which I was

encountering on campus. After graduating from a multicultural youth leadership and facilitation training program for immigrant and refugee youth, I was exposed to immigrant and refugee community members who were very much involved in community work and who introduced me to many ideas in the field. This is how I got involved doing some projects and how I started to gain some interest and perspective in this work.

*Mariposa: My background is mestizo (Spanish and Indigenous ancestors) from my mom side very mixed mestizo and from my father side Indigenous from the southeast of Mexico Chiapas. My involvement with migrant justice is connected to my personal journey of redefining identity and belonging as well as to my commitment to address sexism, racism and poverty. I try to be in the world and build relationship with a social justice and gender equality but for example I worked and work for non profit organizations that are progressive in their mandate but not necessarily political so what I do for organizing and mobilizing for immigrants/refugees is outside of my paid job as a personal and ethical commitment. I believe that I am in a position that is very privileged and I have the responsibility to organize, name and shame but many other people are in vulnerable positions whether it is because of their status or their journeys or the language, or the socio-economic situation and I believe that I have to use the power that I have to open spaces and at time step back for other voices to be heard. I am still not a resident or a citizen but I have had opportunities to work and study here. My awareness of the social and political realities particularly of women has motivated and pushed me at times to be self reflective, critical and active in finding ways to change and influence the causes of these inequalities. When I moved to Canada I experienced challenges and feelings of disempowerment, discrimination and lack of self confidence about who I am, who I want to be and who am I expected to be as a Mexican woman without having to assimilate or give up parts of my cultural background. I believe in creating spaces where immigrant and refugee communities can share and speak their stories to understand how our identities are evolving and how through dialogue we can reinvent ourselves with others and through others and reconcile the present with the possibilities in the future. I am drawn to do this work as part of a personal journey of liberation and belonging and for a strong commitment to social justice. I got involved in this work since I was 14 years old doing literacy campaigns in rural and Indigenous communities in Mexico but my work with immigrants and refugees here in Vancouver started with a project that I did for four years for immigrant and refugee youth that I paired*

with artists to learn how to do a comic about their journeys to address isolation, trauma, racism, identity and belonging. In Canada migrant communities are my chosen family and I feel engaged and committed to improve the realities of poverty and lack of access and opportunity for migrant communities in Canada.

Sasha: *Malay-Muslim-Singaporean, female*. I first arrived as an international student in 2007 with no intention of settling down in Vancouver at all. In 2008, I met a really special person and we chose to be together since. I moved here pretty much permanently to be with him. Now, I consider myself at best, an immigrant, a settler and at worst, an occupier of someone else's Indigenous land and a 'guest of a guest' in someone else's home. I'm still trying to figure this out. In the past, I was involved with a lot of international student organizing while I was in university. When I had my...shall we say... 'feminist awakening', I started feeling uncomfortable in international student organizing spaces especially with this unquestioned privilege a lot of international students had as "third culture kids". I searched for other ways to organize and found myself at a women's studies undergrad department and I enjoyed myself for a while, surrounded by feminist folk and politicized peeps who were unafraid to shit-disturb. In 2012, a few months after graduating, I started a zine with 3 other friends/acquaintances. The zine was for self-identified young women of color, Aboriginal women and LGBTQ women. I was the primary driving force behind the project and it took A LOT out of me. I did majority of the grant-writing, communications, designing, promotions etc. I had a blast (despite some 'drama' between the other organizers in the collective) but I don't think I could ever take on a project like that by myself again. Especially when it was under the guise of a collective. I've stepped back from community organizing since 2012 and I think it's taken me a good two years to begin to understand what I had been through. I started volunteering for a couple of Vancouver based organizations in 2013. I was also invited to be part of a critical Muslims book club. Some community projects I have in the works now are critical Muslims performance nights and starting an improv <sup>5</sup>troupe for POCs<sup>6</sup> only. I'm really cautious moving forward with community organizing because I don't want to burn myself out, have others take advantage of me. So that's where I am now.

<sup>5</sup> Theatre improvisation.

<sup>6</sup> People of Colour.

### **3.3.2 Interviews**

Felina: *I'm a Latin American migrant.* Through a youth program targeted to immigrant and refugees. From that experience I got to network to other non-profits and continue my learning.

Serena: *Woman, multiple races, culturally Mexican.* I became involved when I looked for volunteer work at a non-profit organization. I took a training and from there I became involved and gained awareness about diversity.

Beth: Black, urban Aboriginal, activist, woman, mother; born in Canada

## **3.4 Feminist Participatory Action Research of this Project**

FPAR is known to engage potential research subjects including those most impacted by the research into the process and strives to recognize power inequalities as central in social interactions. In addition, FPAR methodology calls for participants to be involved in all stages of the project from its conception to the dissemination of findings (Maguire et al., 2004 in Reid 2006, p316). Other important aspects of FPAR methodology are: an emphasis to recognize and address power imbalances in the research; to ensure that the research is community-based and that supports the development of an analysis that sparks social change efforts as a viable outcome. Stringer (1996) and Morris (2002) explain that research questions should come from the ground up to create and expand participants' understandings of a particular issue or experience and to provide spaces for people to reflect and brainstorm possible solutions. Furthermore, FPAR sets the stage for more nuanced and personal reflections of the perspectives and experiences of those involved in the research (Langan and Morton 2009, p167). Thus, although a more self-reflective approach to understanding the researcher's experience in the project is generally discouraged as noted by Letherby (2002), FPAR calls for a critical reflection of our role in relation to the research process as well as a critical analysis of all stages of the research (Morris 2005, p53; Kirby and McKenna 1989, p169).



My intent was to structure the project with all of the elements that Feminist Participatory Action Research require, however, some of its basic concepts are not present in this project as a result of my understanding of the socio-economic conditions and well-being of the research participants. This is perhaps where my insider status as a part of a community of racialized migrant women involved in community organizing in Coast Salish Territories, provided me with the insight to assess the over-burden that conducting a full FPAR project would incur in the participants. The amount of time and commitment that a project using FPAR methodology would require was not realistic to the already fully filled days of work, community meetings and family responsibilities. As I mentioned earlier, as a researcher it was essential that I found a way of making the research work for the participants and not moulding the participants to work for the research. Still, using FPAR elements provided me with the flexibility to use tools and approaches that would encourage a participatory process, yet would not require unrealistic expectations. In addition, I structured the community conversations through a popular education facilitation model that prioritizes their interests and knowledge as central to the research. In this case, this process resulted in a shift in the focal direction of the project. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, my original intention was to explore with racialized migrant women immigration policy changes in Canada from 2010 – 2013, however as the community conversations began the focus of the research quickly shifted towards discussing our experiences as community workers. It is this level of flexibility which I believe created an environment where the research outcomes were not a priority but where the focus was the process and the space collectively formed. For instance, Auerback and Silverstein (2003) conclude that reformulating the direction of the research to address the interests and needs of the participants was a sign of success.

One final aspect of FPAR that became important to this project was its emphasis in action, where the participants work towards brainstorming collective solutions that could potentially address some of the challenges identified (Kindon et al., 2007). Throughout this research process, participants were very invested in finding tools and resources that could help them bring up some of their experiences to community groups in a way that kept their peers accountable and that constructed new knowledge and ways of working.

### 3.5 Feminist Oral History

Using oral history methodologies to re-centre the knowledge of racialized migrant women can allow for more complex and nuanced descriptions of their experiences. Oral history can offer an alternative and complementary methodology to forms of research that privilege the voice of the researcher, especially when engaging racialized migrant women. According to Perks and Thomson (1988); and Geiger (1990), oral history expands the notion of primary sources through the act of telling particular experiences. Through the interview process, oral history as a method provides the researcher with an opportunity to explore and interpret people's past and present through a compilation of oral memories (Janesick 2007; Sommers and Quinlan 2009). Literature shows that the use of oral history is particularly effective when working with groups who have been pushed to the margins (Grele, 1989). Thus, oral history has the potential to provide a space for a narrative account that can be politically engaging and whose perspective or 'side' is that of the narrator (Portelli, 1981).

My intent in this project was to use oral history elements to capture narratives and to complement other methods used in this thesis. Therefore, oral history provides an avenue to obtain thick descriptions about a particular experience through a more holistic approach. Under this methodology, the themes explored in research are not reduced to isolated experiences but they also include a historical approach to better understand the present (Janesick 2007). Blackburn (2009) highlights the importance in understanding where the researcher positions themselves in regards to the communities they are investigating when engaging in oral history approaches. Sharing processes of trauma and violence might be easier to recall if the interviewer is part of a group or community sharing similar 'insider' memories as the interviewee, this might facilitate the ability for narrators to better place traumatic events in the context of their lives (Blackburn 2009).

Furthermore, insider's knowledge might also provide an opportunity to examine racialized migrant women's histories as resilient beings, activists and political agents that move beyond accessing services (Bannerji 1993; Dua and Robertson 1999). Thus, being reflective and actively addressing dynamics of power about the researchers' knowledge and positionality, along with creating space for narratives that centre the experiences of

the subjects, brings about a combination of feminist methodologies and oral history methods that researchers refer to as feminist oral history. According to Susan Geiger (1990) oral history is not intrinsically feminist but depending on the intention of the researcher it can become a feminist methodology. Placing gender as a central concept alongside awareness of the intersectionalities (Crenshaw 1991, 2011) of participants, in addition to challenging norms and what is perceived as 'normal' are key to conduct feminist oral history research (Geiger 1990). As Janesick (2007, p115) cites, "Reinharz eloquently tackles the issue of feminist oral history by reminding us that feminist oral history creates new more inclusive material about women, thus, validating their experiences." Within feminist scholarship, a researcher's positionality is essential in designing, conducting and analyzing oral histories of racialized migrant women. Hence, feminist oral history as a research method offers alternate truths and realities about populations that are often excluded from traditional research spaces and centre their experiences in ways that are respectful, transformative and empowering.

Even within feminist oral history methods, there are different approaches to structuring and analysing research. For the purposes of this project I used oral history through a reconceptualist framework (Janesick 2007), by adding to the narratives used both in the community conversations and the one-on-one interviews written elements where participants were able to add aspects of their histories not mentioned in the research. Finally, because the project was framed through a social justice lens, oral history as a method provides innumerable possibilities to hear the voices of those who have been overlooked or not heard in multiple settings.

### **3.6 Community Conversations**

Community conversations is a method I made up using elements of FPAR to structure the group format section of my research in a way that was reflective of good practices in community processes and that at the same time allowed me to explore information for research purposes. Community conversations are a mixture of focus groups, where a group provides public insights about a particular topic (Hughes and Dumont 1993; Kitzinger 1994) and community based groups, where everyone in the room is accountable to each other and the focus of the conversation is directed by participants.

All three of the community conversations took place in the month of April in 2014. Since all of the sessions were audio recorded, I asked participants during the first session if they consented to allow me to record the conversations. In addition, participants were shown and reminded every session how to stop the recorder if they did not want a particular experience or idea on record. I also shared with the group how my positionality as a researcher might affect the group process. Before beginning the group stage of my research I reflected as a researcher engaging in anti-oppressive approaches, what would I do if the participants wanted me to no longer include their experiences as part of data? This proved an essential question in building rapport and trust with the participants. During the first session I communicated to the group that my priority was to provide a space for racialized migrant women to meet and that I would take my research in a different direction if they so decided. I felt the necessity to do so both as a way to maintain my principles as a researcher and a member of the community and also to differentiate my research away from the negative perceptions that many people in community organizing circles have towards academia.

