FROM REENA TO BETI: A COUNTERSTORY CONSIDERING STRUCTURAL RACISM AND LIMITATIONS IN FEMINIST NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

by

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Abstract

Adding to a growing field of literature in critical race studies in education, and gender studies, this project looks to understand cracks in feminist nonprofit organizations, specifically as they relate to services offered for racialized and Indigenous girls and women. Using data from 15 interviews with racialized and Indigenous activists with experience in mainstream nonprofit feminist organizations on unceded Coast Salish territory in the Greater Vancouver area, I compile the activists’ experiences in a composite counterstory drawing upon critical race theory methodologies (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, Solarzano & Yosso, 2002, Duncan, 2002, Cook & Dixson, 2012). Beti, the protagonist of the counterstory, reveals the many structural barriers that exist within these organizations. This includes: tokenized use of racialized and Indigenous bodies to hold strategic positions maintaining “diversity” projects or fulfilling well-intentioned organizational policies only to come up against longstanding institutional barriers committed to racist and colonial white settler structures. This research indicates that these organizations had and continue to have a longstanding history of maintaining the nonprofit industrial complex. Beti, as a racialized settler, centers Indigenous ways of knowing, such as critical place inquiry, to better understand her position on stolen territories and how activism on this land might impact her ability to effect change because of the very nature of racialized and gendered violence that persists within the changing landscape of the city of Vancouver. Finally, I look at the ways this research project is incomplete. Additional research is required to further understand the experiences of activists in organizations, barriers to access and systemic exclusion for racialized and Indigenous girls and women within institutions.
Lay Summary

This research creates a composite counterstory, drawing on critical race theory methodologies. Compiled using the data from 15 interviews with racialized and Indigenous activists working in mainstream nonprofit organizations on unceded Coast Salish territory in the Greater Vancouver area. Beti, the protagonist of the counterstory, reveals the many structural barriers that exist within these organizations. These barriers include: tokenized use of racialized and Indigenous bodies to hold strategic positions maintaining “diversity” projects and/or fulfilling well-intentioned organizational policies. Despite organizational intentions activists reflect experiences of institutional barriers committed to upholding racist and colonial white settler structures. This study contributes to the growing field of research that seeks to provide space for traditionally marginalized voices within institutions.
Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Manjeet Birk.
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Dedication

for my dad ~ who always believed in the potential there was
and for malik ~ who holds unlimited potential for what still can be…
Chapter 1. Searching for Beginnings

Beti opens her eyes. All she sees is darkness. Oh no—the anxiety dream again? The one where she is running through the darkness, looking, but unable to see. Do you see me? she asks, hope against hope. The question is rhetorical, because she already knows she can’t be seen. She has this dream often more often than she would like to admit, so she knows the signs. Blackness surrounds her, darkness fills up within her, like the sunken abyss of drowning in a dark ocean. She cannot see her body, but she can feel it—heart racing, the hard thuds reverberating in her chest cavity—so she knows her physical body is still there, somehow connected to this racing mind, grounded to something, one way or another.

Do you see me? Beti asks again. Do you see me? The darkness lifts into a hazy grey and all of a sudden she starts to see light. A room full of people—her colleagues, her friends, and duplicates of herself—over and over again. Silence. The piercing kind. It makes her wonder if she even asked the question. She asks it one more time, just to be sure. Do you see me? And then she wonders if no one is there to hear. If no one is listening, is the question still being asked? This time the question is not rhetorical. Beti wants an answer. She begs for an answer. DO YOU SEE ME? she screams. Tears stream down her face. She cannot hold them back any more. She needs to feel the warm water dripping from her chin, to feel the pain and sorrow in her heart, to feel anything, just to prove that she is still alive. I am here, she asserts. She collapses to the ground. Her knees fall hard on the floor. Yes, the ground is something she can feel—something she can always count on—this land—something that will always meet her body with supportive resistance. The scaffolding to hold her up when she feels she will crumble into a million pieces. She feels the hard, cold concrete push back against her bare knees. She pulls in shallow breaths,
begging her body to calm. The people all around her watch her, but still say nothing. She knows they can see her. She stares back at them and asks, “Why is nobody answering me?” The silence pierces her again.

Searching for Light: Beti’s Dream

Beti is a protagonist of a composite counterstory informed by the 15 racialized and Indigenous activists, including myself, who participated in this doctoral research. Beti reflects me as well as the participants. She is at once all of us, but none of us. Like all of us, Beti has a story—a story of why she chose to work in nonprofit, a story of how she was drawn into activism. Every Beti has a story, and often Beti’s story starts with an instrumental moment that rationalizes her quest for justice—a desire to find some light in the darkness. Something that weighs on her that she carries—weight and pressure that can only result in the kind of anxiety dream that opened the chapter. Every Beti’s story is different. My story starts on November 14, 1997, when 14-year-old Reena Virk was murdered in Victoria, British Columbia, by a group of mostly girls for not being cool enough, not being “normal” enough, not being whatever young white girls deem enough for a “strange and different” Brown body. Reena was not enough, they decided. The details of her murder have been recounted many times, with varying truths permeating the surface, but the reality remains: Reena was beaten and left for dead by a group of her “peers” under the Craigflower bridge.

What happened to Reena was undeniably tragic. But from my perspective, that was not the only tragedy. The other one, the muddier, more complex tragedy was the frenzy that followed Reena’s death. Yasmin Jiwani (2006) in her media analysis following of Reena’s case shows the
race and class messages that were being delivered to the Canadian public after her death. The media sat within overarching questions of what was happening to “our girls.” These seemingly beautiful, sweet, and innocent girls were becoming monsters. The question remained: What was happening to the girls—the ones who did not look like Reena, the ones who murdered? Rather than the focus being on the violence enacted against a Brown body, the focus of this murder became, as it often does, whiteness and the fragility that surrounds white people’s experiences and sense of self. Robin DiAngelo (2011) reminds that whiteness is constructed within a social and institutional hierarchy where whiteness sits at the top.

This chapter introduces my research project and traces how I came to this project, from the pivotal moment of Reena Virk’s murder to my work with women’s organizations. It outlines the concepts I used in interviewing racialized and Indigenous activists who work in nonprofit organizations and later in transforming the themes that emerged from those interviews into a composite counterstory of Beti. Beti, as a composite, represents the myriad of systemic and structural challenges that racialized and Indigenous women face, both in working in feminist nonprofit organizations and in the systems they navigate in their daily lives. Systems that inform how marginalized people experience the Canadian state. The composite counterstory moves the burden of exposing systemic exclusion from individual racialized and Indigenous women and reassigns it to institutions. Collectivizing consciousness within this dissertation was a strategic act. Most of these participants are economically vulnerable within organizations that use white supremacist underlying logic. In a small city like Vancouver this exposure could jeopardize their potential capacity for employment. A quick note about Beti; in this dissertation she is both every racialized and Indigenous women in the ways the system sees her, while simultaneously recog-
nizing the individual and particular experiences of groups of racialized women and those who are Indigenous, and how they view themselves. Given that Beti and counterstory are complex concepts, I go into more detail throughout this chapter and the next. However, it is important to note here for my purposes I have written Beti as a racialized women to acknowledge the distinct experiences of racialized and Indigenous communities on colonized unceded territories. Furthermore, as this dissertation is concerned with the systemic relations of racialized and Indigenous women to nonprofit organizations, the composite of Beti stands as a metaphor for how those organizations often see racialized and Indigenous women as undifferentiated. This is an experimental approach to the composite because not only does it serve to protect the identities of those I interviewed (which I go into further detail in the next chapter) it will also address this undifferentiatedness that is the projection of the settler Canadian gaze; not real people and who they are. The composites are reflections of the categories of race and ethnicity as they are understood through that gaze—which are also problematic as they function within the colonial systems they seek to disrupt. In this chapter I outline the theoretical underpinnings, methodological considerations, and refusals that shape this composite—Betis story.

Searching for the Foundations: Background

The details of Reena’s murder are deeply saddening, and I cannot think of these tragic events without also thinking of an encounter at McDonald’s restaurant. It must have been the late 1980s or early 90s. I could not have been older than ten. My family and I had gone one Sunday afternoon to the stand-alone McDonald’s off of Douglas Street. In contemporary Victoria it has been absorbed by the gentrification of the fancy new Uptown Mall, but during these years the
area was a little rougher. Reena and her family were at McDonald’s that day, too. The entire family was dressed up in their “Sunday best.” Reena wore a short, poofy dress—I remember pastel colours—light blue, pink, and violet—with bows in her hair. It was a special occasion of some kind; I am not sure exactly what. My siblings and I pleaded with my parents not to go and talk to them—we knew it would result in a communal dinner over awkward polite conversation—but we could not convince them.

At this time, the Brown community in Victoria was minuscule. And although we had no direct family connection to the Virks, my parents were committed to keeping ties to the community and solidarity with familiar Brown faces in the sea of white Victoria. Reena’s father and mine approached each other somewhere in the middle of McDonald’s between our tables, shaking hands and chatting niceties in Punjabi. They smiled and promised to get together soon as they walked back to their respective tables. That was the last time that I saw Reena, and every time I hear her name, that is the first image that comes to my mind. Of course, as time goes on that image of her is slowly being replaced by the school sanctioned picture day image of her in her blue sweater. The image that did and continues to flood the pages of newspapers then and the web now.

Amid the media hurricane that followed Reena’s murder, I remember thinking: was I like the girls in “moral turmoil” that society was rushing to save, or was I like Reena? I was a little older than she was, and our families were not close—I was not close with Reena—but my McDonald’s memory sticks with me because our stories are more alike than they are dissimilar. In the years that followed her murder, the stories of Reena continued, and many others surfaced as well. I, certainly, cannot do justice to Reena, her story and her family through these pages. She
could have been my entire dissertation topic. The case was well covered in Canadian media and
too this day her story and image pop up regularly. Reena’s story is a foundational part of my
coming to know, especially as a racialized girl living in Victoria at that time.¹ She is foundational
to who I have become, more than the individual girl she was, but all that she has come to sym-
bolize representationally in the public consciousness inside and outside racialized and Indige-
 nous communities. There was a constant stream of missing Brown girls and women—Indigenous
girls and women mostly, but others as well: “honour killings,” domestic violence, poverty, sui-
cide, and addiction were killing girls that looked more like me than I ever wanted to admit.
Through Reena’s story, I realized, more clearly than ever, how precarious the lives of Brown
girls can be in a white settler country with its legacy of racism, genocide, and hate, particularly
towards Brown feminized bodies. Yasmin Jiwani (2006) demonstrates the ways race, gender and
violence interplay within the lives of young racialized women, specifically Reena Virk. She
shows that race and gender were inextricably linked to how Reena died and the ways her story
was taken up as a national conversation. Even from that young age, it was clear to me that our
systems are broken, and not just for Brown girls.

None of this is new to scholars who theorize race and racism within a white supremacy
context (Razack, 1999, Razack et al, 2010, Omg & Winant, 2014). The interconnected and inter-
sectional elements of histories and current-day racist policies, poverty, lack of access, lack of re-
sources, lack of service providers is painfully clear. None of this is news to feminist, anti-racist
and anti-violence activists, either. Those, like my participants who are shedding light on how
these intersectional realities exclude Indigenous and racialized women from the institutions in-

¹ For a more thorough analysis of Reena Virk’s story please see Jiwani (1993) and Jiwani (1999).
tended to serve them. People are organizing. Important, meaningful work is interrupting mainstream narratives and disrupting white settler colonialism. As Razack explains: “Without history and social context, each encounter between unequal groups becomes a fresh one, where the participants start from zero, one human being to another, each innocent of the subordination of others.” (Razack, 1999, p. 8). Those within this resistance are working to expose the existing power arrangement to shed light on this history and social context to show the ways in which racialized and Indigenous women have and continue to be marginalized within the Canadian state.

In my experience working within these organizations, it has become clear to me that the problem is fragmented systems busting at the seams. Busting because they are overcrowded, incomplete and covered in Band-Aids that are not fixing the problems but rather barely holding together a broken system. Indigenous girls are suffering from a system riddled with the historical legacies of residential schools, intergenerational traumas and the legacies of continued colonization on stolen lands. Racialized girls are trying to stay afloat in systems that do not account for the unique needs of immigrant communities, cultural dialogues and racism embedded amongst these groups and towards them at its very core. Indigenous and racialized girls and women, and the Indigenous and racialized women who work with the feminist non-profits serving girls are falling through the cracks because there are lots of cracks to fall through. I wanted to better understand the cracks. Although, my interest in girls experiences motivated this research, specifically a girl—Reena Virk—they are not the focus of this project. As I learned and understood theory, I realized systems, organizations and how they operate are equally complex and troubling. As a result, this research tries to understand the cracks within systems through the experiences of racialized and Indigenous activists who work within organizations.
Searching for Terminology and Concepts

Throughout this project I have understood feminist organizations to mean organizations that work with an explicit mandate to serve girls/women in a women-centered environment. This includes the incorporation of a feminist mandate in their structures, although this is fluid based on who is in the organization at any given time. These organization might include, but are not limited to, the advocacy of women’s rights, with the understanding that women are diverse and encompass intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991) that impact our relationships to systems and structures. The term feminist has multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings (Bunjun, 2011, Yee, 2011), and the participants within this research had varying levels of comfort with this word. As a result, I bring a loose and fluid understanding of feminism to this project. Although I use the word women to discuss the historical realities of those who work and access space within women’s organizations, most, but not all, contemporary feminist organizations acknowledge the limitations of this word and welcome a variety of bodies within these spaces, including, trans women, gender-neutral people, and feminist men, among others.

Feminist organizations are often borne out of a need to support girls and women in alleviating common barriers they experience. They face many challenges in their service provision, including the inability to center Indigenous issues within anti-racist organizations and movements (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Yet, research has also indicated the need for organizations to cater to the multiple realities of racialized and Indigenous girls and women (Lee & de Finney, 2005; Lund & Nabavi, 2008). There has also been a lack of input from and an erasure of the experiences of racialized and Indigenous girls in the design and implementation of social service and education programs (Srivastava, 2006). Furthermore, the challenges
of implementing anti-oppressive policies and practices within women’s organizations reduce organizations’ efficacy in working with this population (Barnoff & Moffat, 2007; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Srivastava, 2006). To this point, research has only minimally represented the tensions within this complex work.

Race and racism are also important themes for this project. Although it is clear that race is a social construct (Omi & Winant, 2014) based on perceived differences of skin colour, this understanding by no means devalues, changes, reduces, or cancels out the experiences of racism. Racism can and does impact the lives of marginalized folks on both individual and systemic levels. Further, racism does not work alone. It is clearly intertwined with other structures and systems (class, gender, sexuality, etc.) to give it its power and veracity within the lives of these women (Crenshaw, 1991, Razack, 1999, Williams, 1992).

Throughout this research, I work with the concepts of racialized and Indigenous. Racialized signifies communities that have been differentiated/othered through the presence of a white settler society (Ahmed, 2009; Razack, 2002). I work within the language of Indigenous instead of Native, First Nations, Aboriginal, or Indian to consider the diversity of Indigenous peoples globally and the similar struggles communities have had for self-determination and sovereignty around the world (Dei, 2011). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) defines Indigenous as “a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples” (p. 7). Even so, I acknowledge that language is working within a white settler colonial system that seeks to privilege the legal, scientific, philosophical and epistemic frameworks of obedient bodies. This allows for the division of resources through a process of racialization and identification. As a result, certain actors refuse state-determined identities and categories due to the ways
in which the categories themselves subjugate Indigenous bodies, land, and rights—under the settler nation state and not outside of it.

Despite its tensions, the term Indigenous resonates within this research, because it also implies the collective consciousness of rights both violated, denied, reclaimed and fought for through historical colonization, displacement, diaspora, and dispossession. It is being energized today within contemporary movements by and for racialized and Indigenous women, such as Idle No More. Indigenous peoples can have and often do have experiences of racialization; however, I refer to Indigenous peoples separately from racialized people of colour to acknowledge the distinct challenges Indigenous communities face under the continued reality of settler colonialism. Taken together these terms also recognize the ways that colonization (by white and racialized bodies) has impacted and continues to impact the process of Indigenous people on stolen lands. I go into this in greater detail throughout this dissertation.

Settler colonialism impacts the relationships of all settlers on Indigenous lands to resources, including those of racialized bodies. The concept of settler colonialism serves as a reminder that even though racialized peoples experience racism and oppression, they also directly benefit from colonization and the stolen lands of Indigenous peoples, albeit differently than white people. (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, Jafri, 2007). As a result of this history and context, the experiences of diverse racialized and diverse Indigenous bodies can never be parallel. I acknowledge that this is a limitation of Beti’s counterstories as a composite. The decision, here, was purposeful. As a non-Indigenous scholar, it is not appropriate for me to write in the counter voice of an Indigenous person and Beti’s as “every” racialized and Indigenous woman highlights one of the main themes of this dissertation informed by the participants; that is, that systems flatten the
experiences of racialized and Indigenous women as if their experiences were parallel. The fact that I interviewed both racialized and Indigenous women in this research in no way suggests that these distinct experiences are similar. Insinuating a similarity would replicate the flattening of experiences perpetuated by organizations.

I refer to community/communities often within this research, and I understand the diversity, inconsistencies, and challenges that these concepts may pose. To which communities am I referring? Who selects membership within these communities? Who is in and who is out of these communities? How can I begin to define communities based on the vast diversities that exist among racialized and Indigenous peoples? I am aware of the confounding complexities in the notion of communities (Coloma, 2018, Dua, 2007), and this concept is critical to understanding that there is a need to create spaces where marginalized folks can find shared experiences and commonalities across tremendous difference. I aim to acknowledge the commonalities of experiences with systemic racism, however varied and complicated these experiences may be. The othering, lumping, minimization, paternalization, tokenization, that they experience that are similar are intricately related to the settler colonial system in which they are lumped together despite their complex lives. Their differentiated experiences of racialized are not allowed to have space because to do so would mean whiteness must decenter itself. My overall objective is to unpack colonization and systemic racism within white settler systems and elucidate how they operate in nonprofit organizations.

These are the guiding ideas or definitions I used for this project. Of course, they shifted and continue to shift at every turn of my understandings. The activists within this project agreed, disagreed, complicated, interrogated, and destroyed these concepts and definitions in their own
ways. I welcomed this dialogue and did not shy away from the messy and complicated understandings. I hold these contradictions to the best of my ability.

**Searching for Answers: Research Questions**

As previously discussed my research interest stems from a desire to understand the cracks within organizations, mainstream feminist organizations to be specific. This dissertation should not be understood as an attack on activists or the institutions within which they work. As is clearly evidenced by the plethora of feminist projects and publications available, good work is abundant, and it changes the lives of many. In this dissertation I am interested in uncovering systems of power within feminist organizations. It is difficult to analyse organizational behaviours and balance the many challenges nonprofit organizations encounter. And this, in part, is the challenge I take up. I wanted to better understand the dynamics within these spaces now that I had left, and at the time of my defense returned to, them.

Informed by current research and literature, my project began with a set of questions that I felt were under-researched and under-theorized questions:

- **What are activists’ experiences of engaging racialized and Indigenous girls and women within institutions? How does this engagement prevent/perpetuate the marginalization of these communities?**
- **What does activism and organizing look like for contemporary racialized and Indigenous women? And how can organizations support this activism?**
- **How are institutions supporting/impacting/preventing solidarity building among racialized and Indigenous communities, despite their historical, political, and social**
differences?

Through these questions I expected to be able to examine the ways in which structural racism excluded certain bodies—and how these bodies were/ are more vulnerable to falling through the systemic cracks. As I began to explore these questions through the interviews I started to understand how structural racism (and its intersections) were far more embedded within the structure of institutions than I had initially anticipated. My questions felt overly broad to capture the experiences that the interviewees were speaking to in their everyday lives navigating complicated institutional politics and dynamics.

As I collected data for the dissertation the questions continued to evolve. Individual participants were sharing stories of racism and how they were navigating these policies in ways that interrupt mainstream notions of organizing. Women were counterbalancing the sad stories of racial exclusion to those of innovative service provision that was working for their communities, their clients and themselves. The data was answering a different set of questions. The data was showcasing not only the challenges and triumphs activists were experiencing in their daily lives but also how institutions are getting in the way of racialized and Indigenous activists doing the meaningful work. The participants and the data were speaking to me in a way that forced me to get more specific and pointed with the questions that I was asking, and what I felt I was capable of answering within the limited scope of a research project. Those were the macro questions that I began with. These are the micro questions I ended up answering:

• What are the structural limitations of feminist nonprofit organizations and what are the implications for racialized and Indigenous activists who work within them?
• How does whiteness as a systemic and structural concept operate within feminist
nonprofits with racialized and Indigenous activist workers?

- How do activists understand their work of supporting racialized and Indigenous girls and women within institutions? What are the pressures and tensions of such engagements?

Although my interest is in increasing support for all, this project focuses on feminist organizations that serve girls and women because of research that indicates the necessity to further understand the unique barriers young girls and women face specifically through an intersectional analysis of race, class and gender. I interviewed activists because I was interested to see how their interactions with structures, specifically nonprofit organizations, has impact on service provision with and for “marginalized” girls and women. Although my interest in girls’ experiences motivated this research, they are not the focus of this project. The interviews I undertook and the composite I created from them help illuminate the structural barriers that organizations have created/maintained/destroyed. The ultimate goal of this research is to understand how organizations can change to better suit the unique and varied needs of racialized and Indigenous activists working in nonprofit organizations, as organizations are a cornerstone for helping their communities and preventing them, and by extension those with whom they work from falling through the cracks.

Searching for Clarity: The Construction of the “Canadian Woman of Colour”

It has become increasingly clear that I cannot consider the intersection of race and gender in Canadian women’s organizations without first considering how racialized women are understood within the landscape of this country and subsequently the organizations that seek to serve
them. As Himani Bannerji (2000) shows in her article it is clear that the notion of “women of colour” has been created through state sanctioned policies on multiculturalism and diversity. This concept originated into policy during Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s tenure in office through his instrumental use of multiculturalism policy to ease the political and structural tensions in the country and in an attempt to unite Francophone and Anglophone Canadians. It is no coincidence that this construction/policy is particularly relevant in the days of a Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as his political clout has rested deeply on his furthering his father ideologies of a multicultural Canada. As a self proclaimed feminist prime minister the construction of “women of colour” is relevant now more than ever. Bannerji shows the ways in which the political nature of multiculturalism and the creation/development of women of colour has been intertwined. She explains how in its “political deployment, the notion of diversity escapes from its denotative function and dictionary meaning and emerges as a value-free, power neutral indicator of difference and multiplicity.” (Bannerji, 2000, p.547) This clearly has strong implications for the ways in which ‘women of colour’ are taken up within organizations.

This is not the first and/or only time politics and strategic policy development has had organizational implications in the lives of racialized and Indigenous women. Bunjun (2018, 2011) shows us the ways in which the politically sanctioned Royal Commission on the Status of Women, sets up/creates and reproduces the problematic dimensions of white women’s organizing in categorizing and creating hierarchies of/within racialized and Indigenous women within mainstream white women’s organizations. Turpel-Lafond (1997) also shows these colonial implications specifically in the ways in which it works for Indigenous women within the sphere of organizing—showing how white women within these organizations have made the assumption
that Indigenous women are looking for the same types of “equality” as they are. As a result, Turpel-Lafond exposes the limitations of the organizations that are based on these incomplete ideologies. Ottawa and the residual politics that it centres can and does have a long standing relationship in the ways in which women’s organizations are governed and even the impact that this has on who, how and when racialized and Indigenous women can occupy these spaces.

Furthermore, within Bannerji’s (2000) construction of the paradox of diversity she illuminates the etymology of the term woman of colour, its relation to the political construction of diversity and its limitations. Specifically how the expression “of colour” creates a difficult place to provide an analysis of the context in which women of colour operate within the Canadian landscape. She clearly showcases how the use of this term removes the much-needed emphasis on white privilege that is necessary when considering the experiences and associations of racialized bodies within the white settler context of Canada. She also highlights the limited nature of this phrase as it does not normally include the experiences of Black and Indigenous women.

The arguments that Bannerji outlines within her paper are of particular importance for this research because the ways in which she has outlined the construction of women of colour within the Canadian context are also true of women of colour within the context of Canadian women’s organizations. Many of the grassroots and feminist organizational spaces that I occupy as well as the women I have interviewed within the scope of this research acknowledge this uneven construction through the use of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) as a way to identify their communities. Although, I have steered away from the use of “women of colour” within my dissertation, and favoured racialized and Indigenous (to acknowledge some of the limitations Bannerji expresses) the constructions of these communities as described by Bannerji are
still relevant and important within the scope of my study. In complying to the women of color category, Bannerji shows that the Canadian state has inadvertently removed the class analysis from the conversation. This is particularly true when considering how these complexities work in women’s organizations with “racialized” women who are seen as a monolith and not at the intersections of a variety of identities, including but not limited to immigrant women, refugee women, 1st/2nd/3rd generation, Canadian educated, educated abroad, and/or with no formal education.

This construction of “woman of colour” within the Canadian state’s policy of multiculturalism at once homogenizes the experiences of a woman of colour through the removal of intersectional identities but also creates a hierarchy of the ways in which women are represented and understood within the Canadian landscape. As Bannerji argues diversity discourses are set themselves as neutral and power free when they are anything but. They are set up discourses that are “uncritically, unreflexively, and yet cannot escape the role of being an instrument of designation of some cultures as real culture, while others fall into the category of sub-culture and multi-culture, cultures of the peripheries.” (Bannerji, 2000, p.555) This construction of racialized bodies within women’s organization has been an important factor within this research because racialized and Indigenous women have and continue to be taken up differently within the scope of these organizations. Through the intentions of politically sanctioned multiculturalism racialized women and/or ‘immigrant’ women have been given space within these organization differently. As evidenced by Ng (1996) women of colour/immigrant women have been given space since the 1980s however, Indigenous have not been given that same consideration. It was only until the
Idle No More movement of the 2000s that the importance and absence of Indigenous women in organizations was recognized and reflected in any substantial way.

This space allocation makes it clear that there is a hierarchy in the ways that “women of colour” or racialized women are taken up in Canadian society more generally and within women’s organizations specifically. Some cultures are cultures and other cultures are sub-cultures. Punjabi culture (my identity which I discuss at greater length in the next chapter) is an avid part of the Indian diaspora globally but especially in Vancouver. As a result my experiences of otherness in Canada and within organizations will be different than that of other “Others” within the same landscape. Some of the women I interviewed also explicitly discussed the complication of anti-Black racism within the Canadian context and specially how this has permeated the women’s movement. This is a reality that cannot be forgotten in Beti’s story. The experiences of racialized and Indigenous women in feminist community organizing in Vancouver have been brought together in Beti’s story, however, the reality remains that racism, discrimination and exclusion exists amongst and within these communities. This cannot be forgotten or minimized when thinking about the larger exclusion present due to the systemic nature of racism and colonization in women’s organizations. Furthermore, Beti’s construction as a composite character—within this context—cannot fully account for the ways this hierarchy plays out within organizations and within the lives of the activists I have interviewed. As a result, after each of Beti’s stories I come back to this reality with a reminder by pulling apart the pieces to showcase how racialized and Indigenous women can be understood differently given their context and/or connection to this hierarchy. My intention through this careful unpacking is to show the complexities
of how this hierarchy can and does play out within the context of Beti’s stories. A process I further develop in the chapter 2.

**Searching for Structure: Theoretical Musings**

My work is deeply rooted in interdisciplinary studies; it borrows from many different schools of thought and does not sit comfortably in any single frame. I seek to understand how feminists, organizations, and structures function within and categorize difference and, as a result, have implemented systems that create, maintain, and sustain these differences. This understanding of difference deeply informs the ways in which feminists’ structure space within women’s organizations. This research also relies heavily on feminist understandings of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991, 2015; Lorde, 1984). All women, including the ones I interviewed for this research, have multiple identities based on race, gender, sexuality, and class, among other factors, which impact the ways in which they access and interact with systems. For the purpose of this research, I bring Indigenous ways of knowing and critical race studies in education into conversation even though they are, at times, in tension with one another. This conversation is imperative as activists and academics attempt to understand the work of anti-racism on colonized and occupied lands.

In the following section I attempt to trace the genealogy of the most important theorists in my work and show the ways in which they are in conversation with each other for the purpose of this dissertation. I rely heavily upon Roxanne Ng (1996), Sara Ahmed (2012), Sherene Razack (1999) and Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) to build the foundations of my arguments. Although these theorists are not normally considered within the same epistemological frameworks,
each theorist contributes deeply to how I have come to understand the Canadian state, organization development, race and whiteness.

**Roxanna Ng: Construction of immigrant women**

Roxanna Ng (1996) reflects the systemic challenges within nonprofit organizations and how these institutional barriers impact immigrant women. She argues that “[w]ithout an analysis that makes the link between the agency and the constraints imposed from within, these tensions and contradictions could be (and indeed were) interpreted as personality conflicts and problems of the individuals, rather than as structural features of the organizations.” (1996, p.11) Based on her extensive research within a women’s organization she was able to uncover the complicated dynamics that take place within feminist nonprofit organizations, particularly as they relate to racialized/immigrant women’s experiences within these spaces.

Using sociological and Marxist theories, Ng offers an understanding of how class operates through immigrant women’s bodies in the creation and maintenance of nonprofit organizations through the structural systems of the Canadian state. Her theories stem from a class analysis with a deep commitment to intersectionality, especially as it relates to race, class, gender and citizenship. She achieves this based on her in-depth understanding of micro and macro economics specifically in a Canadian context as it relates to immigrant women—and the racialization of labour. Ng builds upon the theoretical foundations in sociology as they have been adapted from Marx’s method of political inquiry. Ng provides important contributions to the systemic nature of organizational spaces and how they need to be reflected in my understanding of community organizations. Her micro/macro analysis has been instrumental in my own understanding of community activism and the challenges of individual versus systemic representation.
Ng pays particular attention to how women are frustrated by the nature of their work in women’s organizations. She suggests that frustration has been a common theme in the lives of racialized and Indigenous women. These are also reflected within my interviews and the systemic barriers that Beti hopes to address. Ng makes the argument that class is not a theoretical category but a process enacted through the daily lives of the women within these organizations with the help of the Canadian state. Ng clearly uncovers the power relations that are set up within community organizations, the nation state and the construction of the labour market in Canada.

Ng’s analysis has been imperative to the way I have set up this project. I have relied heavily upon Ng’s construction of immigrant women’s labour as it has been imperative in my understanding of racialized and Indigenous women’s bodies as cultural capital in women’s organizations. Her works ties in closely with my earlier discussion on Bannerji’s (2010) deconstruction of “women of colour”, as immigrant women’s experiences in organizations are also closely related to governmental structure. Ng explains that the state “fundamentally constitutes a set of social relations which (a) legitimizes certain courses of action, thereby rendering other (alternate) forms of action illegitimate; and (b) organizes how people relate to one another. What is important to grasp is that these social relations are relations of domination and subordination: they are relations of power” (1996, p.86). She goes on further to explain that “it is impossible to understanding the relation between state (ruling) processes and community struggles without understanding how documents work in mediating, enforcing, and transforming everyday life. This is an essential part of how community struggles become an extension of ruling our society” (1996, p.87). Understanding the structural process of the organization has been imperative in also unveiling the ways in which these structures work to maintain the exclusionary status quo.
Although Ng’s ethnography took place forty years ago, the themes/findings from her study, such as funding constraints, overwork, stress, and the hierachal practices in community organizations, are still relevant today, and many of them are reflected in this study. Organizations (and the Canadian state through them) rely upon their cheap labour and cultural capital within their communities to operationalize issues they see as useful within the scope of their organizations. As a result, racialized and Indigenous women’s bodies become commodities in the organizational sphere.