Using Lee Mun Wah's (2004) *The Art of Listening* allowed me to establish a set of guidelines for the group to frame the way in which we interacted with one another. Although typically community group guidelines are brainstormed by everyone in the room, I introduced Lee Mun Wah's 16 points to establish a framework of observation, empathy and self-reflexivity in a short amount of time. We took turns reading each of the points out loud while briefly discussing what each of the points might mean during our interactions with the group. Consequently participants were encouraged to add, change or remove guidelines which would support all of us to critically and respectfully participate in dialogues across difference. In addition, every session I reminded participants about the agreed guidelines and encouraged them to add or address points that could make them feel safer to contribute. The usage of this particular set of guidelines helped me to address some of the emerging dominant voices which tend to arise in group settings. I placed a strong emphasis throughout the community conversations in reminding participants that they were able to withdraw whenever they wanted to or refrain from participating in any or all of the activities.

Moreover, although participants had committed to attend three community conversations, each time after the first and second session I used consensus based techniques to assess the participants' willingness to continue meeting. In addition, the group meetings were structured to ensure that collective accountability and facilitation was used throughout our time together. I used these techniques, to ensure that we would all address unequal existing relations and potential micro-aggressions by everyone present in the room including myself as the researcher. This unique opportunity was possible given the background of the women in community work as group facilitators using anti-oppressive frameworks. Furthermore, although there were agenda items presented to the group, I constantly reminded participants that they were able to shape the direction of the conversation if what they wanted to share did not fall under the categories discussed. Lastly, I strongly encouraged participants to speak on personal experiences to avoid appropriating or speaking on behalf of others not present in the room. Although these approaches were implemented to deal with some of the power dynamics present in the room, I am conscious of the ways in which interlocking relations of oppression take place even under the most intentional anti-oppressive settings.

### **3.7 Interviews**

The semi-structured interviews had been initially designed to seek additional information from key informants who identified as racialized migrant women working in policy sectors. However, as the project unfolded and given that the focus of the research changed throughout the community conversations, I made the decision to re-direct the focus of the one-one-interviews to providing a space for the three racialized migrant women who had not been able to participate in the research to share and document their experiences. Two of them had not been able to participate in the community conversations because of time schedule conflicts and one of them because day care arrangements fell through. The interviews all took place in the months of April and May 2014. As I contacted the women to participate in the interviews, I once again provided complete information about the project along with consent forms and as requested by them, attached some of the general themes that came up during the community conversations. The women were reminded that they did not need to focus on identity, heteropatriarchy, community

accountability or Indigenous relations as themes to discuss. During the interview, I also explained that they could stop the recorder at any moment and that if there was information they shared with me which they no longer wanted included as data to let me know either during or after the interview. The one-on-one interviews served to express experiences that one might otherwise not share in a group setting which Radley and Billing (1996) refer to as private views.

### **3.8 Data Collection and Analysis**

I decided to use a variety of data collection methods to better reflect the manifold understandings, connections and experiences of participants. The three community conversation series and the three interviews I conducted were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by me. In addition, during the data collection activities, I took mental notes about particular non-verbal/visual cues that the recorder would be unable to account for. For 20 – 30 minutes right after each session and interview I wrote on a notebook all of my reflections and notes describing some of the process and information shared. Moreover, the women were given feedback sheets (see appendix B) at the end of the community conversation series and each of the interviews as a way to document more specific questions that would help me describe who they are in this thesis. Additionally, participants were encouraged to share more on themes discussed throughout the three sessions/interviews, their histories and community involvement to address the issue of 'dominant voices' in groups as described by Smithson 2000 (p107). The final question on the feedback sheets was an evaluative piece I included to assess my approach to the data collection aspects of this research. Before establishing guidelines in the first community conversation, one of the participants expressed her concern with the research process by asking the following:

So, I was wondering if you are considered a participant? Because I am wondering, are you going to share your stories? Be a part of it? I just don't know because I won't share if you don't share. (Janina, 2014)

It was at this point that I decided to fully participate and contribute to the research in a way that would feel reciprocal for the women involved. This interaction was a powerful moment for me as a researcher because I was able to reflect on how power relations are

constantly shifting. Though my insider/outsider status was something that I continued negotiating throughout the research process. Janina's question ensured that my investment and level of vulnerability was similar to those of the participants. Therefore, my opinions and contributions highlighted from the transcripts of the community conversations and interviews were included in the analysis of the data.

### **3.9 Evaluating the Process**

...it is interesting to see that and to hear somebody else's words but have them really identify with me. (Fatima, 2014)

For me, as a community researcher, evaluating the research process is one of the most important steps of the project. At the end of the community conversation series and each interview, I provided participants with an evaluation sheet that asked them to note topics that we were unable to talk about due to time and provide feedback on what went well, what was challenging, and what could have been done differently. This evaluation was based on an appreciative enquiry approach where participants are able to highlight what did not work but also what worked. Some participants chose to complete the sheet right after the interview or final community conversation, though others wanted time to reflect and later on forwarded me the sheet via email. Evaluating the research has the potential to serve multiple purposes:

- 1) it provides an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the research process;
- 2) it serves as a space for participants to communicate to the researcher things that might otherwise not be voiced during the interviews/community conversations;
- 3) and it gives researchers feedback on the tools and approaches used throughout the collection process so that there is always improvement in future research projects.

Participants' responses on the feedback sheet vastly varied. In order to further guarantee anonymity, I chose not to identify participants by pseudonyms in this section of the research. One of the participants' responses focused on how they felt throughout their participation, they mentioned that for the most part they enjoyed a level of safety she had

not had in the past when engaging in conversations about topics relating to activism or community work. The level of safety felt by this particular participant was explained as a unique opportunity to be in a room where people not familiar with each other still had similar backgrounds and experiences. In her evaluation she wrote the following: “[the group] allowed me to hear myself in someone that does not know me as well as my usual group of confidants”. To this participant, this reflection came as a shock as she always thought that the safest setting included close friends and allies. A number of responses focused on our conversations about the relationship between migrant communities and indigenous peoples in Turtle Island. Some participants were inspired by the conversation, while others would have liked to go more in depth in a way that was more challenging and that brainstormed solutions or approaches. Self care, trauma, gender politics and strategies to achieve an overall well-being within activist/community settings were frequently mentioned by most of the participants as topics they would have liked to have more time to explore. Time constraints made it difficult for us to discuss strategies for any of the themes that we covered, though the sections on Indigenous solidarities did offer a list of tools or materials to find basic information about history and relationships between migrant and indigenous communities. Moreover, in retrospect, I would have liked to present to participants some tools and materials in relation to self care as many of the women expressed burn out from community work during the initial stages of the research. The only activity that addressed self care during the conversations was the opening and closing rounds we did at the beginning and end of each session, where we set goals for activities we would do throughout the week that would nourish us. For a list of self care activities that participants engaged in (see appendix C)

As the last section of the evaluation asked participants to assess the research process many of them reflected on their experiences and made suggestions for future projects. For the most part, participants seem to have enjoyed participating in the research and reflected on their participation as an opportunity to meet and have conversations with women of colour from diverse identity and community backgrounds. Some of the participants mentioned that they enjoyed the open discussions, the food, the overall environment and the sense of safety. One of the participants highlighted the open style of the community conversations with the following quote: “I was able to speak about what is important for me and not have to mould my answers to fit the question.” Interview



participants mentioned that they found the process enjoyable but asserted they would have liked to participate in the group sessions. Furthermore, participants also identified some of the challenges as follow: they would have liked to have conversations that were more in-depth which they believed did not happen as a result of the different language levels, experiences in the group. Participants found that having three community conversations was not enough to discuss all that was needed. In addition, there were some frustrations with the amount of time that we took discussing certain topics which did not leave a lot of time for other topics they would have like to expand upon. One participant summarized in this quote most of the reflections on all of the evaluation:

Your sincerity, honesty and accountability were really important. I think you were very considerate too. In addition to all these qualities, your warmth also contributed to the space that the participants met in. It felt safe and comfortable to me. Also, the participants that were involved in this research group shared so many rich ideas that were helpful for the group conversations. It was great to see other young women who were passionate and who came from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Although it would've have been great to get more voices, I actually liked the fact that there were a few of us – our conversations seemed more intimate and focused this way and I don't think we would have gone into as much depth if there were more people. In terms of challenges, I think timing was a big one – it was hard to set an agenda for discussions that often needed the depths that we went into. There wasn't enough time! In the future, I think the research group may benefit from meeting over a longer period of time so that there would be enough time to dive into some of the foundational issues that the agenda could benefit from. (Participant, 2014)

Another participant suggested I organize a community event where we are able to share some of the points that came up in the research in order to 'spread the research'. Overall, based on the evaluations, the participants seemed to have had a positive experience throughout their involvement. The feedback I received has helped me think about how to disseminate the findings and reflect on my approach as I continue engaging community based research within academic institutions.

Once I transcribed the narratives from the interviews and the community conversations, I analyzed these women's stories seeking overarching themes about their experiences in community organizing. An ideal way of doing FPAR and Feminist oral history analysis would have included consultation with them throughout the analysis and possibly the writing process. However, as this thesis is written up as partial fulfillment of

my Master Degree, I did not think appropriate to include participants in this process as they would not be able to get deserving credit for their involvement. To request additional time from what they had already generously offered to the research would have been inconsiderate of the multiple families, professional and personal engagements the women are part of on a daily basis. However, I did encourage participants to let me know if they wanted to be a part of the analysis portion of the research but none of the women contacted me.

For the analysis component of my research, I printed out the transcriptions of each conversation and interview which I then read multiple times to identify key themes, connecting points and narrative patterns in order to bridge them to the main theoretical frameworks used in this work (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003). Reading the transcriptions multiple times and coding the data by using different colour highlighters for each theme, helped me familiarize myself with the narratives to better understand how the frameworks selected connected to the data. After this process, I used large pieces of flipchart and sticky notes drawn from the transcriptions to connect the data through a visual process that made it easier to conceptualize and group the findings.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Findings: Racialized Migrant Women on Language, Decolonization and Community Organizing**

The community conversations and interview participants have gone through different and diverse journeys, summarizing these findings is not an attempt to homogenize these experiences but rather to highlight both commonalities and differences in how they self-identify, experience community work and articulate their lived realities. As per Smithson (2000) the reflections and perspectives I present in chapter four are my own and will not necessarily match those of the participants, therefore my analysis should be viewed as one layer of multiple possibilities and viewpoints.

#### **4.1 Critical Reflection of Migrant Journeys**

Decolonization and meaningful solidarity with Indigenous communities both locally and overseas came up multiple times throughout the findings. However, as I reflect on this research process, I am critical of how migrant communities choose to share our migration journeys and encounters with oppression as it often results in the erasure of Indigenous peoples. For instance, our experiences as migrants often starts with our arrival to Canada resulting in our failure to acknowledge the territories of the Indigenous peoples whose land we have come to settle. When we share stories about becoming Canadians often times we mean becoming more like white Anglo-Saxon men, not like the Indigenous peoples who have inhabited these lands for thousands of years. In addition, obtaining Canadian citizenship becomes one of the main goals for migrant communities, it makes us feel safer, particularly if we come to this land seeking refuge. However, rarely do we make the connection that by obtaining a Canadian passport we are further solidifying an empire that continues to dispossess Indigenous communities. Moreover, as migrants, some of the first anecdotes we share, especially those who did not speak English before migrating, centre around language learning. Whether funny or tragic many of us have multiple stories about unknown English idioms and words we have 'incorrectly' used in the past but rarely we refer to this language as one of the most powerful tools of a colonial project. Sometimes

we share experiences of racism and discrimination as a result of our accents or lack of english knowledge but we fail to link them to the systematic erasure of Indigenous languages. As guests, settlers or however a migrant might identify in these territories, how many Halkomelem or Hən̓q̓əmiñəm words do we know? Do we even know this is one of the native languages of the territories we now live in? Have we considered our role in helping erase Indigenous languages by not putting the same amount of effort we do into learning english or perfecting our “canadian” accents as we do with the Indigenous languages of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish nations? Being critical about the way in which Indigenous peoples had their languages violently erased by means of residential schools and other systemic institutions is not something that we typically connect to our own experiences of oppression. We often forget that we also come from regions where our ancestors or indigenous peoples in our own lands were also violently dispossessed and punished for speaking their native languages. Furthermore, as migrants, home becomes such an important concept and though it has different meanings to different people, we need to remember that the land we might call home is already someone else’s home and needs to be respected it as such. This paragraph is meant as preface of the findings, because this analysis was sometimes missing from this research project, not necessarily because the participants and I were not aware of any of these dilemmas but mostly because it is not common for migrant communities to articulate how we can share our experiences of migration without continuing with this erasure. My hope is that this work will help initiate conversations about how we can start decolonizing our collective and individual journeys of migration.

## **4.2 Why here? Why now?**

When asked about what had brought them to be part of the community conversations, participants expressed the necessity to talk about their experiences in community organizing because often times these settings lacked space and time to explore challenges and conflicts faced within. For instance, a participant in one of the community conversations described how consumed she felt in an ethnic specific youth organization she was involved with because of the numerous and often competing meetings and events she felt she had to attend.

...it really made a difference when I was like, well I am not going to go see my parents today because I need break so I am just going to tell you that I am not going to either of these things but you know how to get your story straight and he was like why do you have to lie to spend time with me. And so that was a big moment for me when I knew that I had gone too far with putting too much in so that was a good time to step out. (Gabriela, 2014)

At this point Gabriela realized that she needed to distance herself from community advocacy settings because attending meetings and events was becoming an obligation rather than part of how she wanted to spend her spare time. Gabriela's experience brings up an important insight of how consuming activist settings can become if the well-being of its members is not at the forefront of the struggle. In advocacy settings, expectations run high because the causes that activists are trying to advance interconnect and affect communities' lives in such a profound manner that there is often pressure to be as involved as possible. This often leads to burn out from community work because these expectations come on top of multiple and often competing responsibilities, encounters with different forms of oppression and lack of spaces to openly discuss the mental, emotional and physical well-being of advocates.

Expressions of guilt, inadequacy and lack of commitment were present throughout all of the community conversations and interviews. Some of the participants had stepped away from community organizing due to exhaustion in recent months while others found ways to set boundaries so to maintain a balance between spending time with family and friends and attending meetings, trainings and rallies. Some participants mentioned high levels of burn out while others expressed feeling energized from participating in community settings. The participants were all at different stages of involvement in advocacy groups, some were trying to re-connect to organizing groups after a period of distance from these movements; others were completely immersed in meetings, organizations and collectives; others were partially involved, still trying to figure out what their commitment should be; and others were completely burned out and not actively involved in community organizing. As part of my participation, I shared with the group my own experience of exhaustion with community organizing and my need to distance myself from the work in order to reflect on how and if I want to continue being involved in advocacy and activism. I shared with the women in this project that my burn out was in large part

one of the main reasons I wanted to engage in this research and think about the dynamics in these settings in a more theoretical manner.

### **4.3 Migrant, Advocate, Activist and Racialized Identities**

One of the Community Conversation activities entailed participants writing on sticky notes their ideas, thoughts or definitions about four terms used during the outreach process: migrant, advocate, activist and racialized. After reading out loud all of the definitions, a conversation pop-corn style<sup>7</sup> followed to further discuss the reflections shared with the group. It was important for me as a researcher to clarify that the intent of the activity was not to reach an overarching definition for any of the terms but rather to complicate some of the terminology we use in both the individual and collective sense to define who we are. All of the identities had different connotations for participants, the initial activity required us to write on a post-it note whatever came to mind about all of the terms, however as we read back the responses some of the meanings and understandings began to shift. As Smithson (2000) notes, in research group settings participants typically influence each others' answers as individuals often try to disrupt the group as little as possible. To address this issue, I decided to introduce a silent post-it activity where participants were able to articulate their thoughts about migration and other identities highlighted in the call-out poster. Thus, this activity served as an opportunity to anonymously share perspectives with the group with minimal influence. Although some of the participants' reflections did shift after the responses were read out loud and discussed, it was clear to me that by the end of the activity there were widely different definitions of what each of the terms meant to every individual. When it came to interviews, I ensured that participants had the space to address the identities that had come up during the focus groups and/or bring forward new ones that had not yet been explored.

<sup>7</sup> Facilitation technique where participants are invited to contribute their opinion to the group as they wish and not in an structured manner.

## 4.4 Migration: “Where Are you Really From?”

I feel migrant because even though I moved to a new land with my family I still hold my memories and relationships back home. (Focus Group Participant, 2014)

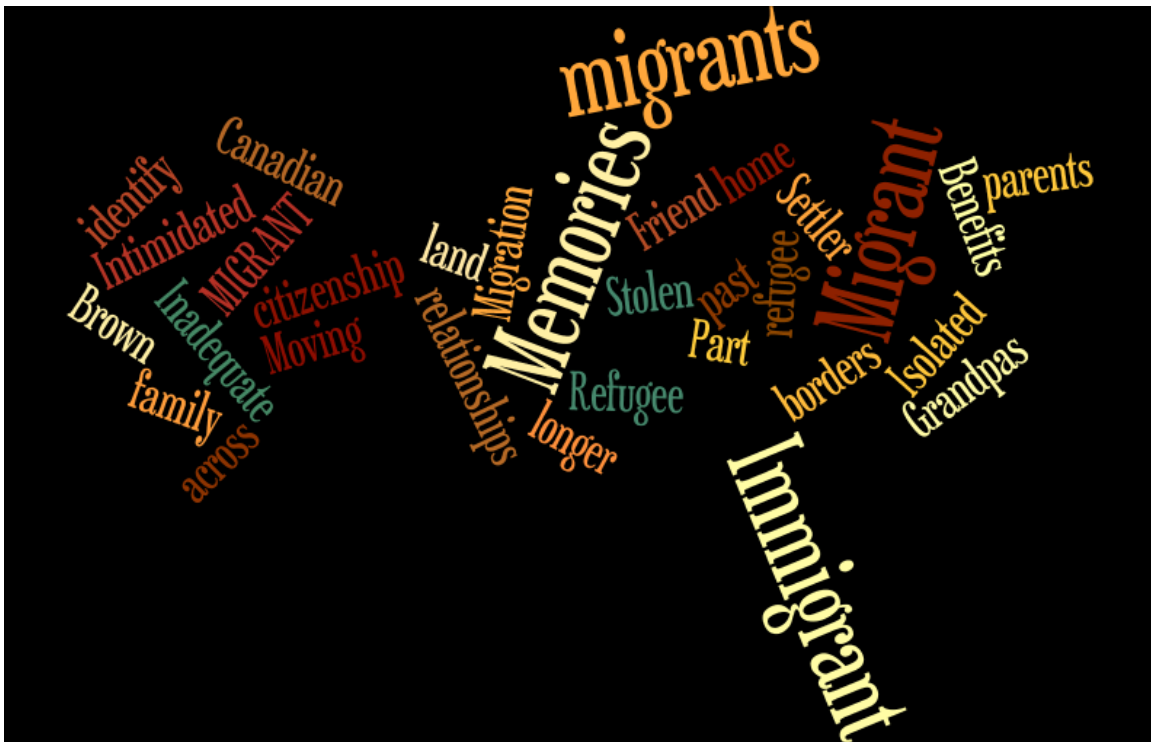
The discussion on migration sparked extensive conversations about what this meant to different people based on their lived experiences. Thus, this section includes excerpts and summaries of the discussion but does not reach a concluding definition. What the group was able to establish is that a migrant identity is not static or absolute and as with many other identities it is in a constant state of change. During the initial stages of the first Community Conversation, the importance of articulating that migrant communities have histories, lives and experiences preceding immigration was widely discussed. There was consensus in the group about the necessity to explore migration beyond the typical research on immigrant and refugee experiences that reduces a person’s history to the moment they emigrated out of their countries of origin. It was established that perspectives and histories of migration were important factors but not the only characteristics to consider when exploring the experiences of people with migrant backgrounds. The group was able to conclude that their learning and perspectives are not to be reduced to only their migrant experience as they extend well beyond one single identity and might pre-date migration.

Articulating a migrant identity with a group with diverse journeys of migration was particularly insightful as the group encompassed people who were born in Coast Salish territories, those who came as refugees, those who came as economic immigrants and those who came as international students and then decided to stay. In this regard it is important to note that self-identification was an instrumental aspect of this research project, as those who were born in Turtle Island but whose parents immigrated to this land, felt comfortable participating and identifying themselves with a migrant identity. This was part of my strategy in using the word migrant and not refugee, immigrant or newcomer during the outreach process as I took this research as an opportunity to include the perspectives of racialized people who identify themselves as migrants as a result of their families’ migration history. I recognize that there are wide differences in experiences between those who were born in this land and hold certain privileges that those who

migrated would not be able to access. In this regard, encompassing participants who did not have an active transnational re-locating experience into this research, could invisibilize the journeys of those who have faced exclusion and oppression as a result of direct migration. However, I feel that in the same way that experiences greatly vary amongst actively migrant communities such as refugees, economic migrants, etc, there are also similarities in how racialization and migration become constructed identities that define us. There are numerous instances where racialized folks are Othered and questioned about their “real” origins, questions like where are you really from? and What is your background? are more than common in the lives of racialized people. In the words of Beth, one of the interview participants: ‘...people always justify or question your identity when you are a person of colour’ (2014). Hence, I utilized this work as an opportunity to broaden the knowledge and experiences that self-identified racialized migrant individuals could bring to this discussion. After all, migration is an identity that is constantly redefined by others and by our own selves as demonstrated by my own understandings of my migrant identity in the positionality section of this thesis.