**Sara Ahmed: Brick walls & diversity workers**

Ng’s insights about organizing in a Canadian context are further illuminated by Sara Ahmed’s (2012) research about diversity workers in Australia and the United Kingdom. Ahmed questions the ways in which whiteness operates and is perpetuated by the work of diversity. She argues that “we need to think about the relationship between diversity and what we might call ‘institutional whiteness.” (2012, p. 33) Ahmed discusses the ways in which whiteness “tends to be visible to those who do not inhabit it.” (2012, p. 3.) Ahmed clearly illustrates that institutional whiteness are the different ways that whiteness operates within the organizations. She explains that “[t]he very idea that diversity is about those who ‘look different’ shows us how it can keep whiteness in place.” (2012, p. 33) She goes further to explain that “[e]ven if diversity can conceal witness by providing an organization with color, it can also expose whiteness by demonstrating the necessity of this act of provision.” (2012, p. 33) She shows that ultimately diversity becomes “changing the perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations.” (2012, p.34) Ahmed’s demystification of institutional whiteness informs the ways in which I think through operational whiteness within Beti’s life. She encounters whiteness fre-
quently, she bumps up against it, she maneuvers around it. These are all of the acts, experiences, documents and structures that she must navigate in order to do her work. It is inevitable though that she also participate in operationalizing whiteness within this work.

Ahmed offers me an understanding of diversity processes in organizations through the experiences of diversity workers. In providing the historical and organizational implications of diversity, she shows us the ways that diversity workers experience operationalized whiteness through the brick wall. She explains that the “feeling of doing diversity work is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move, something solid and tangible.” (2012, p. 26) This brick wall is experienced by diversity workers in organizations as they try to move through the diversity process. “The wall is what we come up against: the sedimentation of history into a barrier that is solid and tangible in the present, a barrier to change as well as to the mobility of some, a barrier that remains invisible to those who can flow into the spaces created by institutions.” (2012, p. 175) In naming, explaining and experiencing the brick wall, diversity workers become the diversity problem. Through becoming the problem they are unable to interrupt the operationalization of whiteness and thus institutionalizing the non performativity of diversity workers. In doing the work of diversity these workers become the organizations diversity problem. Ahmed’s participants similar to the activists that I interviewed had roles within feminist organizations that often depended on this capacity to serve as “diversity.” In the case of my participants often in special projects surrounding themes of ethno-specific and cultural identities.

Ahmed’s thorough analysis of institutional life has been crucial to my understanding of this research because in many ways the women that I interviewed are also speaking to the institutional realities that Ahmed discusses (including the systemic barriers that become brick walls.)
Specifically, activists interviewed for this research discuss how diversity policies and good intentions become stand ins for action yet still manage to negatively impede the work of seeing “marginalized” clients that activists were hired to attract to the organizations. Activists I interviewed talked about the brick wall that they encounter and the ways in which institutional whiteness operates in their lives and through their organizations to perpetuate this brick wall. For example, one participant discussed how she was expected to serve Indigenous communities because of the mandate of her particular project—yet there were no resources given to support that work. Elders were not able to come into the organization to provide resources and guidance—and projects were being developed counter to the Indigenous ways of knowing that the project required.

Ahmed has helped me understand that through stranger making in feminist nonprofit organizations, racialized and Indigenous women become the outsiders. Institutional whiteness operates in many ways in women’s lives in organizations—through the structural barriers that they experience but also through the ways they encounter organizations. Organizations see them as the “diversity” within their spaces, moving up particular agendas that they have set out for them, appointed by whiteness to counter whiteness but also as the diversity problem within their walls.

Ahmed offers an important entry point for my research as her primarily unit of analysis is whiteness in institutional spaces. This has been instrumental for me in understanding how whiteness operates within the organizational spheres of the activists I interviewed. Like Ahmed, I am interested in how operational whiteness impacts racialized and Indigenous women in their organizations. Ng takes a similar approach in that she is also interested in these structures but she comes at it from a class and Marxists analysis, Ahmed approaches it from a diversity and whiteness analysis. Both are significant for my research as they help illuminate how race and class op-
erate within institutional spaces and how these systems shape the experiences of racialized and Indigenous activists.

**Sherene Razack: Race within the gaze of whiteness**

Similar to Ng, Sherene Razack (1999) discusses Canadian institutions to illustrate how white settler colonialism and settler politics are employed and institutionalized. Like Ahmed, Razack shows how whiteness is used to construct racialized and Indigenous bodies. Specifically the way the colonial encounter (colonial gaze) is institutionalized in the nation state through courtrooms and classrooms. Razack (1999) shows that the “colonial encounter produces…both the colonizer whose eyes commit the act of violence, and the colonized who is erased by the colonial gaze.” (p. 4) Using critical theories of race (Fanon, 1967, Bhabha, 1994, Mohanty, 1991) and cultural studies (Said, 1979, Hall, 1992) Razack shows the erasure of racialized bodies through the act of western saviours, multiculturalism and cultural diversity—making power relations within institutions invisible.

Razack builds on the concept of interlocking systems of power (extending the ideas of Patricia Hill Collins, 1990 and Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1989) to showcase that systems of oppression depend upon each other to give meaning in historically specific ways. Ng and Ahmed also rely on the ways systems of power rely upon each other but they use intersectional framework. Razack argues that a white settler nation state like Canada is looking to create innocent subjects, not accountable for the past or the present. As she explains

with a little practice and the right information, we can all be innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchal social relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present. It is not our ableism, racism, sexism, or het-
erosexism that gets in the way of communicating across differences, but their disability, their culture, their biology, or their lifestyle. p. 10

The responsibility of difference rests on the individual and not on the system. Razack’s disruption of hegemonic understandings are imperative to this research project. Women who are doing this work, like the activists whom I interviewed, realize the implications. They understand the ways systems operate in their own lives, this project is about disrupting these implicit understandings to uncover the systems of power that are operating within their institutions. Razack’s work has been crucial in my understanding of the ways in which racialized “others” understand themselves through the white man’s colonial gaze. This has been vital in understanding the data within this research and the ways Beti’s story has developed.

Razack’s theorizing has been helpful in the creation of Beti to supplement the institutional understanding of Ng and Ahmed. Ng’s focus on the construction of racialized women as a labour market category and Ahmed’s construction of the diversity worker within institutional whiteness are complemented for the purpose of my research through Razack’s analysis of the Canadian white settler state. Razack provides a macro analysis of how the Canadian white settler state is shaped and operates specifically through the institutionalization of colonization and racism. This has been imperative to the construction of my research project because it helps me understand the scaffolding of scenarios that the interviewees have come to know themselves. These are the racist institutions informing every aspect of their lives, including the organizations they work for and the ones Ng and Ahmed’s participants work within.
**Eve Tuck: Deconstructing decolonization**

Eve Tuck & Wayne Yang (2012) take a different approach to the understanding of the colonial settler state. Similar to Ng, Ahmed and Razack they look to observe how whiteness is institutionalized within systems, however, they approach institutionalization through a clear, concise understanding of how Indigenous ways of knowing and resistance have been misappropriated in academic and activist movements, specifically through the appropriation of decolonization. They explain “decolonization brings about repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to improve.” (2012, p. 1) Decolonization can not be placed into other frameworks even if they are radical and anti-racist. The easy adoption of decolonization is another form of settler appropriation. In their article they explain the various settler moves to innocence that are made in order to absolve responsibility for our roles in settler colonialism—the maintenance and perpetuation of it. They conclude by explaining that “[d]ecolonization is not an “and”. It is an elsewhere.” (2012, p. 36) It cannot be understood by the limitations that our current constructs impose on us because it is something completely different.

As a settler, Tuck and Yang’s work has been instrumental in helping me understand how research and activism need to be understood on unceded territories. Unlike the other theorists, this work has been instrumental in understanding how to reframe, reshape and theorize this research from the perspective of a settler on Indigenous lands. Tuck and Yang have been instrumental in understanding decolonization and alliances on stolen lands. The participants all had stories to share about their work with Indigenous girls and women because they all understand the unique marginalization that occurs for Indigenous girls due to the complicated mix of the Indian Act, residential schools, criminalization and poverty. (Dhilon, 2017)
My reading of Tuck and Yang’s (2012) article made my shortcomings apparent. I started this project with an understanding that racialized and Indigenous women have similar experiences of racism within systems. I felt comforted in lumping together our stories of racism because it made my body less complicit in settler colonialism—it was my settler move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, I now realize that our different and complex relationships to the land and the ways that colonization has impacted us differently on the stolen lands of Turtle Island make these communities incomparable. In other words, I have come to understand the important political, social, economic and material differences between Indigenous and racialized women. Despite this there is something to be explored about how/why/when white feminist organizations still lump/homogenize/weld Indigenous and racialized women together in a category, segregated these folks into low income brackets within the organizations into support/temporary/less meaning and less prestigious roles classified into diversity/cultural and project workers. This experience perpetuates the cycle of oppression within these organizations and motivates the creation and necessity of Beti. I go further into the details of Beti’s creation in the following chapter.

Ng (1996), Ahmed (2002), Razack (1999) and Tuck and Yang (2012) come from different theoretical origins with different purposes. They all have contributed to my theoretical understanding of these issues and the ways in which I have approached my research project and data analysis. Although, they appear to be coming from very different perspectives they have many commonalities that have informed my research. They each discuss systemic failures, sometimes pointing to an individual system other times taking up flawed systems in general. They all exemplify racist systems in action. Not only the symptoms of racist systems (like damage centered
research or the brick wall experienced by diversity workers) but the ways racist systems operate and continue to operate on hidden (and sometimes not so hidden) power relations that are cemented into the foundation of Canadian society. These racist symptoms have real implications resulting in tangible experiences for racialized and Indigenous people. Each rely on notions of intersectionality or interlocking systems of oppression that recognize that the oppressions women experience are related and in fact rely upon each other, especially as a colonial system. Finally, all of these theorists acknowledge and call out whiteness, white settler colonialism, and the different ways racialized and Indigenous people experience this whiteness but often times maybe implicated in it. This is where my research begins.

**Searching for a Path: Dissertation Outline**

Within this dissertation I have undertaken a complicated and difficult task. Bringing into dialogue Indigenous ways of knowing, critical theories and notions of race and racism has left me confused, uncomfortable, and with many more questions than at the beginning of this journey. Theorists (Kumashiro, 2014, Dutta et al, 2016) before me have grappled with how academics can teach and learn these “pedagogies of discomfort.” They often call into question not only the systems they operate in but also the practices academics use in engaging them. This has felt like an impossible task. It has been uncomfortable and incomplete and, as such, I invite you to hold this knowledge as you journey through this research. Read it knowing that “pedagogies of discomfort” call into question much of the traditional social science research and many of the standard academic ways of knowing. This research takes truth, data collection, reporting and storytelling into challenging places honestly and without hesitation. It may make you unsettled be-
cause it is resistance and it seeks to call into question the validity of systems. If I have succeeded
you may experience just as much discomfort reading this project as I did in writing it. This is un-
chartered territory and it may be uncomfortable.

Chapter 2 will reflect more on the methodologies I have used within this research. Specif-
ically, I look at the ways in which composite counterstories are an ideal way to reflect the institu-
tional and systemic barriers racialized and Indigenous women face, in organizations and in their
lives. As Sara Ahmed (2013) has said, “when the restrictions governing who can occupy a cate-
gory become explicit you are noticing what is around you, what gathers, but what does not ordi-
narily come into view” (para. 16). Capitalism and whiteness play an important role in how
women’s experiences are reflected in organizational structures and policies.

This is further explored in Chapter 3, where I examine how the nonprofit industrial com-
plex (NPIC) is structured. Many important structural elements permeate organizational founda-
tions and consequently impact how institutional violence is perpetuated across these organiza-
tions. As a result, organizations maintain a culture of mainstream whiteness and prevent services
and structures intended for diverse bodies from succeeding. Building on Ahmed’s (2012) nonper-
formativity of diversity workers, this chapter looks at how organizations, despite their best inten-
tions, fall short in systematically supporting diverse bodies and ideas, thereby creating and/or
widening the institutional cracks that marginalized people fall through. Organizations employ
diversity measures as a way of moving forward, but fail to understand how systematic whiteness
prevents them from achieving success for those they were intended to serve. Albeit unintention-
ally, these mechanisms then become a way of advancing white capitalist agendas and cementing
institutional racism.
Building on the systemic exclusions discussed in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 looks at the ways in which structural racism permeates throughout organizations and, as such, sets up Indigenous women in particular to be vulnerable to cracks within this paradigm. I draw upon Indigenous ways of knowing to understand the importance of place in general and Vancouver specifically in Beti’s experiences of systemic exclusion. This chapter integrates systemic barriers created through the NPIC to look at how Indigenous ways of knowing are being structurally excluded within organizations. The nonperformativity of diversity (Ahmed, 2012) works in important ways here. Organizations continue to prioritize “Indigenous issues” but do not actually utilize this work for meaningful inclusion due to structural and intersecting barriers.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I discuss how this work can be furthered by looking at new research opportunities, including the impact of and pertinent need to address mental health challenges of racialized and Indigenous women working in community organizations. I conclude by providing some academic implications for this research and next steps.
Beti always thought that the offices of nonprofit organizations had a unique flair, each one showcasing the personalities of the people who have helped build it. Each one marking the history of its foundation, a subtle but important connection to its past—with posters, projects and relics reminding staff of where the organization had come from. This office was no exception. Beti distinctly remembers the “pink room”—at least that’s what everyone called it. This room had become a nod to all versions of feminist pink. Girly pink, baby pink, fuchsia pink, the hating of pink and the reclaiming of pink—it was ironic but also cliché. In its current iteration—the walls were a bubblegum pink, bright in an assault to the eyes. Project posters lined the walls—in various levels of professionalism—some as old as the 70s browned from sunlight and curled at the edges from the summer humidity. A fuschia pink throw rug covers the rusted yellow linoleum except right against the corners where the floor is peeling back from the base exposing the wet mould covered beams and sending puffs of must Beti would be forced to inhale as she walked in and out of the room. Rays of sunshine blasted in through the aging window reflecting off the walls creating an orange haze through the sky. This room was the “bonus” room in the office, it was often the extra space where project staff would get housed, affectionately known in the office as the 'refugee camp’—Beti preferred pink room. It held the “special projects” which always included the diversity projects. Kitchy vintage filing cabinets, also in pink, lined the walls bursting with decade old funding reports, project plans and brochures—representing the feminist legacies that have occupied the organization. A physical manifestation of the blood, sweat and tears that continue to permeate the walls. If these walls could talk—the stories they would tell. Women of colour huddled across the majestic wooden table with generations of coffee circles and haldi...
stains—reminiscent of the kitchen tables in our childhood homes. Women working away long after the sun had gone down—strategizing projects and programs to help their communities, to help themselves.

Beti didn’t have bad memories of this room—in fact they were only good. This is where she spent most of her time working alongside important projects that meant something to her. This is where she worked with other staff and volunteers that looked like her. This is where she shared countless laughs, countless potlucks and home cooked meals, countless nights listening to salsa music and breaking out into hypnotic hip shaking rhythms when their bodies ached from sitting too much. Despite all of these wonderful feelings, this room in all of its pink/orange glory haunted Beti at night.

She would dream that she was entering a big glass tower downtown on Georgia Street. She walked in through the revolving door of one of those shining buildings. As she entered she would feel worth and happiness swept away by childhood explorations of entering big towers through the revolving doors. Imagining all the people who walked in and out of what felt like the most luxurious and important space in the world. All the pomp and circumstance Beti imagined of the shiny downtown buildings. She felt completely safe in the glass bubble incubator of the door frame but at the same time, exposed for the world to see. A big smile would consume Beti’s face as she dreamt of the revolving door only to be wiped away with feelings of anxiety, fear and a tremendous sense of overwhelm. She had recurring nightmares of being in this revolving door because every time she exited she always ended up in the pink room. All roads lead to the pink room and there was no exit. Her anxiety was rooted in the feeling she was replaceable. There was always another Brown skinned activist who was able to run her project, open the door to her
community connections. People didn’t always make her feel like she was disposable (although sometimes they did) but she knew—she had seen—if she didn’t stay in line at the organization they would replace her with someone who would. Beti was haunted by the pink room cycle that trapped her.