Below is a wordle graph of all of the responses collected from the sticky notes activity on migration:





<http://www.wordle.net/create>

For some of the participants, migration signified being in a constant state of displacement with multiple ties to different locations and longing for something that is quite simply just not there. Janina for instance highlighted that migration to her means having memories from the past and added that as a migrant she feels that she is often living in multiple worlds:

I like the point about still having memories from the past. That resonates with me because I have been away from home for so long but so many of the memories that comfort me and really influence my personality and how I perceive things so I feel as migrants we are often living in two worlds whether it is in our heads and the present physical or something else. (Janina, 2014)

These divisions amongst multiple worlds might be imaginary, emotional or material. They might be mental, as in having a static image of what a person remembers from their native countries and/or the perceptions they have about their current realities. Emotional, by feeling that they love and care for multiple people and families in transnational locations. Material, by having to physically travel back and forth between

different places. Regardless of what type of division a migrant might feel, most participants expressed a state of dislocation, unable to feel like they fully belong in their current places of habitation but also feeling like outsiders when returning to their countries of origin. Regarding the lack of sense of belonging, Fatima expressed the following:

...for example, when I went back [to her country of origin] a couple of weeks ago for the first time. You know my cousins they all really wanted to know what it is like being here but I feel like I bragged about the way things were here because I think when I speak about this [social justice] it is in English and it is not my first language and sometimes I feel resentful that I am not able to express this in my own language. These are the conversations that I have in English. (Fatima, 2014)

Mariposa, a participant who mainly associated the term migrant with negative connotations explained that for her migrant often signified a lack of belonging or Othering which in turn becomes part of a person's identity. From her perspective, many of these negative associations with migration can easily turn into shame and denial about our own migrant identities, rather than feeling proud or empowered as a result of their rich migration journeys.

I realized that you know I expressed the negative conceptions that we have about migrants because when you think that you don't belong, then that becomes what you identify with that word but at the same time in my chosen family and my chosen community where I feel really proud about who I am it is around other immigrants so I think there is this tension with trying to define that because there are so many negative perceptions around that word and about the feelings of isolation and inadequacy but also a lot of resilience and healing, I think being proud of what you bring from those memories. (Mariposa, 2014)

Although the sticky note activity was anonymous, Mariposa offered the reflection above as a result of being the only person who associated the term migrant with negative definitions. Whether it was as a result of pressure felt from hearing the other more positive definitions, she felt the need to emphasize that she feels proud about sharing a community with other immigrant and refugee people. Mariposa mentioned the potential for empowerment in this identity but also recognizes the tension for her and her community to relate to an identity that in the mainstream has negative connotations of inadequacy and isolation

Some participants also reflected on how they were unaware they had a migrant identity until they joined groups or surrounded themselves with peers to talk about self-awareness, racialization and migration. For example, even though refugee is now one of Fatima's core identities, she did not see herself as having any migrant background until she joined a leadership program where immigrant and refugee identities were explored, this realization for her was so transformative that she expressed she could no longer imagine how she could conceptualize who she is without identifying as a refugee.

I like the sticky about not thinking of yourself as a migrant until you became a part of a migrant group because that was me as well. Because for me I agree, I have been here for 14 years and I really got involved like 4.5 years after coming here and now I think about the time before I got involved and I am like what was I doing? I can't even remember, It wasn't that long ago but I really identify with that because it is such a huge part of my identity now but then I don't know what I was thinking because until I join it I didn't really think of myself like that because I didn't really identify as that. I though well it is gone but it is not. It is interesting to see that and to hear somebody else's word but have them really identify with me. (Fatima, 2014)

In these instances, self-awareness and peer groups where individuals are able to explore the self seem to play a key role in understanding how their experiences and histories are shaped by multiple systems.

Most racialized people who have been able to articulate how systemic oppression influences their lives experienced at some point in their lives a moment or various moments of 'awakening' or self-awareness. In this context many racialized people crave spaces where awareness and consciousness raising can be explored in order to understand how every day experiences are a result of who we are and how others perceive us in relation to systems of oppression. For instance, Sasha shared with the group that she did not think of herself as being a racialized migrant woman and in fact thought that she had all the privileges a white cisgender male is able to access until she started having conversations with peers about oppression, racism, discrimination and sexism.

There is a certain amount of time from when I was here, when I arrived to where I am myself now. And I ask myself what the heck was I thinking and doing and I heard a short story recently and the lady was talking about how for a long time she conceptualized herself as a white, straight, rich person.

And I was like holy shit that was me and I conceptualized myself like a white, straight, man for a certain point in my life. And I feel like sort of an amnesia at times as well, a disconnect between who I am and who I thought I was. (Sasha, 2014)

Those moments of awakening often come with a lot of pain and despair as a person begins to reflect and understand how events that take place in their daily lives and past experiences of discrimination or exclusion may be linked to racial and other forms of oppression. It is often as a result of these realizations that racialized people end up involving themselves in community organizing spaces where they can further explore their identities in the context of social justice in a somewhat supportive environment. This was specially so for the community conversations, articulating and understanding some of the privileges migrants have were as important as identifying areas of oppression.

For instance, Blue expressed how she has reflected on all of the privileges that come with having a canadian passport and questions what is constituted as being 'canadian enough' for a person to receive a passport. From a conversation Blue had at her work place, she described how she engaged in a discussion with a co-worker who suggested that she should go back home since she was criticizing the white heteronormative settler stereotypical canadian identity.

...the argument was getting to a point where he was saying if you are complaining too much about this stuff then you should leave. But he was right in saying that I benefit from my Canadian citizenship, most of the time I forget about that privilege and that is something I took from that conversation. (Blue, 2014)

In this instance, Blue experienced a micro-aggression that can be construed as violent because it questions her lack of belonging the moment she voices a critical thought about the State. However, Blue also articulates that as a result of that conversation she started to think about the many benefits that come with having a canadian passport. On the one hand there is a constant feeling of exclusion and Othering as a result of a person's racialization and on the other, an understanding that by having a passport migrants contribute to the solidification of a nationalistic empire at the expense of Indigenous self determination. However, given the policy changes on citizenship laws as per Bill C-24, the *Strengthening Canadian Citizenship Act* (Canadian Bar Association, 2014), which were

passed after the research collection process, I wonder how these conversations about passport privileges would shift to reflect the fact that those who have attained citizenship as a result of their own migration journeys could be deported and stripped of their canadian citizenship.

There was a tremendous amount of discussion about the concept of being canadian in a nationalistic sense and for the most part rejected by all participants. Blue's reflection about her privilege from having canadian citizenship sparked many stories about reinforcing colonial and supremacists' ideals of who can be canadian and who cannot. As an example Fatima shared that she works in a building where many newcomers access services every day and recalled a poster at her office about aspiring to be 'a true canadian' and pronouncing canada the 'proper way'.

[T]hat [Blue's] statement reminds me of this poster at work that says Canadian and there is a little thing underneath about how we should pronounce it and it is like "what we are what you are what you want to be." and I just don't get it and I often ask myself why is this even here and I see some people being like yeah and others like what the fuck. (Fatima, 2014)

This seemed to be very troublesome for Fatima because it was reinforcing upon recently arrived migrants, the idea that one must have the accent that white anglo-canadians use and that one does not become a 'real canadian' until a person adopts the flag, wears the maple leaf proudly and enacts other characteristics imposed through the colonial experience. Fatima explained how most people at her workplace would see her as a trouble maker or would not understand the reasons why she would be upset that willingly or unwillingly a settlement organization that is there to support newcomers would reinforce feelings of inadequacy and otherness while simultaneously erasing the presence of Indigenous peoples in this land as not being real canadians.

The group reacted with outrage after Fatima shared her observations from work. Participants made a couple of sarcastic remarks that drew criticism aimed not only at the organization in which Fatima works but at most settlement organizations. Gabriela for example, suggested in a mocking tone that maybe settlement organizations should start giving out flannel shirts and Tim Hortons' coffee, in her opinion, stereotypical characteristics of what makes a 'canadian'. A comment that was rapidly supported by

other participants who had heard immigrant and refugee people in their communities attest that they felt more Canadian by drinking coffee from Timmy's [Tim Hortons]. Although most of the participants have worked or still work for settlement organizations in Coast Salish territories and recognize the kind of support offered through settlement services, they also share deep criticisms of what these organizations stand for. Non-profit organizations often end up silencing communities and encouraging less radical or critical actions and thought, more on these critical reflections about the Non-Profit Industrial Complex can be found in *The Revolution Will not be Funded*<sup>8</sup>. For instance, settlement organizations are meant to do just that, settle migrants and shape them to become part of the white settler nation building project. Settlement organizations push migrants to attend English classes, some even offer classes to reduce non-anglophone accents. Overall these agencies reinforce allegiance to the Queen and to the flag without any regard for Indigenous peoples and communities.

#### **4.5 Language – “Your English is Very Good!”**

Janina talked about how people tell her that she has a “Canadian” accent as a result of having lived in Canada for a long period of time, a position which she describes as ‘not completely integrated but comfortable enough’.

...lots of people also think that I have a Canadian accent, they think I am Canadian or think that I will pass off as Canadian or whatever the term is but with him he is teaching me that I have a lot of words that I say because I say things that I basically am embarrassing myself around him because I say things that I have never heard myself say. And I pronounce things in a weird way so only he is able to tell me that that is how Canadians say it so then, like with him I have started to remember that oh yeah, I am actually a foreigner, it is weird because people kind of show you different sides of yourself. I was comfortable thinking like being not fully integrated but you know I have been here long enough to feel like I am part of this culture but he is just reminding me that there are parts of myself that are still embarrassing. Like it is weird. Can you ever be fully Canadian? (Janina, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Non-Profit Industrial Complex please refer to *The Revolution Will not be Funded* by Incite! Women of Colour Against Violence.

Janina referred to speaking with an accent as a part of her that is still embarrassing. Disclosing something of this sort with this specific group was quite brave and perhaps shows how comfortable the participant felt in the group. The research participants tend to be critical and question the norm, therefore, this comment could have caused participants to challenge Janina to question that accents are not embarrassing especially in a room where 90% of the participants had non-anglo-phone accents. Instead, the group responded by engaging in conversations about the ways in which they themselves have encountered criticisms and othering as a result of their accents. Participants also responded to Janina's comment with their own encounters around language and inadequacy. There were however some reflections of resistance about the need for non-anglophone migrants to have to adapt their accents to fit the norm. For instance, Mariposa mentioned: "That is interesting though because I reflect on things that I want to intentionally unlearn. Like I don't want to be whatever thing that people think is canadian. Like I have the accent that I have and whatever and it is not like I fake it but I feel like I wouldn't want to have someone think that I am not Mexican..." (Mariposa, 2014).

Language is a big part of a migrant person's identity and it often becomes a signifier of how 'integrated' or how much of an immigrant a person is, even in cases where english is a racialized person's only or first language. In Western canada migrant families and to an extent education, government and community systems see learning english as a measure of success. Thus, speaking english with a non-anglo accent serves as an Othering, an exclusionary category that confirms one's foreignness. Assumptions that link language capabilities to intelligence or legitimacy to be part of a country, reinforce the negative connotations that are at times internalized by migrants. As a result, feelings of shame and incompetence materialize, as they did in Janina's case when a person is not able to perform as 'canadian enough' due to their accent. Recognizing when and how migrants replicate feelings that Other and exclude one another is an important step to unlearning destructive, oppressive and violent behaviour. Thus, being able to share these perspectives without feeling judgment from peers, family members and friends, helps a person transform moments of insecurity or self-doubt. From my own experience, not a lot of moments like this occur in community organizing, activists tend to be the harshest on each other, quickly judging wording or thoughts that are deemed not critical or radical enough. I am complicit with these kinds of behaviours, where I quickly assume I know a

person or belittle a person based on one action or comment, similarly I have experienced the backlash when I use incorrect terminology or share a comment that is not deemed to be radical enough. Sometimes, activist groups end up replicating the same patterns and behaviours they claim to be fighting against as result of being unable to be critical of each other without being destructive. For instance, Felina states "...when you say something you are not supposed to in community spaces, everyone jumps at you, you become shy, it takes years to be able to say things that you want to say. With time you learn to use the right words and play the systemic, politically correct game people in these settings play". Felina asserts that one of the hardest barriers to break through in her effort to participate in community spaces was using the 'wrong' words or expressing the 'wrong ideas' either as a result of a lack of information or limited language knowledge especially when she first migrated. Advocacy groups, especially those established for longer periods of time rarely provide the spaces for people to begin learning and unlearning social justice principles. This gap has the potential to exclude the participation and voices of people who would like to join community organizing circles.