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There is a story. A story to everything. A story that explains, defines, and creates but the story does not stand alone. The story requires a frame, which is largely set by the author. If you start the story with the angry woman of colour and not the imposition of racist and colonial systems on her body from birth, the story is only about an angry woman, and it fails to give the context for her anger. Start the story with social and economic disparity in Canadian Indigenous communities and not with the pain and disenfranchisement of ongoing settler colonization and again you have a different story (Adichie, 2009). The frame shapes the story.

This chapter explores the framing of stories within this research, especially the frame that I have used to create Beti’s counterstory. There is a dominant story that is shaped to exclude certain bodies (Griffin et al, 2014; Martinez, 2014), including the women within this dissertation. The counterstories I have created look to center these bodies within their own stories, but through my frame it can and will unintentionally exclude and omit. This chapter looks at the scaffolding of my frame and also explains how theory and method inform each other within my writing process. Theory, at least how I understand it, relies on the lived experience of stories, which in my case is my method. As a result, theory informs method and method informs theory, a process I elaborate in this chapter.

This chapter outlines the qualitative research methodologies that I draw upon throughout
this research project. More importantly, within this chapter I reflect on the theoretical foundations that inform these research practices, namely critical race methodologies and feminist theories. I outline the use of interviewing and storytelling methodologies, as well as the subsequent analysis methods. This chapter is divided into five separate but complementary pieces: (1) theory informed identity, (2) theory-informed methodology, (3) theory-informed practice, (4) theory-informed limitations, and (5) theory-informed analysis. The first section looks at my postionality and the impact it has on my identity. The next section looks at how my theoretical foundations (within critical theories outlined in the previous chapter) inform my methodology (critical race methodologies’ counter storytelling). I then look at how these theories have informed my practice (recruitment, interviewing, writing etc)—the actual tools I applied to conduct this research. This is followed by a discussion on the limitations of my practice and subsequently the research as a whole. Finally, I look at how critical theories inform my analysis (or the lenses I use to consider and create the counterstories).

**Theory Informed Identity: A Positionality Statement**

Who am I? I ask myself that question everyday in the mirror. Often my understanding of who I am and what the research became was muddy. I would come to understand this further through my own process of writing—using writing as a way of knowing (Richardson, 2000.) I have showcased some of these coming to know pieces through my use of right justifying memos. These memos serve as an anti-thesis to a ‘memo’ as normally understood, as communiqué between supervisors and subalterns. Memos are any personal stories, tangents and writings that I have written in my process of understanding the connections between my research, myself and
my position. The entire dissertation is a process of me coming to know—but these pieces were written as thought exercises while I was trying to make sense of the data. Not all of my memos have been included in the dissertation, but a few key memos that helped me think through my writing in important ways have been included.

I am South Asian—from India, the province of Punjab, in the north western part of the country that borders Pakistan. During partition in India many Punjabis were deeply impacted as the border jumped over their lands and communities—my families included. I am many times removed from this land—on my side of the family I know very few people who still live in India. My maternal grandparents had migrated to Kenya and eventually to the United Kingdom; my paternal grandparents moved to the United Kingdom where they re-experienced the land of the colonizer in many ways. My parents, outliers in their own families, eventually laid roots on the west coast of Canada. Satisfying my father’s desire to see the world, and opening up the possibilities for me to spend a lifetime crossing countless borders with a Canadian passport. I am the first person in my family who was born in Canada.

I grew up very much with the feeling of being caught between two cultures. That of the white Canadians I was surrounded by in my French immersion public schools in Brentwood Bay, British Columbia and that of the Indian culture of my parents—foreign and different but also familiar. I grew up going to colourful Sikh weddings and potlatches on the WSANEC reserve only a few
minutes from our home. I grew up eating aloo gobi and smoked salmon but also desiring Kraft Dinner macaroni and cheese from the box. I was born an ABCD (American Born Confused Desi) always speaking broken Punjabi steeped with English thinking. Taught by a society that believed I was too Indian to be Canadian and too Canadian to be Indian—told that I was confused in my skin. It was not until much later in my life that I understood I was not caught between two cultures. I began to realize the “confusion” I was being force fed was a colonial construct imposed on my Brown body and that instead I was “caught between omissions” (Handa, 2003) or maybe not caught in anything.

I started organizing when I was young. My first formal protest, that I can recall, was in grade six—my first year in middle school, when I rallied a number of the girls in my school because gym class had been “gender” segregated and girls were forced to skip for six weeks instead of wrestle like the boys. Even back then I remember questioning what is a “boy” and a “girl”. My parents assured me that my strong will prevailed well before the formal protests started—advocating for fairness as the youngest sibling of three.

I grew up working class. My parents worked very hard and it was never unusual for my family members to have multiple jobs at once. By the time I came around I do not remember struggling for much, but I was always aware of the
value of money and what hard work looked like. My first pay check was at 14.

I am the first generation in my family to be university educated. I didn’t even know what a PhD was until I was 18.

I have a decade long history working in nonprofit organizations locally, nationally and internationally. This has been formative in my identity, especially as I understand it within the context of this research. This experience has given me so much insight beyond just the interviews that form this research. I am deeply intertwined by experience and identity with the participants that I have interviewed.

The education and experiences I have had have given me an opportunity to grow and pass this experience on to the next generation. I have tremendous privilege in my life and I try to honour this through self reflection, introspection and respect in every step of this research.

As a community activist, educator, staff member, and board member at several feminist organizations, I have first-hand experience in seeing how these organizations are struggling to meet their mandates. Furthermore, as a racialized woman, I have personally felt the burden of these systems. The reasons for these struggles are complicated and multilayered. It is not my intention to understand exactly why any organization/institution is not “succeeding,” but rather to better understand and uncover the hidden systems of power that operate within these spaces.
Theory-Informed Methodology

The counterstories I have employed within this methodology are deeply informed by critical race theory (CRT). CRT focuses on structural difference within systems, specifically the way racism is institutionalized and unresolvable within the legal system and how that can and has been applied to other areas. (Crenshaw, 1989, Crenshaw, 1991, Delgado and Stefancic, 2000) CRT offers a “framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly affect social structures, practices and discourses” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 168). This framework is reflected through six main tenets within CRT. First, CRT holds that racism is a pervasive part of American (and global) society. Second, CRT challenges mainstream ideas of objectivity, colourblindness, neutrality, and merit. Third, CRT insists on a contextual and historical analysis of the law. Fourth, it also insists on the importance of the experiential knowledge of people of colour. Fifth, CRT is interdisciplinary, and sixth, it works toward ending racism in an effort to end all forms of discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT’s focus is on race and its intersections including gender, class, sexuality, and other forms of marginalization in conjunction with race (Crenshaw, 1991). Like the theorists I outlined in the first chapter, an intersectional approach is important to understanding the complex and varied dimensions of the lives of the women within this research.

Critical race theories and methodologies insistence of centring the lived experiences of people of colour are the primary reason why they are vital to this research. Racialized and Indigenous women are and have always been at the centre of this research. I know that they have unique experiences when working in the context of feminist nonprofit organizations and I wanted
to get a better idea of what those experiences are and how these activists experience them.

Racism is a pervasive part of Canadian (and global) society. This has been clearly indicated by all of the theorists I have highlighted in the introduction, but especially by Razack (1999) in the ways that she shows how racism operates not only at an individual level but also at a systemic level in Canada. Similar to Ahmed’s (2012) study, the fact that many of the women I interviewed have participated in some sort of “diversity” or ethno specific project clearly indicates the pervasive nature of racism through the very existence of the diversity system.

Although CRT is deeply embedded in an American context, many elements of its’ theories apply to a Canadian context—especially as CRT has been travelled from the law into other educational endeavours. The Canadian and American experiences are different, but both are rooted in a white settler colonial experience and racism which has been cemented within the law. Many Canadian scholars have applied tenets of CRT, specifically the embeddedness of structural racism within institutions, to a Canadian context (Monture-Angus, 2003; Razack, 1998, 2002; Razack et al., 2010; Thobani, 2016).

CRT is critical in understanding the complex ways that storytelling and the experiences of racialized and Indigenous peoples can be applied to research methodologies and the overall outcomes of research projects. In essence, this dissertation builds on CRT scholars’ belief in the power of storytelling as an analytical tool and my own argument that it is through this storytelling that storytellers can begin to heal from our pain and create change in meaningful and sustainable ways. (Birk, 2017)

**Counter-storytelling**

Daniel Solarzano and Tara Yosso (2002) discuss how CRT can be applied to methodolo-
gy, in what they call critical race methodology. They define this methodology as a process that (1) centers race and racism in the research process, (2) challenges mainstream discourses used to explain the experiences of people of colour, (3) provides a transformative solution to race, class, and gender discrimination and subordination, (4) centers the lived experiences of race, gender, and class, and (5) uses an interdisciplinary knowledge base to further understand the experiences of people of colour. This research by its design, and the creation of Beti as a figure is resistance to traditional social science research. Furthermore, the project directly and explicitly utilizes all of these critical race methodology principles.

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2000), Derrick Bell (1992), and others demonstrate how stories can be an important and powerful way to counteract mainstream and inherited realities. Those who belong to marginalized communities tell their stories as a way to counteract the perceived realities of the mainstream and the subsequent regime of oppressive systems imposed on them. These counterstories are important elements that disrupt mainstream understandings of racialized and Indigenous bodies and raise voices that are often erased or unheard. Aja Martinez (2014) shows how narrative counterstory serves “as a method for marginalized people to intervene in research methods” (p. 33). She argues that counterstory centers marginalized and racialized bodies to serve as the authority of their own experiences. Through the use of Condon’s (2012) work, Martinez also demonstrates the power of storytelling, not only for the storyteller, but also for the audience. Condon (2012, as cited in Martinez, 2014) writes:

We need to learn to read, to engage with one another’s stories, not as voyeurs but as players, in a dramatic sense, within them, and as actors who may be changed not only by the telling of our own stories, but also by the practices of listening,
attending, acknowledging, and honouring the stories of our students and colleagues of color as well. (p. 52)

Condon’s analysis is essential for understanding Beti’s story because an active engagement with its content allows for multiple points of intervention by the reader, as a player, actor and witness. These multiple roles divide the responsibility for the story among not only those who share it, but also those who listen/read to it. The audience for Beti’s story—all of the players within the system that is being critiqued—is responsible for engaging with her story to create change, again shifting the responsibility from falling solely on the backs of Indigenous and racialized women, as it often does. An active engagement with Beti reflects the injustices and individual experience, and also refusal to be erased in the name of institutional innocence and/or whiteness.

I chose counterstory as the tool to answer my research questions primarily because, above all else, they center racialized people’s experiences. Through centering the lived experiences of Indigenous and radicalized people within systemic racism and colonization, I have been able to see the ways in which these structures impact their daily lives. This is done strategically to dismantle these very structures. Despite this desire, this process comes with its own limitations. With this best intention, I am deeply impacted by Derrick Bell (1992) when he says that we must first recognize and acknowledge (at least to ourselves) that our actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change and may indeed, despite our best efforts, be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system whom we are trying to help. (p. 198)

Thus, I think it is important, as David Gillborn (2006) says, to “remain critical, not only of power holders but also of our own assumptions and our vested interests” (p. 259). Finally, I realize that
change, as Gloria Anzaldúa (2002) asserted, “requires more than words on a page—it takes perseverence, creative ingenuity, and acts of love” (p. 574). I hold these ideas as cautionary tales as I work through this research.

When privilege goes unquestioned, its vastness occupies more space, and as a result, impedes the presence of another. As is often the case, this massive beast in the room recenters its own priorities and marginalizes the voices it was intended to serve (Birk, 2017). Furthermore, this privilege must be acknowledged and its magnitude applied to the research process. It must be understood that voices can take the place of other, equally important, voices—as is evidenced by the underrepresentation of racialized and Indigenous folks in the academy. (Henry et al., 2017). The ease with which the dominant bodies move through the institution also needs to be questioned. Furthermore, this question needs to be asked at every stage of the research project: Who is present, and at whose expense? This hard work is social justice.

**Braiding a Composite Counterstory and a Tool of Resistance**

I sought in this research to share the stories of systems, but I found that can only be done through individuals. Initially my desire was to do an institutional ethnography similar to Ng (1996.) However, I found access to organizations difficult. Despite my links in communities it became difficult to find an organization that was willing to air their laundry under the watchful researcher’s gaze. Focusing on individuals to tell institutional stories is a difficult project. My initial goal was to preserve the integrity of the individual stories, but I subsequently decided to express the stories collectively in a composite counterstory. I made this decision because of the tightly interwoven narrative that often exists in research of individual stories and broken bodies, which I discuss further later in this chapter. To resist this assumption of broken Brown women,
the data—the stories—demanded something different. The very act of Beti existing, creating, resisting is a direct response to the media projection of what women like her are “supposed” to be. Beti is a tool I created to push back against these assumptions and expectations. This tool begins to better understand the system and resist against it. A process I also elaborate further. In my own capacity of resisting the academic system where I was creating these counterstories, I started to think of my own process as creating a braid.

A braid. The epitome of structure and discipline, a braid is the tight and restricting confinement of free and natural hair. My hair—desperate to be free to fly through the wind, in harmony with the rest of my body, but more importantly my spirit. “Manjeet!” my mother would shout when I was a child. “Bhar bayae.” She commands.

I know there is no point in fighting it. Years of experience have taught me that this argument will not end in my favour. I run to the bathroom, pick up the deeply pronged comb, and run back out in the same breath. I flop onto my mom’s feet and sit cross-legged on the carpeted floor. She has just pulled her long, black hair, still ripe with the smell of the Indian stores, up into a bun. The smell triggers the memory of every family vacation we had ever been on. We would spend what felt like hours in the car heading to the Indian stores to stock up on all the supplies my parents needed from home. The rides felt hot and long—a childhood eternity. We drove a sedan of some kind—it changed over the years, but the makeup of the passengers was always the same. My dad would be driving, my mom in the front seat, and the
three of us kids sandwiched in the back. I was the youngest, by almost ten years, so
I always got the middle seat. It was all a hot, sweaty, carsick haze that meshed one
trip into another, with a constant negotiation of elbows in ribs, overly long legs jut-
ted into thighs, and steamy, hot sweat from the vinyl seat. I would sigh a deep
breath and attempt to negotiate my space, but one stern look from my older sister
and I knew my complaints would not be executed in any favourable way. We would
have to take the ferry from our home in Victoria, on Vancouver Island, and drive
into mainland Vancouver to pick up all of our supplies. Things have changed now,
but back in those days there were not enough Indian people in Victoria to warrant
Indian stores. We would drive hours to finally get to the Indian stores on Main
Street. Ironically, this neighbourhood in Vancouver is not far from where I live now,
and, like the rest of Vancouver, it has been overtaken by hipsters and cannabis clin-
ics. There are very few reminders here of how it used to be: the colourful Indian
diaspora that would offer small slices of home within the two blocks at Main and
49th. I remember our family stepping into Fruiticana or some such variety store like
that, the tenseness of my parents’ bodies immediately relaxing at the sweet and
savoury smells of freshly ground garam masala and coconut oil. The smell lingered
for days in our clothes and hair. My parents immediately felt at ease, but my sib-
lings and I would always turn our noses at the overpowering smells. We would fake
gagging sounds silently at each other as we laughed at the cultural clash of being
back “home.” My parents never noticed. They were blissfully adrift in memories of
childhood, comforted by the smells of home, their parents, their cultures. They
would beeline straight for the toiletries, even though we ended up touring the entire store. Bottles upon bottles filled the cart: Vicco Ayurvedic toothpaste, coconut oil, hair pins. My parents were home.

I feel my mom’s toes readjust under my butt cheeks and I am thrust back into reality. Mom has just finished applying the hair oil and now she’s attempting to navigate the endless knots in my hair. Her brow furrows as I wince in pain. After combing a part down the center, Mom divides my hair in three and interweaves the strands into a braid, pulling tightly with each individual knot. It hurt now, but it would pay off in the end. My hair would come home clean and still in the braid, even after a day of anything I got into—running, jumping, playing, chasing—the hair did not move. Not only did the braid pull together my hair for the day, it brought together cultures, communities, and generations. My mom was passing down her heritage, her life, her love. While at the time it felt like just a braid, today I understand. That braid took me home also.

**Beti as an Instrumental Tool**

Weaving stories together to create a collective story allows the reader to build on the experiences of individuals *to shed light on the system*. Created with respect and intention, the composite story, or the braid, centers, not the individual, but rather the way that we, as a collective of women, live with structural injustice and a multitude of experiences of structural exclusion and lateral violence within women’s organizations. The braid holds all of us together, but it does not
prevent any of us from being an individual. Each strand is unique, autonomous, with a story and style of its own. The braid is not intended to replace the strands. It depends on them, relies on them to create something new. Individual stories of marginalization have been shared over and over again, and although I believe the sharing of them is important and there will always be a place for it as long as people experience marginalization and isolation, that is not the project of this dissertation.

In the creation of a braid/counterstory, the individual stories women tell depend on each other. Alone they are powerful narratives, but together with my analysis, they illuminate the structural complications of a system that has excluded racialized and Indigenous peoples. Griffin et al. (2014) write about the many productive uses of the composite counterstory. They suggest that

the benefits of composite counterstories [are] their ability to: vocalize perspectives from the margins; reveal struggles for equitable treatment and opportunity; validate and build community among those who suffer similarly; expose barriers that inhibit success and derail social consciousness; creatively position quotidian experiences as critical cultural commentary; teach those unfamiliar about marginalization; and challenge and transform the imposition of domination. (p. 1356)

Counter-storytelling is completely different from fiction (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2010). The counterstory I present is not a made-up story but rather one that is entirely informed by the experiences of women from the data. Subsequently, the writing extends the life of spoken stories, pulls out the themes and commonalities and shapes Beti’s organizational experiences.
Rebecca Willis (2018) uses composite narratives to present interview findings. Willis indicates that although this methodology is not a common form of data presentation it offers three key benefits that were imperative for my research findings. Firstly, it allows for complex, situated accounts—which allow for complex narratives that are more representative of the complexities within individual lives. Secondly, anonymity—which allows an opportunity to share personal data without identifying individuals. This is especially important within the elements of my research. Finally, future-forming research—which allows complicated accounts to be more relevant and accessible for non academic audiences. This research was compliant with University of British Columbia (UBC) research ethic guidelines and I also went beyond those guidelines to ensure the anonymity of the individuals I interview in a very small activist community in Vancouver.

To construct the composite counterstory I used the following guiding questions:

**What are racialized and Indigenous women’s experiences in nonprofit organizations?**

**How do racist, sexist, and colonial systems inform, create, and scaffold these experiences?**

I returned to the transcripts, thematically coding them by pulling out key themes (specifically, what was repeated time and time again), and I asked myself, how are the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women replicating in women’s organizations? What were the common themes? Why did the participants share these commonalities? What was it about the structures and the ways that they were operating that informed their experiences? At times, I drew from my own experiences, at the intersection of race, gender, and organizing to fill in and accentuate the
gaps. That is my grounded acquisition of knowledge, insights, observations and “felt
theory.” (Million, 2009)

Collectively, the women I interviewed had over 100 years of experience organizing in
social justice spaces, be it in formalized collectives, in organizations or in disrupting shit in their
own quiet corners. Although their knowledges were unique to the types of activism they orga-
nized, many of their experiences overlapped due to their constant negotiations with racist and
colonial structures. The composite counterstory seeks to shed light on the systemic exposures
they encountered. This is not to suggest that their experiences were not unique—of course they
were—but purely to shed light on the structures that can and do oppress racialized and Indige-
nous women in organizations and beyond.

Let me be absolutely clear: This story, composite or not, will never speak for any one in-
dividual. The women within this project, as well as all of those experiences they reflect and all of
the people they are connected to, are far too diverse to ever be spoken for. I must explicitly state
this in a community where historically it has been okay to speak on behalf of certain groups and
where it is assumed that certain people cannot speak for themselves, resulting in an over reliance
on the voices of a few to represent the experiences of a whole group. This story is only what it is:
a brief glimpse into the challenging and sometimes impossible systems racialized and Indigenous
women navigate every day in every way. This composite counterstory is not a means to speak
about or for racialized and Indigenous women (an abundantly diverse group).

Beti is born. In Punjabi, the direct translation of beti means something similar to pre-
cious. It was actually not a term I heard very often, not because my parents did not think I was
precious, but rather because within our culture the masculinized term beta was heard far more
often, as though somehow masculinity was synonymous with preciousness and girlhood could not be understood in the same way. Beti, as counterstory counteracts the times I heard beta growing up as a Brown girl. Beti symbolizes tenderness and sweetness as a woman. It is the antithesis to the way I feel most of the time. Usually I feel angry, enraged, bitter, and tired—not Beti but her opposite: “angry woman of colour.” Beti pays homage to the preciousness in all of us, to the young girl who lived within us in a world that only heard beta.

The other character who inhabits these counterstories is Gora, who symbolizes the mainstream. In Punjabi, the direct translation of gorā is “white man.” I use Gora to symbolize not only the individual experiences with whiteness that came up over and over again within the interviews but more so the systemic whiteness that buries our experiences. Gora is not intended to be malicious or evil or even a man. She symbolizes the cruel and difficult system that activists sometimes encounter. She is merely a figurehead for a difficult system. Although experiences with this system are not always negative and difficult, I have used the binary of Beti and Gora to simplify the story. Of course, the system is never a binary and it is never simple, but alas, I am stuck telling stories within imperfect systems, with the best of intentions. As a result, I work to illuminate the realities within this imperfect system. Creating stories—embodied reflections of life that counter mainstream understandings—has been crucial in this process. Writing Beti’s counterstory has become the most important aspect of this project because the narrative/data collage/braid has been crucial in my coming to know. Beti counteracts the system but also reflects the system and the ways in which it flattens the experiences of all racialized and Indigenous bodies in diversity, intersectionality and race/culture specific “special projects”. This is the tool that Beti offers. In coming to know and understand these complicated ideas, it has become clear to
me that writing is an important aspect of knowing, which I will go into in further detail later in this chapter.

The pink room, Beti’s story that opens this chapter, is a manifestation of diversity work and how Beti—racialized and Indigenous women often end up in peripheral positions within organizations and not developing, leading or creating mainstream nonprofit organizations. Beti was replaceable by any other body the organization saw fit to do this work. Not only was Beti replaceable, Beti knew she was replaceable—whether it was true or not, along the way Beti was made to feel like all they needed was a warm body to sit in the seat of whatever diversity project they were running at the time. The organizations flattened their lives, flattened their work. Instead of the individuals, with the unique lived experiences that they were—Beti became “diversity” projects, special topics relegated to the pink room. Beti became and in many ways still is the any woman of colour—the nameless and faceless brown body institutionalized to do the work of the whiteness. As Ahmed (2012) describes through her diversity worker, Beti was appointed by whiteness to counteract whiteness and as a result was stuck in a revolving door system, taking her in and spitting her out but never allowing her to create real change. I discuss these barriers in greater detail in the following chapter.

I wrote Beti’s story as a composite, as a metaphor and to protect the people I interviewed, to understand the ways in which systems see racialized and Indigenous women. By protection I mean that the community of Indigenous and racialized works in nonprofits who serve girls and women is very small and if I had individualized data, the participants would have been identifiable. I steered away from direct quotations, because I felt that taking words without providing an articulation of who the person is and where they come from would be another form of academic
appropriation. Instead I paraphrased ideas to communicate the “felt theory” (Million, 2009) or “emotion truth.” (Willis, 2018, Orbach, 2000)

Unpacking the decisions

As discussed in the first chapter, initially Beti was written to represent the voices of everyone I interviewed—racialized and Indigenous, but through my readings I realized how this reproduced many of the systems I was trying to counteract. I had thought about writing another, Indigenous counterstory, but quickly gave up this idea. As a settler on unceded territories, it is not my place to write this story. Indigenous women are writing counterstories (Kundoque, 2008, Lindberg, 2015, Simpson, 2017) beautifully and with intention. These and the stories of countless other Indigenous women are the stories that should be read to understand the ways in which settler colonialism impacts their lives. It is not my place to write an Indigenous counterstory.

At this point I was left with the option of removing the Indigenous voices that have been shared with me, or finding another way to incorporate them respectfully. Removing the stories entirely did not feel like an appropriate way to handle the situation. As a witness to the stories of exclusion that have been shared with me—ignoring them/removing them would make me just as complicit as appropriating them. Indigenous women are being impacted by the same structural limitations I am discussing and I did not want to minimize that. I realized that I needed to make some changes in order to accommodate the unique ways settler colonialism has and does impact the lives of Indigenous women in Canada. As a result, I have written Beti as a racialized body only. The Indigenous activists that I interviewed still inform Beti’s story, but instead of lumping these distinctly unique experiences together, I have opted to talk about the similarities Indigenous participants spoke of in addition to those reflected within Beti. I have done this strategically
so that Indigenous voices, experiences and realities are still reflected throughout the dissertation but also to account for the ways in which racism impacts Indigenous bodies differently on Turtle Island. Many of the activists, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, spoke about systemic racism and colonialism as it relates to Indigenous peoples in Canada, I have tried to reflect these voices within Beti’s story.

Beti is also intended to stand in for the interview participants so that no one person’s voice is responsible for carrying the burden of teaching off the backs of their own experiences. Beti as a composite also calls into question the “truth”, “research”, knowledge and systems of knowing. I am attempting to call into question the entire system that academics and activists are relying upon to tell a singular research story. I have written my research results mimicking the flattening of the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women in organizations. Beti represents this flattening—but also the survivance, the resilience and the resistance that each and every woman I interviewed spoke about and exemplified through their activism and lives.

**Problematizing Feminist Research**

Feminists have debated the notions of embedded power relations when conducting feminist research (Lather, 2007) and, more broadly, when living a feminist life (Ahmed, 2017). Power is evident in every aspect of the research process, from the design (how you formulate the research, whom you consider, what informs the research questions), to the questions that guide the research, to the theory that informs the research, to the people with whom one speaks, to the influence the researcher has in the communities being researched, the ways that the research will impact this project, its applications, and its implications. Power is everywhere—especially within these pages (Bunjun, 2011). For example, power was most clearly illustrated in my use, under-
standing, and definitions of certain words. I knew this might be the case, which is why I asked all of my participants to define a few important words, such as feminist, solidarity, race, and racism.

Despite the fact that I see myself having much in common with my participants, we defined the words very differently. This was an important exercise and a reminder that this research, despite its implicit good intentions, is complicated by the fact that the participants and I have different histories, realities, and relationships with the words that frame and deeply inform this research.

Not everyone agrees with or identifies with these words, yet still, because I am the author, everything will be framed through my lens. This is the reality of feminisms: With all their variations and misunderstandings, these deeply seated realities are complicated, fraught territory, but they must not prevent us from proceeding, despite being knee deep in the messy realities of our lives.

I approached all of my participants as experts in their field or, as Aja Martinez (2014) calls it, “voices of authority” in their own experiences. Based on the historical and continuing realities of racialized and Indigenous bodies having their knowledges coopted for academic gain but not being considered legitimate in that process (Bhattacharaya, 2016; Birk, 2017; Delgado, Bernal, & Villalpando, 2002; Dillard, 2016; Martinez, 2014; Yosso, 2006), it is even more important to assert the importance of expert experience in critical research. Many of the research participants have decades of organizing experience and long histories of working in communities. Some of these folks have made instrumental change in their communities in terms of politics, organizing, and shaping the way that organizations operate. These changes have had longstanding impacts that have shifted how communities organize in Vancouver and around the world.

I respect all of the important and powerful stories these activists shared with me. Still, an important dynamic exists within these interviews: I am the interviewer, the researcher. I form the
questions and I shape the story that is being told. That inevitably creates a power dynamic. I gave participants in this research many opportunities to intervene: during the interviews when I strategically kept the questions open ended; at the transcript stage, when participants were given the opportunity to strike anything from the record; during a group gathering at the analysis stage; and throughout the writing stage, when participants were given opportunities to comment on the variations of the stories. Despite these potential moments of intervention, the script was written by me, with the vision I shaped. The degree that culminates from this research will be mine and mine alone. The opportunities that have arisen and will arise from this research will be mine alone as well. Despite all of this, and despite my sincerest intentions, the interviewer/interviewee dynamic is real and fully present within this research (Simpson, 2007; Smith, 2012).

As a result of this dynamic and the impact I hope this research will have, I carry a profound responsibility as a researcher, beyond the university research ethics that have been set out for me. I carry the responsibility of the work I do and the folks I have interviewed. I hold a deep commitment to ensuring practical implications of this research that have yet to be determined. This is my responsibility. Beyond just a recognition that I have privilege, I need to understand how this research will carry forward, how I can do something with this privilege as opposed to just sitting with it and assuming that acknowledging it is enough. This responsibility I carry is more than a backpack—a burden that I wear on my back. It is a lifeline—a tether that connects me to the earth and reminds me of the serious implications of letting the research fly off into the universe while I remain completely unaware of how it will pan out. This tether keeps me grounded, keeps me safe, and keeps all of us together, because now and forever, the participants and I are connected—through our stories, through our lives, through our experiences, and now through
Beti. I depend on this tether and this grounding to the earth, because these stories have shaped my thinking and my understanding in such a profound way.

**Theory-Informed Research Practice**

**Setting**

When first considering the research questions, my instinct was to work within the context of one nonprofit organization to provide a more systematic and complete understanding of how nonprofits operate, including their strengths and limitations. This project was originally intended as an institutional ethnography aimed at gaining a better understanding of organizations through an intimate exposure of an organization’s inner workings. None of the organizations I approached were willing to welcome an observer. It became clear that I was not going to find an organization who would easily accept me. This study promised an intimate understanding of the organization with a promise to provide effective, interesting, and intentional interventions that would support the organization’s capacity to engage racialized and Indigenous girls and women. My inability to find a supportive organization is a testament to the chilly climate (Husband, 2016; Monture-Okanee, 1995; White, 2008) within nonprofit organizations and their reluctance to support research of this nature. Although there was a universal agreement that this work needed to be done, no one wanted to be at the center of a critical project that would look at the limitations of what nonprofit organizations are able to do within the context of supporting racialized and Indigenous girls and women. A microscope on one’s organization pinpointing its faults has real consequences, especially within the Canadian context, where government funding depends
on seemingly arbitrary numbers and outcomes that are due in reports at the end of each quarter. Government funders ask organizations to provide “real numbers” to measure the impact of their work, and their funding depends on this (Bunjun, 2011; Ng, 1996; A. Smith, 2007). Having a researcher come in and potentially discredit this work would impact the type of funding the organization could access and the type of work they would be able to do in the future. My intentions are always to better understand, develop, and support the organization’s success, ultimately in supporting the work of girls and women, but despite these intentions, the risk was far too great for precarious organizations struggling in a chilly climate of funding and competition (Bunjun, 2011; Ng, 1996).

As a result, I was left with conflicting ideas on how to proceed with this project. I wanted to document the challenges and limitations that I know exist within nonprofit organizations, but I did not want any one particular organization to suffer any negative consequences of this work. In order to satisfy these desires, I interviewed activists to better understand their lived experiences within these organizations. Although it was set up as a one-on-one interview I could better understand the complexity of their work by seeing who, how, where and when they organize. Through the interviews they were able to share the struggles and rewards of their organizing.