Within the language discourse, accents play an important role in how competent and knowledgeable we are deemed to be (Anzaldua, 1987). All participants in the community conversations and interviews discussed accents at some point. Most participants had had interactions where people would speak to them louder and slower because they had accents and were assumed unable to speak english. In cases where migrants are learning english, it does not matter how loud people speak, the language is just not understood. When migrants do speak some english and are trying to formulate responses, patience not loudness is needed and in cases where they speak great english but with non-anglo accents, it was just people's intercultural incompetency that made it impossible for them to understand. Felina spoke about how patronized and infantilized she felt when she was learning english, as people often assumed she did not understand anything while she was actually taking her time to translate how she wanted to respond. Serena recounted how in one of her tutoring jobs, her pupil's parents were afraid of the kids adopting her accent: "I felt racism because of my accent. My pupil's white family compared my accent with that of their nanny, who is also a person of colour and often said the kids going to pick up your accent". Gabriela, Mariposa, Blue and Serena all had stories



of friends, employers or acquaintances who would question where they were really from because as a result of their accents.

As a way to counter internalized notions of how a 'good immigrant' should behave, Mariposa, explained to the group that she makes a conscious effort to try to reject qualities and characteristics that people associate with being 'canadian'. She also mentioned that she viewed this as a form of resistance. For instance, Mariposa makes no effort to try to subdue her Latin American accent and takes pride in pronouncing words differently to the way a 'canadian' is supposed to sound like. For Mariposa, the moments of self-doubt arise when she feels or is reminded by family and friends that she is becoming too much of a 'vancouverite' which she defines as uptight and picky about scents and smoke. "I get reminded by my friends and my family ...oh you are becoming too canadian...you are too picky now...like the scents or like the smoke and people there [in her home country] are like what the fuck!". Either way there seems to always be a desire to please peers and to police the self to embrace or reject certain identities and features based on the perceptions of the communities they are surrounded by.

Fatima, building on the conversation about language, voiced her frustration at being unable to express in her mother tongue ideas and terminology relating to the community work she engages in. This is not an uncommon feeling, a reminder that sometimes migrants who become involved in community work in Canada mainly learn anglicized and western language, frameworks and approaches to activism and advocacy. This is not due to a lack of radical work and knowledge in their countries of origin but similar to how feminism is often construed, to the imperialist ways that white, western Anglo knowledge claims superiority and innovation over native histories and practices of peoples not part of the elite white ivory tower that is academia. Being unable to at times communicate with communities and families back in peoples' home lands about social justice principles is an important reflection to maintain. For the most part migrant justice organizers are indeed racialized migrants coming mainly from the global south who are seen as representatives of their countries. This becomes problematic when advocates here in Turtle Island, start acting as experts about the experiences of peoples in their native homes. Criticisms of feminist women of colour in North America by Chandra Mohanty (2003, 2008, 2010) and Gayatri Spivak (1988, 1995, 2012) encourage feminists

to serve as connectors and bridges but not to speak on behalf of realities that are no longer part of their lives. On the other hand, Fatima also shared her experience of returning to her home country and trying to express some of the challenges she faces in Canada. Participants seemed to share similar experiences to those of Fatima in encountering resistance by families and friends back home in understanding or believing how we navigate oppression in the west. Global economic disparity and years of exploitation make it seem as if northern countries are utopias without any problems of racism, discrimination, homophobia, sexism, economic inequity, etc. As a result, families 'back home' often have difficulties understanding the hardships we might face in the global north and expect us to contribute economically making it difficult to maintain our activist commitments as we often have to secure income from multiple jobs to support family members' sustenance, education and entrepreneurial ventures.

Overall language can play an important role in how participants in this project have faced displacement. Feeling disconnected to a specific spatial location makes racialized migrants create family-like relationships with peers from advocacy and organizing circles. Those peers tend to understand that as a racialized migrant there might be an inability to express technical terms in a mother language while simultaneously not being able to express feelings and emotions in English. These new found families make it easier to engage in migrant justice, as spending time with friends and people in social justice settings makes a person more committed to the causes they stand for. Conversely, conflicts with peers as a result of personal or community disagreements can also leave advocates in a very isolated and despairing state. Whether the reflections were about fitting in with the mainstream or resisting the normative by embracing difference and uniqueness, the conversation for this part of the session centered on belonging. An experience which I shared which was also echoed by most of the participants was confusion about where we feel we belong. Racialized migrant women are often reminded of their foreignness both in western Canadian society and back in their home countries. When migrants return, there is often differential treatment by families and peers where language usage is often a point of contention. Blue for example, shared with the group that her family often makes fun of her 'western' accent when she goes for a visit: "I have been told that I speak weird in Bengali when I go back because it takes a little bit for my brain to re adapt and people think that I am faking...that I am faking Canadian but that

hurts me, that hurts me really bad. But after a while I then again get into speaking Bengali but I honestly don't fake it...that's how my brain works." The aggressions and lack of sense of belonging faced by migrants both where they live and where they come from can cause despair and hopelessness which undoubtedly will affect a person's involvement in social justice settings.

## **4.6 Advocacy and Activism**

The terms advocate and activist did not spark as much discussion as migration did. In community settings, advocate and activist are terms that are widely used to identify people who speak out against injustices, who attend meetings to organize and resist systems and policies that are deemed unjust. According to CRIAW's 2007 report, "[a]dvocacy may take place through a variety of actions and strategies, ranging from demonstrations and protests to meeting and dialogue." (p19) Under this definition and from what participants shared throughout this research project, they are all engaging in one way or another in activist settings and doing advocacy even though for the most part they do not identify under those identities. Overall there were a few participants that did not identify as advocates because they felt that they needed more passion to be considered one and/or they were unsure of how to measure how much a person must do in order to be able to be identified as an advocate. One of the sticky notes on the board made a clear distinction between speaking on behalf as opposed to speaking alongside another person or community.

Although fewer, there were also responses that embraced advocacy as fighting, resisting oppression and voicing out concerns that affect a particular community. One participant wrote "[advocacy is] thinking about my community before myself. At all times, not just in community settings." Another participant strongly emphasized that advocacy is the opposite from charity because it aims to create solidarity and to stand alongside the communities they work with. For these participants understanding a strong link between advocacy and the responsibility they have as a result of their privilege is a strong component of how they relate to this identity and open up space for voices and causes that would otherwise not be heard.

During the community conversations and interviews the word advocate was discussed as an identity far removed for most of the participants. Advocate was often associated with being a lawyer and in many of the languages shared in the room this was indeed the literal translation. Distrust about the use of the word came through in some reflections where the stereotypical white male environmental activist was offered as an example of why no one should call themselves an advocate. I also noticed that discomfort with power was one of the main reasons some of the women rejected feeling like advocates or activists and it was stated numerous times by many of the participants that supporting or working with communities was better than advocating on behalf of others. Most of them rejected the concept of leadership associated with the term because according to participants, one can ever only advocate for one's self.

There were multiple questions about what makes a person an advocate, how it is measured, the skills required, when a person stops being an advocate, etc.

...who tells you that you are an advocate or what makes you an advocate? because I don't consider myself an advocate, because I have seen people's examples of people who are advocates and they have certain skills that are very visible to me actually. I don't have any of those skills. So that is the only way that I evaluate myself, whether I am an advocate or not but I genuinely don't know what makes one an advocate. (Blue, 2014)

For the most part participants agreed that the definition of an advocate was context dependent, it was understood that even though many of the participants did not identify as advocates within non-profit settings, advocacy equalled support but in larger external contexts the term would be linked to the law. Gabriela explained that she uses the term to provide a simple definition to her co-workers about her involvement in community organizing through after work and weekend meetings. Blue affirmed a similar experience in that she stated that at work she had to assign labels in the form of advocacy in order to explain her community involvement. It is interesting to note that out of all of the community conversations and interview participants Blue and Gabriela were the only ones to be working outside the NGO world and therefore felt the necessity to identify as advocates to the outside world but would never claim to be advocates within community organizing circles. Gabriela went on to assert that being an advocate is not necessarily an identity

one choses but a 'manifestation of [one's] politics that we carry with us at all moments of our lives.' (2014)

Those who work in NGOs, even though they also rejected an advocate identity, mentioned that they use it selectively to navigate systems. Some argued that it would be beneficial to identify as an advocate in certain settings while others explained the importance to not identify under this identity if accompanying the communities they support to governmental institutions that typically see this label with a negative connotation. Others see advocacy held to such high standards in community organizing circles that they feel unattached to this identity. For instance, Janina expressed that she often found herself using the advocate identity to describe herself only because she felt she had to in order to continue belonging to the immigrant youth work circles that she was involved with. In her perspective she does not feel there is room in community settings for people who do not identify under these label in her own words:

...when I talk with people who have more experience, I don't want to talk to them because I want them to understand that I am not at their level because of advocacy or activism so I rather just listen to them, inhale them and let them leave me alone and out of things because it is scary to me. (Janina, 2014)

Janina's fears might reflect her own personal ideas of how she thinks others might see her but it could also bring light to how some community organizing circles might work. Social justice, community and grassroots groups, are spaces where marginalizes people should not feel afraid of participating. However, Janina and Felina explicitly expressed intimidation and feelings of incompetency if unable to use words, frameworks and ideas that take time, privilege and a good command of the language to learn. Perhaps a lesson moving forward is for community groups is to explore more inclusive ways of holding peers accountable, encouraging learning and having the patience to teach one another in ways that are less threatening.

On the contrary, participants like Mariposa and Gabriela have embraced the advocacy identity in order to reclaim the word and as form of resistance.

So for me it is kind of like reclaiming this word because those white environmental people and who are getting paid a lot of money for like

having a cause, they consider themselves activists and I don't think that being an activist is something that one should even get paid for. (Mariposa, 2014)

Financial remuneration for community work is a contested issue in community organizing and though it only directly came up once during the community conversations, the hesitation to identify as advocates seemed to be in large part due to the fact that many of the women work for non-profit organizations. The reality of community involvement is that it is easier to be part of mobilization efforts if they are around meetings, circles and people who are organizing for a similar cause. In terms of employment, migrants often find themselves having to enter low paying jobs or doing unpaid volunteering as a way of gaining 'experience' to enter the workforce. Felina for example expressed the following: "I volunteered because it was required, low entry jobs are low paid and volunteer jobs not paid. All of this before even considering applying for a good job." The 'good job' often ends up being a job in a community, not for profit organization, it is considered 'good' because it pays a little more than minimum wage and it is not manual. These types of jobs also allow migrants to stay connected to their migrant communities, to continue learning about the issues and policies that impact migrant's lives and where their lived experiences and identities become assets. The advocacy role usually comes as a result of being involved and committed to speaking up within the organizations that they work for to ensure that they address some of the barriers and issues they see their communities facing. In addition to their day to day job, all of the participants have also joined in a volunteer basis multiple spaces to organize around particular issues relevant to their lives and those of their communities.