**Recruitment**

The inclusion criterion for participants of this research was self-identified racialized and Indigenous women with experience advocating for racialized and Indigenous girls’ and women’s rights in nonprofit organizations in the Greater Vancouver area. Furthermore, I sought participants who had experience with systemic marginalization and discrimination within these institutions. Recruitment was done through community email listservs. I sent out a letter to several list-
servs to which I belonged. I asked members from these communities to distribute the letter to other listservs or to individuals as they saw fit. I then waited for participants to contact me expressing interest in the project. Finding participants who were interested in this research was not a challenge. I received more requests than I was able to fulfill. Because of the scope of my community connections, I attracted interest from many different activists who had experience in Greater Vancouver, Greater Victoria, and across the country and North America. Interested participants contacted me via email. I provided them further details about the interview process and set up an interview at a time and place that was convenient for them. From among those interested in participating, I selected 14 participants based on their availability to schedule interviews in the coming weeks. As expected the activists that I interviewed had a diversity of organizing experience. Most of them had been organizing for at least five years, and many of them had involvement ranging over a decade. Their exposure varied from environment justice, arts based, student, violence against women, LGTBQ+, ethno-specific organizations and more. Many of these activists served at the intersections of this organizational diversity. All of the activists had experience organizing in at least one “mainstream feminist” organization, which I loosely defined as an institution with a feminist mandate serving a diversity of clients.

As expected in this very small community of activists, I knew, or knew of, each of the participants. In five cases, I personally knew the participant. In three cases, I had one degree of separation (where the participant was a close connection or colleague of a personal connection of mine). In the remainder of the cases, there was a larger degree of separation. My close connection with the participants was not a surprise, because people need to feel comfortable and trust the person with whom they are sharing intimate and personal details. If potential participants did
not know and trust me already, they needed someone else to vouch for me. Although in traditional research this close connection is seen as a disadvantage due to the lack of supposed objectivity, I knew this would not be the case. As a matter of fact, my knowledge of and respect for the individuals gave me a deeper commitment to and respect for their work, as well as a greater sense of responsibility in sharing their stories.

**Interviews**

I interviewed 14 self-identified racialized and Indigenous activists, as well as undertaking the processes of interviewing myself. My knowledge for this research goes beyond these interviews. It is also deeply informed by my participation in what Ahmed (2012) called the “diversity world.” She states that an “ethnographic approach to diversity is necessarily ‘multi-sited’ given that the diversity world is a world of mobile subjects and objects, of the networks and connections that are necessary for things to move around.” (2012, p. 11) This is true of this research as well. I have been participating in this world for over a decade, especially in feminist nonprofit circles. I knew of many of the organizations women referred to as well as some of the politics they discussed. This is a reality of being one of a few in larger contexts of organizing. As a result I had my own preconceived notions, feelings and opinions about the organizations and their politics. The interviews took place from August to November 2015. The data collection process for this research utilized qualitative research methods, including semistructured interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), and relied heavily on the in-depth principles of ethnographic research (Bhattacharya, 2017; Duncan, 2002; Simpson, 2007), to prevent me, as the researcher, from parachuting or dropping into established communities with longstanding histories, collecting knowledge and leaving. And also to provide a more holistic approach to learning and
working with communities. The interviews lasted approximately an hour and a half in a location of the participants’ choosing, ranging from their homes to cafés to places of employment. I offered follow-up interviews should participants feel they wanted to add anything or if something new came up after our interviews. One participant took me up on this offer. As a result, 15 interviews were transcribed and analyzed. In practice, these interviews were much more than interviews. Since my relationship with each individual was different, so was the nature of each interview and the scope of our relationship after the interview. These extended relationships allowed for an increased exposure to the work, commitment, and activism of each participant.

When referring to the women interviewed within this project, I left my understanding of what “woman” means open. Organizations are diverse spaces, and the people who occupy them are equally diverse. Stories of marginalization present in many ways, and I was open to interviewing all folks who felt that they could contribute to the research questions, even though they may not have identified with the term woman at the time, in the past, or ever. Due to the nature of my activism in “women’s” communities, all of the activists I interviewed presented/identified as cisgender women. Historically, women’s activism in Vancouver has not always been a trans-inclusive space (Elliot, 2014) and I would argue that this remains the case. Furthermore, my own presentation as a cisgender, feminized body no doubt has an impact on my relationships and the ways in which I organize. Understanding the barriers gender non conforming folks face within an intersectional analysis is learning I have yet to further develop. I am still learning and I suspect this is reflected in my research design—from language to recruitment. Although I was open to anyone who did any form of activism, including, but not limited to, trans and gender nonbinary communities, I was not surprised that my recruitment resulted in all cisgender women partici-
I asked activists to share their experiences within nonprofit organizations by using open-ended questions that I hoped would elicit stories (e.g., “tell me a memory that sticks out in your organizational experiences”). I had heard many of these kinds of stories anecdotally and desired to capture them systemically to reflect how women experience marginalization within nonprofit organizations and activism. I used interviewing methods as a way of collecting counterstories that centered on the experiences of living with race and racism through institutions. I wanted to understand the stories from the participants’ perspectives: what words they used, how they framed their experiences, whether or not they saw discrimination, and how and why they came to understand these experiences. Was it in the moment, later, or not at all? What led them to activism? How had systems impacted their lives?

Time and time again, marginalized women expressed that they feel isolated in institutions (Ng, 1996; Birk, 2009); so during the interviews, I proposed an opportunity for a focus group with all of the participants. I imagined a focus group would be a useful opportunity for women to connect across organizations and different experiences. However, although many of the participants were receptive to the idea of a focus group, many of them also brought forward hesitation and reservations related to confidentiality, small communities, and sharing experiences with colleagues with whom they will most likely continue to work. These valid hesitations led me to decide against conducting a focus group.

I used a transcription service, who signed a confidentiality contract, to transcribe the interviews. I went over the transcriptions while listening to the interviews and modified based on my interpretation of what I heard. Transcription shapes the way data is understood, what is said
and what goes into the record (Tilley, 2003). Although I realized the value of transcribing the interviews myself in order to have more “control,” I also recognized that time is money. Since a number of different people transcribed the data, a number of different styles were used, and I had to go over the transcriptions and try to make a style of my own. Overall, the transcriptions were quite accurate based on reasonable expectations. Some of them were very impacted by background noise, which resulted in a little data being lost in translation. I sent the interviews back to the participants to get their feedback and remove anything from the record if they wished. All of my participants were able to get back to me within a few weeks with very minor edits to the script. I made all of the requested changes and used only these revised transcripts for data analysis.

Participants

Activists within my research had organized, and continue to organize, in a myriad of ways. Organizing from and within Indigenous communities and Indigenous ways of knowing, anti-violence, art/culture, queer, environmental, and women’s organizations were all heavily represented, as were a variety of intersections within these forms of organizing. Activists are activists in and outside of the organizations they work for. As a result, their experiences extended well beyond the mandate of any one organization and spread fluidly across many humanitarian and social justice causes.

The participants of my research project are diverse and come from a number of different backgrounds. It is difficult to list out their characteristics as each of them cannot be defined by one singular ethnicity, but also encompass a variety of intersectional elements that impact who they are and the way they have experienced Vancouver. The migration stories of their families
and the resulting diaspora impacts how they impact the increasingly changing landscape of Van-
couver. Having said that it is also important to get a snapshot of some of the ways the activists
interviewed identify themselves. Participants identified from a number of different ethnic and
racial backgrounds including:

3 Indigenous participants
4 East Asian participants
3 South East Asian participants
1 South American/ Latina participant
2 Black participants
1 South Asian participant

Their activisms are as varied as their identities. All of the participants have done some
activism/ advocating in issues of race/culture/ethnicity/Indigeneity both directly through the
projects they have worked for and indirectly based on a need that was identified as some of the
only people with experiences as racialized and Indigenous bodies in the room. This was the
common piece that brought them all to talk to me. For example, each one had worked on a diver-
sity project within a larger women’s organization or they volunteered with an ethno specific or-
ganization etc.

Their understanding of race and Indigeneity has been imperative in my conversation with
them. I think it would be fair to say that all of the participants interviewed have an understanding
of the ways in which race/ racism inform the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women in
Canada and as a result the ways in which they experience nonprofit organizations, both as clients
and staff within these organizations. The participants ranged from 3 years to 20 years of experi-
ence in nonprofit organizations. Participants have also worked/volunteered for a number of other organizations that include:

12 women have worked for women’s organizations (including organizations that deal directly with violence against women)

6 have worked in ethno specific organizations

4 have worked in LGBTQ+ organizations

4 have worked in environment justice organizations

2 have done arts based activism

8 have been engaged in student activism on campuses

Although these women all had a variety of different experiences in how they understood their activism and the lenses that these experiences were derived from I had communicated that I was most interested in their experiences working within “mainstream feminist non profits.” The examples I gave for these “mainstream feminist organizations” were women’s centres, domestic violence organizations, sexual assault support centres and resources centres. All of the participants identified having this experience although some of them spoke more directly to their experience using examples from their days within these women’s organizations. Others spoke more directly to the experiences they had most recently and/or the experiences they felt resonated most with the questions I was asking. Most importantly to note is that many of the activists I interviewed talked about the ways in which these experiences translated over a variety of organizations. Experiences of systemic exclusion and limitations resonated because these organizations were built or were modelled from traditional activists organizations which moved from grassroots spaces to more formalized organizations, cementing many of the nonprofit industrial com-
plex challenges I discuss at greater length in the next chapter. Although these experiences differed greatly, I was interested in the ways in which they felt these experiences of exclusion replicated amongst/within/around these organizations.

Like the organizations, most of the participants explained their experiences working with a diverse clientele from girls to older adults as they navigate various challenges within their lives. All of the participants found themselves at the intersections of many types of activisms, engaging in a number of different ways—and not only in the nonprofit organizations that they work in but in daily life. Their activisms stem to the ways in which they live their life therefore their experiences extend much further than the various organizations they have worked for. Significantly, at the time of the interviews all of the women I interviewed had left formal nonprofit organizing in favour of more “stable” work environments like universities, governments and foundations. Many of them still do activism/advocacy within these new spheres and also work as volunteers, board members and part time project work with nonprofits organizations.

Confidentiality

Participant confidentiality was an incredibly important consideration for the purposes of this project. I asked participants to share stories—some of vulnerability, pain, anger, and frustration. Indigenous and racialized women rarely have an opportunity to narrate their own lives, and when given the chance, it can be an overwhelming experience. Furthermore, the community of Indigenous and racialized activists in Vancouver is small. The tiniest characteristic can be identifying. I have been committed to safeguarding confidentiality, privacy, and dignity throughout the process to the best of my ability. Doing so required several important steps.

First, I made participants aware of the risks associated with the interview process, using
an informed consent letter. I also protected the identity of the participants by using pseudonyms within the research documentation. Second, all participants were invited to review transcripts and findings throughout the process. If they were interested and available, this review took place at several stages: once after the initial interview, again after any follow-up interviews, again during the data analysis stage, and then during the writing and editing stages. This process helped to ensure that participants had greater control over their stories. Finally, to further safeguard individuals’ identities, instead of a traditional presentation of the data, I created a composite counterstory. This approach, in addition to greater confidentiality, provided an opportunity to see the ways our stories confine and converge. My research data underwent UBC Research Ethics review but based on my desire to protect the vulnerability of my interview participants I choose to further protect their identities through the composite counterstory. I felt confident that this additional protection would allow for an opportunity to share the experiences of my participants without jeopardizing their identities in a miniscule racialized and Indigenous activist community.

Reciprocity

This research started with a desire to “give back.” Giving back is what motivated me to apply for the UBC Public Scholars Initiative (PSI). PSI is “an innovative pilot program intended to explore how a top-tier university can support doctoral pathways that encourage purposeful social contribution, innovative forms of collaborative scholarship, and broader career readiness for students” (University of British Columbia, n.d.). It was my hope that this project would allow a deeper connection to community and the people with whom I share this work, and in many ways it has. The PSI project enabled community consultations throughout this research so that others might understand, interact with, and consider the nature of my research findings. This project
also allowed me to reconnect with my research participants, almost a year later, to go over the research results and discuss how things had changed since we had last had an opportunity to talk about activism and organizing. In August 2016, I invited all of my research participants to a dinner where we could discuss the research “results”—or at least what I identified as important themes. Nine of my original 14 participants gathered at a restaurant for this dinner.

My intent was that the consultation dinner would be a good substitute for a focus group. It would still give everyone an opportunity to connect and support each other, but since I would not be asking any personal questions at the dinner, nobody would feel the need to divulge difficult information, thus alleviating the fears of how we would continue to work together. I thought it could also be an important time to discuss the collective story I had created / was creating. Folks were nervous to meet each other. I could feel that energy well beforehand in the nervous texts and emails I received. “Who is going to be there?” they would ask. Would it be someone they had had conflict with before? Someone they knew they did not see eye to eye with?

We sit across a circular table staring at each other. We smile, yet still somehow resist the urge of this familiarity. The very one we are here to discuss.

It has hardened our shells, made us distrust each other, because at the end of the day we realize that other women of colour are our greatest competitors. Many of us have experienced it. Our bodies tense over again as we feel the pain of experience well up in our shoulders and necks, our backs, our hips—where we hold the brunt of the pain of colonization and racism. Yet somehow, like good children of immigrants (or within the Brown skin of assumed immigrants—the pain of
Despite the initial tensions of opening up to the realities of organizing, the dinner was an honest, frank, and diverse conversation about the research themes. As expected, we, as a group of activists, had differing opinions on how to reconcile the sometimes conflicting ideas. But that initial edge was there, you could feel it. Should I trust? Can I trust? And that is a result of this system. This system activists like us work so hard to protect. We hold it. We protect it, right before we attempt to rip it apart. Thankfully, that systemic deconstruction was built right into my project. In addition to the individual interview transcripts, my research is informed by this dinner and check-in within its findings.

In addition to this dinner with research participants, PSI funding also allowed me to travel to two communities within Canada in Calgary and Montreal to see if these stories/results related. Although this research is very much grounded in place (as I discuss further in Chapter 4), I wanted to know if it would resonate with communities organizers outside of this context. I chose these two cities based on the community connections I had within these cities and their approximate sizes. They were never intended to be direct comparisons since geography, colonization and land/treaty negotiations happened so differently across the country. I was not attempting to pull out this story and drop it into another place. I had the opportunity (and availability of resources) based on this pilot project that existed on my campus. The project exposes how doctoral research, community experience and community connection are closely connected and interrelated. This was never a “traditional” research project as it was deeply motivated by my personal experience in organizing. As a result the project, communication of data and reciprocity could not be
traditional either. Primarily my motivation to visit other organizations with my research results was based on a desire for a sort of litmus test. I wanted to understand if context would change activist experiences entirely or if they still resonated with the structural limitations/exclusions activists in Vancouver shared. The folks I spoke to over tea and pastries in their organizational spaces agreed unanimously, they also see these realities operate in their organizations. PSI funding allowed me to see that the themes that built Beti’s stories translate and have resonance beyond this unique context.

Creating as Method, Creating as Analysis

Similar to our individual processes of coming to know, coming to know within this research happened/happens in a variety of different ways. Writing as a process of coming to know is an important part of this project (Morrison, 2015). Through the process of weaving a story, or stories, of research, lives, and people, I developed muddy clarity and partial understandings. Similarly, in creating a social-justice-oriented project, one must hold the complicated and sometimes conflicting tensions of systems, power, and knowledge throughout the methodologies employed. In coming to know and understand these complicated concepts, it has become clear to me. Writing is an important method of coming to know; it is knowledge (Morrison, 2015). It is imperative to move away from the traditional barriers within research to create a writing project that seeks to engage readers in a more personal way. This process can be used beyond the communication of research results to find a deeper connection to the self and, as a result, the reader. Storytelling and self-reflexivity become a key way to connect with the subject material and also oneself. This is especially true for racialized bodies (Weems, 2003).

In an effort to counteract dominant systems, racialized people can come to know through
their own creation. This is one important way that racialized and Indigenous people are able to overcome systemic oppression and thus become the authors of their own research projects. This is a powerful act of resistance for the participants within this project, and also for me as a racialized researcher. This project is an opportunity to offer feminist, Indigenous, and/or racialized counterstories of experiences in nonprofit organizations and activism. By pushing Richardson’s (2000) notions of “writing as method,” I have been able to appreciate the importance of creating as knowing, and how, especially for racialized and Indigenous bodies, it is crucial to come to know through the process of creating within, among, and against dominant culture. As another important form of resistance throughout this dissertation I have employed a Citation Challenge. Tuck et al (2015) remind us of the importance of citing intentionally with a consideration to the ways academic knowledge is created and reproduced. I have employed this to the best of my ability, citing primarily racialized and Indigenous women. A process of resistance I discuss at greater length in Chapter 5.

**Racism is Structural: Moving Away From “Damage-Centered Research”**

There are many limitations that present themselves in research of this nature. This counterstory/braid has not come without its challenges and complications. Primarily, the risk of appropriating knowledges and minimizing the unique aspects of history and culture individual communities have experienced across Canada but especially in Vancouver, the site of this research.

As discussed above, after careful consideration of Indigenous appropriation I have decided to not include the voices of Indigenous activists within Beti’s story. I have written Beti as a racialized woman, and shown the parallels of which there are many, with Indigenous activists in
my analysis that follows. This is not to say that Indigenous activists have not deeply informed Beti’s story, but rather as a way to mitigate the cultural appropriation that happens far too often in academia and also to shed light on the unique ways settler colonialism exists on unceded territories. To lump these experiences together ignores the ways Indigenous communities experience unique violence, racialization and a long history of genocide and trauma resulting from the ongoing realities of colonization. The braided counterstory is not intended to minimize the experience of the individual—to the contrary. It is meant to uncover the power of the institutionalized nature of racism. My intention is to showcase how these stories are not isolated experiences but rather the outcome of racist and oppressive systems intended to silence and marginalize. This precarious grey area of identity, identifying and appropriation are a significant limitation to Beti’s story.

Another limitation that I have seriously considered are the ways in which storytelling can often recreate notions of damaged Indigenous and racialized communities. Tuck’s (2009) open letter to communities invites researchers to consider the long term repercussions of thinking of ourselves and our communities as broken and to reconsider damage centered research. She charts the historical realities of Indigenous peoples in colonized countries and how that has impacted the ways Indigenous communities are treated within research. Through this relationship Indigenous communities become “overreasearched yet, ironically, made invisible.” (2009, p. 411-2) She relies on Indigenous researchers like Linda Tuhawii Smith and bell hooks to show how the pain that is communicated becomes the only facet of a given community. Tuck shows me that damage centered research relies heavily on problematic notions rooted in theories of change. Tuck teaches us that communities are not damaged but rather the frameworks that position these communities are damaged. Although the narratives within this research deal with pain, chal-
lenges, and sadness, I write with awareness of this letter. Tuck urges researchers to stop telling
and thinking of the broken stories of communities to reinforce and reinstate mainstream notions
about racialized and Indigenous peoples.

I have seriously considered these ideas and the ways this research reproduces notions of
damaged racialized and Indigenous people. This is the primary reason why I overtly emphasize
the institutions that perpetuate these stories rather than the people living these realities, and
hence the need for Beti. The experiences of activists are honoured, not only as individual stories,
but also to emphasize the ways in which systems perpetuate the marginalization of these com-
munities. In so doing, this research intends to go beyond pointing fingers to explicitly ask how
can systems implement the changes required to support the activism these women see as neces-
sary. In considering these stories, I seek to actively break the cycle of damage-centered research.

Despite all the reasons I believe in telling a good story, every time I sit to write them
down, I am still overcome by tremendous fear. Authors remind that there are dangers in telling
stories (Adichie, 2009; Razack, 1999), including dangers that arise from which stories are
choson and why they are told. Once the story is out there, in many ways it is no longer mine or
any of the Betis I interviewed. These stories are based on our experiences, and as a result, many
things impact their “validity.” For instance, how these stories are remembered and the “accura-
cy” of these remembered facts can always be called into question (Davies et al., 2004). Further-
more, due to the sheer “subjective” nature of these stories, I am certain there is another person,
even a Brown Canadian woman of similar age and experience, with a completely different, po-
tentially contradictory story. When I say subjective, this is not to suggest that anything can be
objective, but rather to acknowledge that each story I tell falls into the varied experience of who,
what, where, when, and how I remember the story at a particular moment in time. The same considerations come into play when I sit to write Beti’s counterstory.

The fact that these stories will be told within a mainstream context in a mainstream institution like the university raises the additional question of whether I, as a racialized woman, can tell these stories, and, more importantly, if anyone can hear the stories I tell. As Gayatri Spivak (1988) asks, can the subaltern speak within a context where Western dialogue is constantly reproducing its own thought for its own purposes, unable to contend with alternative forms of knowledge because it is only able to deal with its own? Although I share these stories, I am aware that they cannot be fully taken up within this paradigm that I, in many ways, am absorbing through my perpetuation of this institution. This is a reality I cannot ignore. However, I cannot let it paralyze me into remaining silent and further perpetuating this violence on the bodies of others.

**Theory-Informed Analysis**

Feminist theories, particularly those that engage with race and Indigeneity critically (Ahmed, 2012, Ng, 1996, Razack, 1999, Tuck and Yang, 2012), as outlined above deeply inform my research questions and subsequent analysis. Upon working with the transcripts of the interviews, I started to explore a couple of different qualitative data analysis software programs. Nothing seemed intuitive and easy to use. I abandoned this method quickly, opting for something more old school. I felt the need to use my hands, to see things on paper as opposed to yet another screen.

Sticky notes of different sizes and colours began to litter my space.
Things were being written, were falling, moving, and creating new spaces within this process. Themes began to take shape as my writing appeared. I felt strangely vulnerable in this process, seeing all of my ideas out in the open like that. Naked. Alone. Incomplete. I became intensely aware of who was coming over and would be able to see my space at its most vulnerable. All of a sudden, I felt the need to protect my ideas, the shorthand words that were scribbled on stickies. Would they look at my typos? It does not matter. It’s just another stumbling block to mount. Push it aside. Keep going. Move on.

The themes seemed obvious. Finding them was like falling in the lap of a familiar friend. There they were, the stories of pain, exclusion, racism, structural injustice—all things I expected. I was satisfied, yet completely sad, and also somewhat vindicated. I knew there was a purpose. There was something here I had to do. Something that needed to be seen, to be done. A story—many stories—that were needed to shed light on the ways that systems compound injustice and complicate the process toward justice. These were not the stories I wanted, but they are the stories that have to be told. Of course, at the same time, resilience, beauty, triumph—all of the things racialized and Indigenous women have become so good at, despite everything else. So I sat amid the satisfied glow of the stories I expected, plastered up on stickies all over the room. I sat underneath them, staring at my “success.” But what was I missing? Uncertainty filled me, always, as I moved through this process. I understood the stories. They reminded me of after-work conversations with my friends. Perhaps they were too easy to find? Yes, perhaps they were.

I have a history of over a decade working in nonprofits and therefore hold practice based
assumptions of the “problems.” I also found a number of things through this research that I did not expect to find—stories of struggle, isolation, surveillance, and mental stress. I knew and expected some of what I heard, but much of it was new or was articulated in new ways, with different insights. For example the ways participants spoke of mental health concerns, especially as they relate to depression and anxiety in working in nonprofit organizations was particularly relevant. Furthermore, when I took these findings into community organizations many of the racialized and Indigenous women within those organization related with these stressors. The interviews also spoke to each other, and helped clarify each other, because the questions brought insight into specific challenges many of the women experienced.

Research of this kind has tremendous strength. Ultimately, I believe that this research can produce best practice guidelines that will be useful to local, national and international institutions working with racialized and Indigenous peoples. Women within these organizations are always overburdened by a lack of funding and resources, and as a result, rarely get a chance to consider the dynamics within their organizations and how they might be able to better do the work of advocating. This study holds potential to answer important questions about organizational structures and policies.

In this chapter, I have explored the importance and limitations of the methodologies I have used within this research, specifically CRT’s composite counter storytelling using Beti. I have looked at how the benefits and limitations within these theories apply to my research project. These theories call into question my best intentions and how they impact the work I am doing within the project.

All that is left now is putting pen to paper. Figure it out by writ-
ing it out. See what comes and see what flows. See where the writing and thinking takes me. See where the people and the places and the spaces and the thinking go. Write it down. Because that is all that is left to do—to see and to understand. It is my process of doing and my methodology of imperfection.
Chapter 3. The System is Broken: The Development and Maintenance of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex

Using the theoretical underpinning described in the previous chapters, this chapter seeks to answer the question: How do the structural limitations of feminist nonprofit organizations present themselves in the lives of racialized and Indigenous activists? This will be accomplished through analysis of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC) and how it operates in and through Beti’s life. Through this chapter I define the NPIC, I break down its development and maintenance (in “What Does the NPIC Look Like?”) into eight related subthemes: (1) entrenched leadership; (2) spaces as a physical manifestation of the NPIC; (3) oppression within our movements; (4) nonperformativity; (5) structural whiteness and how it cements both structural racism and the NPIC; (6) the crazy structure of racism; (7) capitalism; and (8) and the beat goes on: perpetuating the cycle. These subthemes are the interlocking building blocks that perpetuate and maintain the NPIC, present roadblocks to the workers and activists I interviewed, and ultimately reduce the capacity of organizations to effectively serve Indigenous and racialized girls and women.

Through Beti’s stories of institutional experience and the Indigenous activists voices, I seek to explicate the implications of NPIC on racialized and Indigenous women who work within these organizations and the implications for those they are trying to service. I will discuss how systemic exclusion continues within feminist organizations. These stories question systems and the ways they have been built, especially the system of whiteness (Fanon, 1967, Razack, 1999) and the way the NPIC depends on it. Finally, Beti and the Indigenous activists I interviewed demonstrate how the NPIC perpetuates the cycle of burnout, especially on Brown bodies moving through the revolving doors leaving organizations only to be replaced by fresh, young, new
Brown faces, as exemplified in Beti’s pink room story that opens chapter two. Beti’s dream of continuously walking through the revolving door and ending up in the pink room illustrates this cycle of how activists feel trapped within the perpetually revolving system of the NPIC.

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About five years ago, Beti was at a large international women’s conference where several thousand activists, academics, organizers, politicians, and youth were gathered from around the world. Several controversial sessions took place that roused a mostly profound consideration and debate about global interpretations of women’s bodies—as controlled by men and, ironically in this context, as controlled by other women. During a particularly contentious session put on by primarily white presenters to a mixed audience, a number of sex workers and sex work supporters, many of whom were Indigenous and racialized women, silently protested outside the workshop venue. There they sat, cross-legged on the floor with signs that read “If you want to know what a sex worker thinks, ask me.” As the heated session emptied, some of the participants decided to engage the protesters by asking them what they thought. The participants and the sex workers were engaged in a respectful dialogue around their interpretation of sex work when the session presenters came out and began shouting at the protesters.

The heated argument culminated in one of the session presenters spitting on several of the protesters. Later, Beti discovered to her shock and dismay that all parties involved in this incident were Canadian feminists. These were women that Beti had shared banners with marching down the street to end violence against women, and here they reenacted the violence they had fought so hard against. Beti knew this was not an isolated incident. She had seen injustice like this in the movement over and over again. When people ask Beti what is wrong with organiza-
tions, she always tells this story.

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Beti’s story is just one of the many examples of how marginalized bodies are kept at the margins, even when the intention is to center their concerns. I acknowledge that important work happens within these spaces, despite stories like this one. What I wish to consider is how these stories showcase systemic failures within organizations, specifically as they relate to barriers of access and exclusion. All of the women I interviewed discussed the complications of those in the margins—even within the margins. Beti’s story of witnessed exclusion would have felt differently if she was of a category that is normally assumed connected with sex work in Canada, specifically Indigenous women. This is also an increased reality for Black women who similarly experience life on the margins within the margins because of the over representation of anti-Black racism within all aspects of Canadian life. This story would undoubtedly be felt differently based on Beti’s race, class and gender. Beti as a racialized Brown body was able to witness as a bystander and someone who did not step into this heated debate. Had Beti been representative of another group (specifically Black and/or Indigenous) perhaps she would have not have been able to be an observer. This is the reality of perceived inclusion. Activists shared stories of how being in the room sometimes even voicing your opinion is not always enough to be heard. Just because you speak (or protest) does not mean someone will listen—quite the opposite as evidenced by Beti’s story. Activists acknowledge this based not only on the things they experience by also the stories they witness.

These issues are crucial in understanding how racialized and Indigenous girls and women continue to be excluded, even within organizations that are intended to address these gaps. Jessi-
ca Yee (2011) asks, “when feminism itself becomes its own form of oppression, what do we have to say about it?” (p. 12). Yee’s important question is often overlooked or goes unanswered when activists are overworked, overwhelmed, and do not create a space to talk about the different and diverse interpretations held in communities.

Beti’s story exemplifies how even the women’s movement can be exclusive, despite the good intentions that perpetuate these spaces. Indigenous activists that I interviewed discussed similar feelings of exclusion. They spoke of how their bodies being asked to represent all Indigenous issues was severely problematic in the context of mainstream feminist organizations. In addition to that Indigenous participants discussed the manner in which exclusion can and does happen because of an organizational unwillingness to support Indigenous ways of knowing, a topic I go into in further detail later in this chapter and the next.

What is the NPIC?

In *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* by INCITE! Women of Colour Against Violence (2007), the editors, rooted in community organization and experience, reveal how the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) is a natural corollary to the prison industrial complex (PIC). In the introduction, Andrea Smith² (2007) explains:

² I acknowledge how exceptionally contested Andrea Smith is, especially in the field of Native American studies. Many Indigenous scholars have refuted Smith’s unfounded claims to Indigenous ancestry and that her presence as a well—cited scholar in this field challenges the work of Indigenous scholars who are doing important work and who face many more institutional barriers within academia than Smith has faced. I recognize this debate and use her work with caution. I am fully aware of the favouring of light skin privilege, the desirability of consuming Brown bodies, and the many settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012). On the other hand, Smith has undeniably made significant contributions to the ways that community organizations and the nonprofit industrial complex are built and maintained. I discuss these challenges in greater detail in the section “Searching for Knowledge: A Citation Challenge” later in this dissertation.
While the PIC overtly represses dissent the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a “shadow state” constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services. The NPIC functions as an alibi that allows government to make war, expand punishment, and proliferate market economies under the veil of partnership between public and private sectors. (pp. 8–9)

As nonprofit organizations have become reliant on government and foundation funding, they have become reshaped from grassroots kitchen-table movements to industries that function to be accountable to funders instead of to communities. Smith (2007) argues that the NPIC uses nonprofits to advance capitalist gain as a way to monitor and control social justice movements; divert public moneys into private hands through foundations; manage and control dissent in order to make the world safe for capitalism; redirect activist energies into career-based modes of organizing instead of mass-based organizing capable of actually transforming society; allow corporations to make their exploitative and colonial work practices through “philanthropic” work; encourage social movements to model themselves after capitalist structures rather than to challenge them. (p. 3)

Although Smith is speaking to an American context, the structure and development of the NPIC are similar within the Canadian context (Bunjun, 2011, Ng, 1996, Srivastava, 2006). Foundations and organizational structures have been set up differently according to the individual country provisions, but in Canada as in the United States, foundations and governments fund and conse-
quently control the way nonprofit organizations function. When organizational livelihoods directly depend on foundations, the foundations are often able to control the type of work and consequently, the stance the organization takes. Foundation and government monies can and do direct staff, community engagement and organizational advocacy. For example, as participants shared, in addition to other limitations set out by funders, organizations are “not allowed” to protest the government, engage in direct political engagement with clients, or more generally engage in advocacy work. Activists individually and organizationally have been carefully negotiating these obstacles for decades, but their success in doing so does not limit the toxic climate that results from outside entities controlling their activities.