In community organizing settings identifying as an advocate can also be seen as problematic. This title can be loaded because there is a sense of power attached to this identity. Once a person starts being recognized as an advocate, organizations want these advocates to run workshops, feature them as speakers in conferences and very quickly a person can be seen as the expert on a particular community or experience. If a person has this kind of institutional and community validation, it gets harder to challenge or bring accountability this person's work and/or actions. The fear of most of the women who participated in this research to identify as advocates might stem from fear of tokenizing the experiences of the people they support. However, the way comments about resisting

the norm were positively taken by the group can also have the potential to quickly turn into an expectation of what people should say and how they should behave in 'more progressive' activist settings. In the 2006 *Color of Violence: the Incite!* anthology, Betita Martinez reminds us the following:

Those with more standing, influence, and power within a group dynamic can unthinkingly do violence to the spirit of someone with less power in the group. To deprecate or humiliate a sister out of competitiveness, or out of domination that sometimes accompany leadership skills and intelligence, is to do harmful violence to her spirit. (195).

It is in light of these reflections that community organizing groups must be able to talk openly about those prominent figures that represent a group or community and have processes of accountability and transparency.

## **4.7 Indigenous-Migrant and Migrant Indigenous Settler Relations**

One of the focus group sessions and during all of the interviews, the relationships/alliances or lack thereof to First Nations and Indigenous communities were at the centre of the discussion. Two of the participants identified as Indigenous, one as Black Aboriginal and the other as Indigenous. Both of these participants had difficulty being able to locate their Indigenous ancestry because colonization tore their families and histories apart. Other participants, myself included, know we have Indigenous ancestry but are unable to have specific information about our Nations and only came to those realizations in our adult lives as a result of constantly asking family members. There were three participants who did not share with the group if they have Indigenous ancestry.

During the focus group, I shared a map of the First Nations of British Columbia from the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (see appendix D). None of the participants had seen the map before and this quickly brought forward reflections about how tokenistic what they know as Vancouver and the lower mainland can be to First Nations communities. The importance of language and terminology was deemed to be important. For instance, Gabriela shared with the group how during award ceremonies at her work place, the institution uses 'unceded' rather than stolen because it is a nicer way

of saying it. This deescalates the severity of recognizing that an entire country has been built on stolen land while dealing with guilt by making settlers feel radical or in solidarity by acknowledging it. On the other hand, the group also made an observation about how difficult or maybe even impossible it would be for most of us to have a map of the Indigenous Nations in our own territories. As an observer at that moment, I did wonder why the group thought that it would be hard to obtain more information about First Nations in British Columbia when this map and many other resources are available online.

The pain and emotional toll of realizing how colonialism completely erased a person's family histories and identities to a point where one can feel like an impostor for wanting to identify and find out more about one's Indigenous roots carried through the entire session. Participants reflected on how for the most part they wanted to disassociate from their Indigenous roots as a result of the systems and values imposed through colonialism and imperialism in their home countries. Gabriela for example, narrated how she returned to the Philippines to find out more about her Indigenous heritage and her family quickly rejected and shot down her request because according to them "...all the native stuff is so ugly". This experience was extremely painful for Gabriela to share with the group because every participant had a story about their families and communities sharing similar reflections. Janina also shared how her parents do not want her to return to her country of origin or talk about their ancestry, yet she feels that if she does not learn soon about her family history, it could die with her grandparents. Self-learning about a person's ancestry is thus an important factor in becoming effective allies to First Nation communities because it strengthens the commitment to the self, the communities and peoples whose lands migrants have come to live in. As Janina explained "there are strong parallels between First Nations and migrant communities, our stories need to be told or they die". Sharing those narratives between migrant and First Nations communities could facilitate a better understanding, knowledge and allyship between groups.

For those who migrated during their childhood or teen years, the exposure to First Nations' histories and present realities was very limited. For instance, the videos, or the small chapter in history books often minimized, misrepresented and made it seem as if residential schools happened a hundreds years ago, genocides never happened and First Nations communities no longer exist. In some regard whether reflecting on individual



journeys or those of the communities that the participants work with, it is important to note that for many newcomers, part of the struggle in learning about First Nations is rooted in their English language usage. Fatima for example, reflects on how not speaking English as one's mother tongue can be a barrier but it can also be an excuse. "I never learned about First Nations groups when I came in, I didn't even know they existed. I struggled to learn basic English and that wasn't my priority but now I think differently, I think I would have learned faster if I had learned through story telling and about the people here." (Fatima, 2014) However, even after learning English, most migrants do not often deliberately make an effort to reach out and learn from and about the communities whose lands they have now come to live in.

Migrant social justice groups struggle to make connections to First Nations communities to establish stronger alliances and to bring more awareness about Indigeniety and settler occupation in this land. Migrants' histories and encounters with Colonization and Imperialism have left deep levels of internalized racism, for many migrants, awareness about Indigeniety comes as part of their involvement in social justice circles. A key question to ask in these movements is, how can migrants become effective allies to First Nation sovereignty in Coast Salish territories if they have not yet begun to understand their own ancestry, histories, identities and place in the world. As Lila reminded us: "It is important to recognize our own complicity and responsibility within systems, without falling into a pit of guilt and hopelessness because then we give in to the project of colonization" (2014). Similarly to any type of political awareness placing importance in recognizing a migrant's role within a system of colonization and imperialism can be a move towards liberation rather than to place guilt that can be paralyzing in migrant justice movements.

Part of the role as an advocate working towards migrant justice and social justice in general is to bring awareness about identities or experiences that would better support the communities they work with. During the community conversations, the participants expressed frustration in keeping their organizations or groups accountable and in solidarity with Indigenous Nations. Lila for example, who works at a settlement organization expressed the following "I am trying to have conversations at work about how to better acknowledge the land and more effectively work with First Nation communities, I just don't

know where to start or have any tools to provide” (2014). The lack of access to resources that they can bring into organizations and groups to more effectively recognize First Nations communities and work towards creating alliances and relationships with Indigenous peoples was widely echoed by all research participants. Only Gabriela and Sasha were able to provide concrete examples of initiatives they had supported or participated in to bring awareness and establish relationships between migrant and First Nation communities. Sasha in the past, co-facilitated a Decolonize Asians workshop where participants were able to discuss and learn about colonial systems and how they are designed to pit First Nation communities against migrants and vice versa in competing for the few resources available. Gabriela also shared her experience in a group where First Nations and migrant youth came together to share stories and learn from one another. These examples are rare and difficult to organize because of the lack of relationships between migrant communities and First Nation groups and because as described in the Setting the Ground section, migrant communities have not yet found more effective ways of advocating for migrant communities without erasing Indigenous realities.

## **4.8 Migrant Women in Community Organizing Spaces**

For the last focus group session participants decided to focus on talking about the lateral violence they have encountered during their organizing efforts. The general consensus in the group is that they continue to be engaged in community efforts out of necessity fuelled by their principles and out of a desire to meaningfully transform the different circumstances of oppression that shape their lives and those of their communities. This kind of inter-personal violence in organizing affects their well-being and is particularly hurtful when it comes from people within their communities. Power dynamics within community or grassroots groups is a topic that is rarely addressed. Lila for example shared her reflection of how power functions within these spaces by stating the following “...collective spaces are places where everybody is supposed to be horizontal but some people have more power than others and it is not recognized. Some people’s voices are more valuable than others...” (2014). Gabriela experienced in her group similar dynamics that were never addressed and that created settings where mentors and people who had been in that particular group for a longer period were able to perpetuate violence without

being held accountable. For Gabriela, the unhealthy situations and general burn out takes place in part because of the way that community organizers enact gender roles to place women as the 'caretakers' and practical organizers. Gabriela expressed that "As women we feel that we need to take more than we should because we have this love for the peoples in our communities. While we care for other people we put ourselves last". This was a feeling echoed by the rest of the participants. When this type of violence takes place within circles of trust the expression that kept coming out of the conversation was that of heartbreak. The women articulated how they internalize dysfunctional oppressive systems and often end up replicating some of the very approaches they try to organize against. Within both ethno specific and issue based group organizing, gender unbalance was discussed by most of the participants. For instance, Mariposa stated "Gender imbalance in my community, makes me feel lonely. You struggle with having one voice to hear. It is an exhausting and very lonely process". Janina also added:

It makes me sad when a woman of colour perpetuates the system of oppression because it feels like she has not only lost some touch with her identity as a racialized person or POC, but she has also somewhat lost a huge grip on her identity as a woman too considering that larger systems of oppression are very patriarchal and sexist. (2014)

Disengaging from that community or that particular organizing group seemed to be the mechanism used for protection. Within community organizing groups, there seems to be a lack of processes of accountability to deal with these kinds of experiences.

One of the most extreme cases of violence within organizing groups came from Felina, who shared with me in one of the interviews her experience with sexual violence at the hands of a well-known male community organizer. "I had a low cut dress on and he just kept looking at my boobs, I called him on it and he got all defensive and angry. Other people, my friends heard us and no one did anything so I never came back to any event or group where I knew he was going to be...". Even though Felina was able to confront the person the moment the comments and actions took place, she felt disengaged and unsafe and withdrew her participation from the group. There were no systems in place or even conversations about how the group could hold each other accountable. Moments like this take away from the legitimacy of the work because migrant social justice is

encompassing of the intersections of a person's identity. Therefore, if a group loses participants because the violence they are fighting against is replicated within the group it is because their end goal becomes more important than their journey. Thus this is in direct opposition to social justice principles of equity and support. Examples like Felina's, also bring important insights about leadership roles within social justice organizing, no matter how important a person might be to a cause, they should be held to the same standard as any other participant.

Encountering constant comments, attitudes and behaviours within organizing communities that perpetuate systems of oppression can be exhausting. Some of the participants expressed how destructive and lonely it can be to constantly fight peers, family members and systems at large that are designed to keep people at the margins down. The group agreed that people do not usually have the intention to be hurtful and that most of the oppressive encounters migrants have experienced in organizing are a result of the patriarchal, ableist, homophobic, classist systems that are part of their lives. However, they also recognized that sometimes intentions are unimportant and it is what happens as a result of people's actions that leave scars for a long time.

As a way to cope with these oppressive and hurtful experiences, participants often talked about the need for better self care techniques as well as the importance for groups and organizations to dedicate time and efforts to developing processes of accountability for each other and their own selves. Two tools discussed during the focus groups to address accountability in community organizing circles were *The Revolution Starts at Home* (Chen, Dulani and Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2011) and *The Community Accountability for survivors of Sexual Violence* (Hereth and Rumpf, 2014).

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Conclusion and Community Contributions**

One of the major goals of this research has been to provide a space for self identified racialized migrant women to talk about their experiences in community organizing. Through this process important insights about identity, belonging, migration, advocacy and relationship building between migrant and Indigenous communities were explored. The need for social and migrant justice circles to value and foster the well being of the racialized migrant women community members that advocate daily for various causes is instrumental in preventing over exhaustion and burn out. Potentially part of this process could include stronger connections to the land and the people where they now live. Social and migrant justice circles also need to place a strong focus on addressing how groups can deal with sexism, homophobia and misogyny to keep themselves and their members accountable to the practices and general principles they tend to abide by.

I hope that the research participants, individuals and communities involved in similar advocacy settings, find these reflections and findings relevant in starting conversations about the ways in which community organizers treat one another. Belonging to a group of committed individuals striving to support their own communities can be very refreshing and empowering, however, at the same time, these spaces can feel judgemental and isolating. As migrants continue moving forward trying to create communities where they can better support each other, they need to consider who owns or navigates the social capital built by a group or a cause and have honest conversations with one-another about how to hold each other accountable.

Throughout the community conversations, interviews and additional research, a set of tools to contribute towards the well-being of racialized migrant advocates has been compiled (see appendix E). In addition, a separate document (see appendix F) summarizing some documentaries, books and other resources for migrant communities to learn and create relationships with First Nations communities will also be circulated. A final resource (see appendix G) that contains selected sources and tools on community accountability taken from the [criticalresistance.org](http://criticalresistance.org) website will also be readily available to

migrant justice groups. All of these documents will be widely circulated among advocacy circles, the women who participated in this project and throughout social media.

## **5.1 Limitations and possibilities for further research**

This research project does not claim to have any answers to any of the challenges or dilemmas identified by participants, however, it does bring into light some important reflections by women working in social and migrant justice organizing. Through this work, my hope is to encourage migrant advocates and activists to set more clear processes within their groups and sectors to address instances where migrants are discriminating and being violent against each other. In addition, it is a reminder that migrant justice movements cannot move forward without grounding their causes in solidarity work that includes new ways of sharing migration experiences while simultaneously understanding the colonial implications on those communities where they now live.

The methods and approaches used were also instrumental in getting the type of information I was able to collect. The sample size though dense was quite small and my involvement and inclusion of my own reflections in this thesis could lead to the questioning of the accuracy of these findings. However, from the very inception of this project it was my goal to resist some of the norms in how institutional research works with communities poorly represented. For instance, the deliberate non-capitalization of Canada and English was an attempt to resist the ways in which we academically continue placing value in certain cultures, languages and experiences over others. Not placing a strong emphasis at the beginning will probably deter readers from engaging with this work as for some these 'grammar errors' might make these findings lose validity. This was a decision on my part that feels like a tiny act of rebellion but that hopefully also helps me draw the type of readers that would celebrate such a choice. As more racialized migrant activist women join academic sectors, it would be interesting to see how other approaches and modes of presenting research findings are conducted with migrant communities.

Although the participants who committed to attend the community conversations were very generous with their time, more than three sessions could have brought forward deeper insights about their experiences. Perhaps having more concrete ways of

contributing to the well-being of the women or having stronger relationships with Indigenous groups in Coast Salish territories, would have facilitated the intentions many of participants had of moving forward with a project that involved migrant and Indigenous communities. In addition, the reflections collected through the community conversations had much more depth than the one-to-one interviews as the peer support model was encouraging and sparked collective memories. That said, it was only in the one-to-one interview that the sexual violence came up. I believe that having more time, resources and a combination of community conversations and one-to-one interviews would work best for future research.

A deeper exploration sexual violence and other kinds of violence experienced in activists' sectors would bring greater insights about migrant justice groups. A more in-depth reflection could also bring about better tools to hold each other accountable and support victims and perpetrators of violence as part of advancing social justice principles. A group meeting over a longer period of time, the ability to explore different models and brainstorm unique ways to address issues and concerns participants bring up would be ideal. This approach would view the women as having enough knowledge and experiences to find solutions to their own challenges. In addition, as migrants continue their journeys towards figuring out how to be better allies to Indigenous peoples both here and back home opportunities for relationship building and uniting forces to fight for causes would become more natural and fluid.

The absence of class analysis in this work is quite evident throughout. This is in part due to the lack of focus on this identity on my part and by the women who participated in this project. With a few exceptions, Anti-racist and Decolonial migrant activist work in Vancouver tends to shy away from a class based analysis, particularly when it comes to working with refugee communities. A better understanding about the social mobility and social capital required to cross transnational borders as immigrants, refugee claimants or government assisted refugees would provide a better insight about class status of people back in their home countries and add to reflection of the experiences and journeys of migrants once they arrive in Canada.

For academics conducting research with communities that are not well represented within institutions, an important question to ask is why this particular topic and why these specific communities. This constant questioning helps us as researchers have clear objectives and defined intentions about our roles. Finally, researchers should also continuously reassess their role within their research projects and place value in acknowledging the knowledge from the journeys that individuals in communities at the margins have as a result of their encounters with systems and institutions that surround them.



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## Appendix A.

### Outreach Poster for Focus Groups



CALL OUT FOR

**SELF-IDENTIFIED RACIALIZED  
MIGRANT WOMEN ADVOCATES  
WORKING WITH MIGRANT  
COMMUNITIES IN  
COAST SALISH TERRITORIES**  
(Vancouver, Lower-Mainland)

**WHAT?** To discuss our experiences as advocates in relation to Indigenous Nations, immigration policy (especially within the past three years); and our experiences navigating settlement organizations, community organizing, policy and whatever else you might want to talk about linked to your experiences.

I am compiling this research for my thesis in the department of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at SFU. However, recognizing how exploitative and extractive research often is, I plan to do the following:

- As a researcher, I commit to create a short document with the findings that could serve as a tool to support other racialized women and community groups working for migrant justice.
- If interested, there are some resources available to create an event, dialogue, discussion, etc beyond the academic research.
- I am also open to discuss other ways in which I could give back to the communities we work with.

**WHO?** I am a racialized migrant woman who has been involved in different initiatives around migrant justice.

**WHY?** Because I got tired of white (though sometimes also racialized) researchers appropriating my experiences and extracting my communities' knowledge to never see them again.

**WHERE?** We will meet in a public space; whichever is most convenient to those interested and most likely close to transit.

**WHEN?** We will meet for 2-3 hours three to four times throughout the months of March and April, depending on peoples' availabilities.

*Home cooked meals and snacks will be provided. Though limited, there are some resources for childcare if needed.*

If you want more information about the research or about me and/or are interested in being a part of it, **please contact me by February 28 (Nathalie Lozano-Neira) at 604-762-5028 or nla27@sfu.ca**

Poster design by: Jennifer Sarkar [cargocollective.com/dive](http://cargocollective.com/dive)

## Appendix B.

### Racialized Migrant Women Research Feedback Sheet

Pick a pseudonym for this research:

*This is so I can quote or reflect on things you might have said and so I can keep your anonymity. Feel free to be as creative as you want.*

1) How do you want to be identified for the purposes of this research in relation to your race/ethnicity, migration identity, community work and gender? You don't have to identify with all or any of them.

2) How did you become involved in community work?

3) We didn't get a chance to talk too much about our lives/connections relationships outside of this land. Anything you would like to mention about you and/or your families' homelands?

4) What are some of the topics that you would have liked to talk about during this research that we didn't get a chance to touch or expand on?

5) What was good? What was challenging and what could be differently if I was to do a research group like this one again?

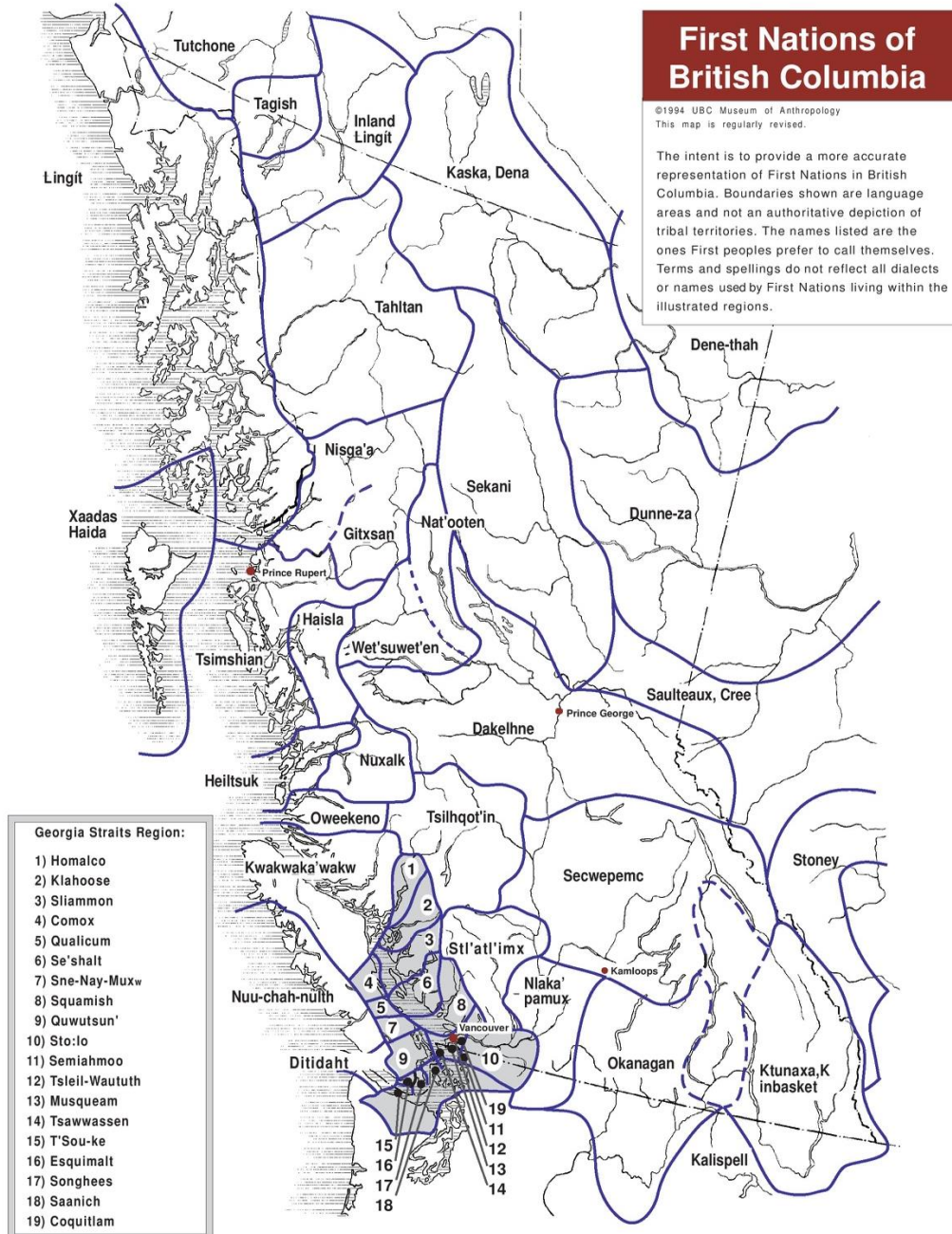
## **Appendix C.**

### **List of Participants' Self-Care Activities**

- 1) Play a musical instrument
- 2) Sleep well (make an effort to go to bed early and read a book)
- 3) Me day to go for a walk and read a magazine
- 4) Dancing
- 5) Being lazy, listening to music
- 6) Walking
- 7) Eating
- 8) Sleeping
- 9) Me time to read
- 10) Eating something delicious

# Appendix D.

## Map of First Nations of British Columbia



<http://moa.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/SchoolProgram-FirstNationsMap.pdf>  
Used with permission.

## Appendix E.

### Resources for community workers, particularly racialized women working in Social Justice sectors

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." —Audre Lorde

- Self Care as Warfare by Sarah Ahmed  
<https://feministkilljoys.com/2014/08/25/selfcare-as-warfare/>
- 11 Queer and Black Women Discuss Self Care by L.G. Parker  
<http://elixher.com/eleven-black-queer-and-trans-women-discuss-self-care/>
- Self Care for People of Colour After Psychological Trauma by Jasmine  
<http://justjasmineblog.com/self-care-for-people-of-color-after-emotional-and-psychological-trauma/>
- Self-Preservation as Resistance: Tips for Practicing Self-Care and Social Justice by Krislyn Dominique <http://www.forharriet.com/2014/12/self-preservation-as-resistance-tips.html#ixzz4N0da5KxC>
- Self Care by Aisha Moore: Filled with resources and tips for Black and Racialized women. <http://www.selfcarebyaisha.com/>
- On Trauma and the Necessity of Self Care by Suzanne Narain.  
<http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/blog/2015/12/10/on-trauma-and-the-necessity-of-self-care>
- 6 Things To Do If Your Social Justice Job is a Toxic Environment by Laura Kacere. <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/09/social-justice-job-toxic/>
- From Fired up to burn out: 7 tips to help you sustain a life committed to social justice by Linsey Mullin. <http://blog.en.idealists.org/from-fired-up-to-burnt-out-7-tips-to-help-you-sustain-a-life-committed-to-social-justice/>
- Everything is Awful and I am not Okay by Eponis  
<http://eponis.tumblr.com/post/113798088670/everything-is-awful-and-im-not-okay-questions-to>
- Self Care list: How to Take Care of Your Self While Learning About Oppression (With Unaware People)  
<https://fabianswriting.tumblr.com/post/69798253522/self-care-list-how-to-take-care-of-your-self>



## Appendix F.

### Resources about First Nations and Indigenous identities for Migrant Justice Organizers

The following information has been compiled for community workers to share with the populations we work with. We need to make time; this needs to be a priority. There is no right formula to talk and learn about Indigenous communities but the more we know as community leaders, workers, facilitators, the easier it will be to facilitate these conversations with the people we work with. Bringing in Indigenous peoples to share their knowledge, history and present is important, it hopefully establishes relationships and that is key but we need to do some groundwork first with our groups and organizations. It is not fair to invite them to come in to do the most basic work. Let's think about the resources and time we are pulling away from Indigenous organizing so that we don't burn out/overwhelm these leaders. I hope this is a start of resources we can use to learn more, to learn together and to share with the communities we support. This is a living document that we can all use to get started or to continue our learning, please add resources as you come across them.

Resources about Residential Schools:

- Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education and Society: *Decolonization* is a journal, which centers and privileges various forms of Indigenous knowledge and decolonial epistemologies and methodologies for the purpose of decolonization. <https://decolonization.wordpress.com/tag/canada/>
- We Were Children: It is a 2012 Canadian documentary film about the experiences of First Nations children in the Canadian Indian residential school system. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/we\\_were\\_children/trailer/we\\_were\\_children\\_trailer/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/we_were_children/trailer/we_were_children_trailer/)
- CBC 8 fire series: Resources, maps, profiles about Aboriginal peoples in what we now know as Canada. <http://www.cbc.ca/8thfire/>
- The Experimental Skimos: It is the untold story of how an experiment in assimilation, not only changed three boys, but changed a nation. <http://aptn.ca/reelinsights/more-insight/the-experimental-eskimos/>
- First Nations 101: It is an easy to read primer that provides readers with a broad overview of the diverse and complex lives of First Nations people. <http://www.firstnations101.com/>
- Red Skins white masks: Fundamentally questions prevailing ideas of settler colonialization and Indigenous resistance <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/red-skin-white-masks>
- The Inconvenient Indian: A brilliantly subversive and darkly humorous history of Indian–White relations in North America since first contact <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-inconvenient-indian>
- Chinese-Canadians and First Nations: [http://www.chinese-firstnations-relations.ca/bibliography\\_Media.html](http://www.chinese-firstnations-relations.ca/bibliography_Media.html)
- All our Family relations: All Our Father's Relations (祖根父脈) tells the story of the Grant siblings who journey from Vancouver to China in an attempt to rediscover their father's roots and better understand his fractured relationship with their Musqueam mother. <http://allourfathersrelations.com/>

- A Sorry State: With three Canadian government apologies to his parents and stepparents for past racist actions, filmmaker Mitch Miyagawa has the most apologized-to family in the country—maybe even the world.  
<https://mitchmiyagawa.com/film/>
- Cedar Bamboo: Recounting the life experiences of four descendants of mixed heritage, this documentary explores the unique relationships shared by early Chinese immigrants and First Nations peoples on Canada's west coast.  
<https://www.knowledge.ca/program/cedar-and-bamboo>
- UBC First Nations House of Learning: Xwi7xwa Library <http://aboriginal.ubc.ca/>
- Talking Stick Festival: Welcome to 2016 Talking Stick Festival, proudly presented on the traditional un-ceded territories of the Coast Salish People. <http://fullcircle.ca/tsf-overview>
- Indigenous Culture and Competency online: The ICS training is a unique, facilitated on-line training program designed to increase knowledge, enhance self-awareness, and strengthen the skills of those who work both directly and indirectly with Aboriginal people. <http://www.sanyas.ca/training/british-columbia>
- Urban Native Youth Association: As Metro Vancouver's only Native youth program-providing organization, we work to empower Native youth through our 21 programs which include education & training, personal support, live-in programs, and sports & recreation. <http://www.unya.bc.ca/>
- KAYA: Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association's (KAYA's) mandate is to advocate for aboriginal youth voice, representation and participation in all levels of decision making processes. <http://kayavancouver.com/>
- Feminism for real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/ourschools-ourselves/feminism-real>
- Decolonizing Social Justice Work: Stories to support organizations, facilitators and youth working against oppression. <http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/decolonizing-social-justice-work>
- A Red Girl's Reasoning (Short Film): After the justice system fails the survivor of a brutal, racially-driven sexual assault, she becomes a motorcycle-riding, ass-kicking vigilante who takes on the attackers of other women who've suffered the same fate. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEXYuZQy8qQ>
- A Red Girl's Reasoning (short story): The story follows the unfolding of a relationship between an Indigenous woman, Christine, and her non-Indigenous husband, Charlie. The story explores social and cultural tensions between Christine and Charlie while critiquing stereotypes about women and Indigenous peoples in colonial culture. [http://canlit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/red\\_girls\\_reasoning.pdf](http://canlit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/red_girls_reasoning.pdf)
- Indigenous Young Women Lead: Our Stories, Our Strengths, Our Truths. <http://www.girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/indigenous-young-women-lead-our-stories-our-strengths-our-truths-edited-by-the-native-youth-sexual-health-network>
- Margins: An anti-racist, anti-colonialist, Indigenous, queer, feminist Vancouver-based print and electronic zine produced by and for Indigenous women, women of colour and queer and/or trans women. <http://poczineproject.tumblr.com/post/28991381962/community-submission-margins>

- Indigenous Perspectives Society: Building Local Relationships workshop  
<http://ipsociety.ca/events/blr/>
- Lee Maracle's books: Lee Maracle is a Sto:Lo nation; grandmother of four, mother of four who was born in North Vancouver, BC. <http://indigenoustudies.utoronto.ca/person/lee-maracle/>
- The connection between immigrants and Aboriginal people in Canada's mosaic  
<http://canadianimmigrant.ca/slider/the-connection-between-immigrants-and-aboriginal-people-in-canadas-mosaic>
- Vancouver Dialogues: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities (Video and Booklet) The goal of the project was to build increased understanding and strengthened relations between Aboriginal and immigrant/non-Aboriginal communities.<http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/dialogues-project.aspx>
- Indigenous Initiatives at UBC: This film series reveals the historical context of the site known today as Totem Park Residence, the contested history of its building naming processes, and stories of UBC-Indigenous relations.  
<http://indigenousinitiatives.citl.ubc.ca/research-resources/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLG5UGIHVtIPsf2EFBRUSoHtIJAd0E8EOn>
- Various documentaries by Lisa Jackson: Jackson's films have garnered numerous awards and in 2012 the ReelWorld Festival named her a Trailblazer. She is Anishinaabe, has a BFA in Film Production from Simon Fraser University, has completed the Canadian Film Centre's Directors' Lab, and works in both fiction and documentary. <http://lisajackson.ca/>
- Decolonizing Antiracism by Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua <http://www.anti-racism.ca/content/%E2%80%9Cdecolonizing-antiracism%E2%80%9D-bonita-lawrence-and-enakshi-dua>
- Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States by Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright. <http://www.nanditasharma.net/writings/sharma-decolonizing-resistance.pdf>
- A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism: Rethinking Transnationalism, Intersectionality, and Settler Colonialism by Rita Kaur Dhamoon  
<http://www.feralfeminisms.com/rita-dhamoon/>
- Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society by Shere Razack.  
[https://books.google.ca/books/about/Race\\_Space\\_and\\_the\\_Law.html?id=FWs2TYWS8cMC](https://books.google.ca/books/about/Race_Space_and_the_Law.html?id=FWs2TYWS8cMC)
- First Voices: FirstVoices is a group of web-based tools and services designed to support Aboriginal people engaged in language archiving, language teaching & culture revitalization. <http://www.firstvoices.com/en/index-canada-west-detail>

## Appendix G.

### A Compilation of Resources to Address Accountability in Social Justice and Community Organizing Settings

Selected sources and tools compiled from the Critical Resistance Website <http://criticalresistance.org/> for community organizing groups on accountability.

- Community Accountability within the People of Color Progressive Movement by INCITE! Women of Color against Violence Ad-Hoc Community Accountability Working Group: A report outlines ways to address gender oppression within progressive, radical, and revolutionary people of color organizations and movements. [http://incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite\\_files/resource\\_docs/2406\\_cmtly-acc-poc.pdf](http://incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite_files/resource_docs/2406_cmtly-acc-poc.pdf)
- This toolkit is a product of the Shifting from Carceral to Transformative Justice Feminisms Conference held at DePaul University on March 8, 2014: provides background on a reading group held for survivors of sexual violence, the curriculum for that group, and a workshop curriculum on community accountability for survivors of sexual violence. [https://carceralfeminism.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/cassv-reading-group-toolkit\\_shifting-from-carceral-to-tj-feminisms\\_final.pdf](https://carceralfeminism.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/cassv-reading-group-toolkit_shifting-from-carceral-to-tj-feminisms_final.pdf)
- The Revolution Starts at Home by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (eds). South End Press 2011: A collection of stories and tools for community accountability addressing interpersonal harm within social justice movements without relying on the prison industrial complex.
- A foundational piece on community accountability, laying out core principles, questions for consideration, strategies, and models. [http://www.incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite\\_files/resource\\_docs/0528\\_incite-communityaccountabilityprinciples.pdf](http://www.incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite_files/resource_docs/0528_incite-communityaccountabilityprinciples.pdf)
- By the Queer Transformative Justice Working Group: A piece outlining four core principles to which a community can be accountable around issues of harm and violence. [http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TJ\\_Interim\\_Principles\\_09\\_21\\_08.pdf](http://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TJ_Interim_Principles_09_21_08.pdf)
- By Cathy Richardson and Vikki Reynolds, International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies, 2012.  
A radical social work approach to doing social justice work including ideas about staying alive in community work and resisting the individualism of “burnout”.  
<http://www.vikkireynolds.ca/documents/RichardsonReynolds2012HereWeAreAmazinglyAliveUVicJournals.pdf>