**Oppression Within Our Movements**

Oppression within social justice movements has been experienced, discussed, and documented over the course of the last several centuries (Smith, 2007; Srivastava, 2006; Yee, 2011). Clear examples of this oppression have been discussed as women of colour have sought equal representation and respect in feminist movements (Lorde, 1984) and civil rights movements (Hill Collins, 2002), as people of colour have sought equal representation in queer organizations (Puar, 2001), and as Indigenous people have sought representation within anti—racist organizations (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Exclusion within social justice movements continues to exist in myriad ways. Feminist organizations seek to rectify mainstream injustices, but as depicted in Beti’s story opening this chapter, despite their good intentions, power and violence can and do perpetuate within these spaces. Activists assume that because we share common labels like feminist there are mutually agreed upon principles. In living reality there is not agreement not even on definitions or labels like the identity *feminist*, let alone all the issues that come along with it.
Marginalized communities often seek out organizations as spaces of safety and collaboration where they can organize against the systems that oppress them, but often these so-called safe spaces inflict violence in unexpected ways.

Feminist spaces can recreate the oppression within mainstream society Beti’s experiences of lateral violence in feminist organizations as Beti’s story at the women’s conference exemplifies through the disrespect shown to the protestors. I would argue that this violence is largely due to the fact that the session presenters experience violence in the patriarchal mainstream they occupy in their lives and have thus normalized this behaviour as a way to treat others. One explanation for the recreation of oppression posited by research participants is, in part, because of the internalized oppression marginalized people experience and witness, both in our lives and within our work advocating for social justice. As avid witness to this violence, activists experience mental health struggles coping with the vicarious trauma they witness which then interferes with their own mental health directly and indirectly with the relationships they have with others. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903) wrote about double consciousness, and the ways in which black folks experience a duality of identity from having to understand not only their own experiences but also having to understand how to operate in the white man’s world. This fragmented identity is experienced because black folks have internalized the overt and systemic racism and exclusion they experience on a daily basis. This permeates their psyche and perceptions of self and also the ways in which they understand the world around them, and their relationship to it. This foundational concept of double consciousness explains the lived reality of internalized oppression racialized peoples experience even today.

Paulo Freire (1970/2000) builds on Du Bois by explaining that the oppressed experience
a unique duality: “They are contradictory, divided beings, shaped by and existing in a concrete situation of oppression and violence” (p. 55). The oppressed both live within the system of the oppressor and are trying to break free from it: “They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized” (Freire, p. 48). Through this internalization, the oppressed recreate the oppressor in the very systems they set up to fight these injustices. As a result, those within the organization reexperience this duality, furthering their oppression and maintaining the violence.

As Beti experiences as a witness at the conference, she sees that the session presenters are enacting violence. Why would they do this? Clearly as feminist presenters on the topic of sex trade they have a vested interested on the sex trade and the women who are impacted within this field. Using Freire’s logic it is clear that the session presenters have witnessed violence in patriarchal society and as those who are unknowing ambassadors of the patriarchal work they live in, they are enacting the same violence that they have experienced.

Freire (1970/2000) explains that “almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or ‘sub—oppressors’” (p. 45). He goes further:

Submerged in reality, the oppressed cannot perceive clearly the “order” which serves the interests of the oppressors whose image they have internalized. Chafing under the restrictions of this order they often manifest a type of horizontal violence, striking out at their own comrades for the pettiest reasons. (p. 62)

Within the organizations in which Indigenous and racialized women seek support, they have recreated the same systems they seek to escape—ie. through the presenters that are enacting vio-
lence upon the very women (sex trade workers) they are seeking to “empower”. As a result, lateral violence, micro aggressions, and overt bullying replicate within some feminist organizations. Beti’s story exemplifies one of the ways unintended byproducts of the NPIC—internalized oppression—and the toll this takes on activists organizing.

Organizers within women’s organizations seek to improve the lives of women in order for women to manifest their own vision for their lives. Beti, the Indigenous activists I interviewed and other activists/organizers/defenders within their communities seek to create a better quality of life as service providers, free from violence; yet they are unable to treat each other with the respect and dignity everyone deserves. The violence Beti witnessed at the conference is not isolated. Clearly, something is terribly wrong within our activism. This is not to suggest that individual women are to blame, but rather that individuals are impacted by an intersectional and interlocking systems of colonialism, racism, patriarchy even as they seek to dismantle them. This is also not to suggest that these individuals should not take responsibility and be accountable for their oppressive behaviours but rather to understand that Beti’s activism does not happen in isolation from the systems themselves.

The violent system of the NPIC is the context the women within this research described and are navigating on a daily basis. In their vivid illustration of the NPIC, as with other systemic exclusion, multiply marginalized bodies, specifically poor, queer, trans, differently abled, Indigenous, and racialized bodies, are most negatively impacted. Beti’s personal experience and those that she witnesses—of violence, fear, and exclusion—are imperative in understanding, not only the NPIC, but its perpetuation of violence and its nonperformativity (Ahmed, 2012).
What Does the NPIC Look Like?

*Entrenched Leadership*

Gora has been working for the organization since its inception. She was one of its founders, and even though everyone already knows that, she wastes no opportunities in reminding folks at every chance she can get. “Remember when...?” she will reminisce. Beti and the other project coordinators share side glances and smirk every time this comes up. “We get it. You have been here a long time.” Gora’s entrenched leadership permeates every aspect of how she runs the organization. Other staff who have worked at this site longer than Beti talk about the golden year—the one when Gora decided she had it with this “thankless” job and decided to take a “step back.” They went through an extensive search to find another executive director. They ended up going with a young woman of colour who had been organizing for decades. After the first day, she looked exhausted—dealing with boards, funders, staff, and the communities she had always worked with—all with vocal expectations of how she’d perform in the new role—and that visible burden never really left her face. To no one’s surprise, she left after only 16 months, and Gora decided to come back to “clean things up.” It was Gora’s dream scenario: Not only was she a hero for saving the day, she could now blame everything that wasn’t working on the nameless, faceless woman of colour who left.

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The presence of longstanding executive directors (EDs) who become dedicated to upholding systemic issues to protect their status and funding was a recurring theme in this research. The question of entrenched leadership is complicated based on positionality. Similar to the previous story Beti’s position as observer in this story is complicated by her positionality. Beti is
able to observe this situation with limited impact because of her position as a South Asian immigrant majority in a city like Vancouver. Her position would undoubtedly be different as a women from virtually any other racialized or Indigenous community. There is much more representation of South Asian leadership and South Asian specific organizations in Vancouver which are not reflected in other communities. Participants did experience the challenges of working in ethno specific organizations and the impact of long standing and entrenched leadership in racialized communities, however, this concern was primarily raised in regards to white women’s feminist organizations specifically in domestic violence organizations such as shelters or support centres. When racialized women lead mainstream organizations they can (and often do) reflect the status quo. On the other hand, their presence can sometimes be one of the very few in a sea of white faces. Thus further complicating this dynamic.

Many established feminist organizations stem from the struggles of individuals to organize, and as a result, their leaders are steadfast in maintaining them (even if they present problems). It is difficult to see a system when you have been part of it for a long time and have accepted every aspect of it as the norm. Entrenched leadership and the nepotism it engenders persists, and unlike board members, who are governed by bylaws, EDs are not. Furthermore, some EDs also have a tremendous power in selecting board members, which further cements their power. A number of the participants within this research reflected the realities of EDs and the ways their power in organizations can over shadow the organization’s original intention. As Beti’s story exemplifies, although their may be good intentions in hiring diverse bodies, when those bodies do not fit the status quo they are often pushed out or forced (on various different fronts) to leave. Indigenous activists also reflected similar struggles, particularly how established
leadership caused inflexible systems that were unable to change. The manifestation of long standing leadership and ideas, perpetuated by “same old thinking” which is rigid and does not allow for seamlessly working with Indigenous communities—that are flexible and require a consideration for a situational understanding of the unique needs of colonization and its perpetuation through the Indian Act. Many participants discussed the impossibility of change in regimes that were steadfast in maintaining the status quo. This is not only true for EDs who have been there for an extended period of time. Often, like much institutional leadership, EDs mirror their own image which is why it is hard to create change. There are no built-in checks and balances to maintain the integrity of organizations. This prevents organizational capacity to acknowledge and adapt to change—change which, ironically, is at the foundation of many of these organizations.

**Spaces as a Physical Manifestation of the NPIC**

“Is it hot in here? Why is it so bloody hot in here?” Beti asks no one. The room is empty, and she knows she is talking to herself, but the outrageous heat forces her to ask—as though saying it out loud will make a difference. Beti removes yet another layer of clothing. She is now in her slinky, virtually see-through tank top. Normally she would never strip down this far in public, especially not at work. She is basically in her bra—the epitome of unprofessionalism. But she is just too damn hot. She sits there until the next unsuspecting person comes in to use the photocopier, and Beti awkwardly rushes to put her shirt on before meeting their eyes. Everyone has been in the same situation, the newbie with the bad desk; they respectfully look away. Of course it is hot in here. She is working in a photocopy room, a windowless cavern that overheats in the midst of the industrial copying beast. Basically everyone in the office has had a stint at it—waiting, wondering when someone with better real estate would finally leave. Or perhaps their con-
tract will not be renewed and Beti can finally—finally—go into the other room. At least it has a window. This room, the photocopy room—is basically a walk—in closet with enough space for the industrial photocopier—and all the extra office supplies—paper, toner, staples, etc., all surrounding this desk. Her desk.

The benefits: She is never cold; she never gets distracted by what is outside the window, or by conversation with other people because there is no one; she can photocopy/print something without leaving her chair; and she has become an expert in showing the paper jam who is boss. Plus it never feels like Beti is alone because of the constant industrial hum from the machine.

Really, she is thankful just to have a job . . . making a difference.

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Racialized and Indigenous participants discussed at length the limitations of some non-profit organizational spaces. Beti is uncomfortable in her office and the fact that there is a constant stream of new hires in the office shows that this is a sort of institutional hazing that one needs to overcome in order to access better, more reasonable spaces. Although everyone takes a turn in the copy room, racialized and Indigenous women end up in this space most frequently—because due to the interactions of race and the NPIC these are the women that are most often at the “bottom” of the organization ladder. The physical space is a constant reminder that this is the best that organizations can do. Beti’s positionality as a South Asian woman is an important aspect of consideration in this story. Surveillance, privacy and public space can be understood/experienced very differently based on the body that you occupy. For instance, a gender non-conforming body, a disabled body, a fat person, a religious person may or may not experience the expectation to remove clothes for temperature control differently based on the added stigma and
surveillance associated with their bodies.

The mental health implication of physical space also need to be considered as a number of the participants discussed the ways in which physical space—office location, neighbourhood, light etc, impacted their capacity to be productive. Indigenous participants also spoke of the limitations of physical space. Reflected in much of this theme was the lack of not having offices or spaces to talk privately with clients who are in desperate need to connect with like-minded women about the challenges they experience in everyday lives. Lack of private space also contributes to the physical surveillance of racialized and Indigenous bodies within women’s organizations, further complicated by race. The hierarchy of race shows us that some women—specifically Black and Indigenous bodies—are more likely to be policed than others.

I extend the discussions of these limitations in the next chapter, specifically, the challenges in providing cultural specific supports in organizations that are unsupportive. Physical offices in feminist nonprofits were often seen as refuge from the patriarchal society that surrounds us yet their inadequacies, like Beti’s story suggests, clearly impact the staff and clients who access these spaces. The spaces where many nonprofits are housed (for obvious reasons: lack of resources, overcrowding due to constantly needing to make space at a moment’s notice for new project staff or volunteers who need to be accommodated) are a physical manifestation of the NPIC. They are a constant reminder of who is allowed into these organizational spaces and, more importantly, who is not.

The physical space of a neighbourhood has direct implications for who is able to access the space. Who feels safe coming into the neighbourhood and who does not? Which transit routes link to this location? What does the space look like? Who can get into the space? The old-
er buildings that nonprofit organizations are forced into for financial reasons can limit barrier—free access as well as mold and dust control for sensitivities. The subpar working conditions, including windowless offices shared among several dozen people, and the impact these conditions have on people and their work are apparent. Furthermore, maintaining social justice mandates is next to impossible in physically inaccessible spaces—with broken elevators or none at all, in locations that are not safe, central, or comfortable for the clientele—in buildings that are old (triggering allergies and other illnesses), with slow or poorly functioning computers (many funders will not fund capital expenses, which includes computers and upgrades) and inadequate ventilation, among other things. Although society teaches us not to judge a book by its cover, physical and aesthetic beauty make a difference to our well being. Beyond aesthetics, uncomfortable environments reflect on the self-worth and mental health of the staff in these spaces. How can one not feel as though they are at the bottom of the food chain when they are made to feel like an afterthought? In Beti’s situation, this is reflected in her literally being cast aside in the stockroom with the extra supplies. Nonprofit organizations face many struggles, but the lack of a conducive and creative work environment can be oppressive.

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_Beti was with Friend—someone she cares for deeply, someone she tries to support. She does the same with all her close friends, even though that person might be difficult to support._

But Beti supports her, because in her mind, she is her sister. Not her blood sister, but her life sister. Beti understands her and Friend understands Beti. They share the commonality of women of colour in this world. And although they might have different life circumstances, Beti works hard to support Friend because that is what you do. That is at least what Beti tries to do.
This is Beti’s breakup story. This breakup happens over and over again—with her friends, with her lovers, with herself. It often happens during a coffee date at the most generic coffee shop in the city. You think you are meeting for your regular jam session. You chitchat like normal, except there is strangeness in the air—something tangible Beti can always feel, until Friend finally blurts it out.

“Beti. We have to talk.” Beti knew that never ended well.

“I was hurt when you didn’t stand up for me at the event. When you let me sit there and take the heat for all the things you knew I shouldn’t have to take the heat for. You should have been there to support me.”

Beti had excuses. She had explanations. She had everything she wanted to say, that she knew she could say. But she did not. She stopped herself from saying anything.

“I felt abandoned. I feel alone enough out in the world, I don’t need it from you, too. We can no longer be friends.”

Beti knew this story. She had lived through it before. Her heart was breaking, but she did not try to intervene. She knew the courage it must have taken for Friend to put herself first. To say the things she was saying. So Beti said nothing. She sat in silence and let the words sink in. She reflected on the event that Friend was talking about and wondered how it could have played out differently. What could she have done? How could she have made it better? She stopped the contemplation.

“Okay, if this is what you feel you need to do.” Beti broke the thick silence in the air.

“Take care.”

Beti picked up her handbag hanging from the back of the chair and walked out onto busy
but lonely Main Street.

Friend sat in the cafe a few minutes longer, waiting until the coast was clear. She awkwardly picked up her cup of peppermint tea. Forgetting it was cold, she took a sip and swallowed the minty chill, shuddering. She waited a little longer. Even though she knew she would bump into Beti again and again at community events and in activist spaces, she held off leaving the coffee shop so at least they would not bump into each other again today. She wanted to let the awkwardness settle.

Beti went straight to her dark place. In the days to come, she asked herself the same questions again and again: “Why? Why did Friend leave me like that? Why did she break my heart? Why did she throw me under the bus?” The answers she came up with were the same as always—jealousy, isolation, betrayal, and all the anger that goes along with those emotions. Beti was not immune to those feelings either. She experienced them over and over, in so many different ways.

Maybe Friend did not think she deserved Beti’s friendship. And maybe she did not. Friend held Beti to the same impossible standard to which Beti held herself. Friend would drop herself if she could—her self-loathing was proof of that—but she could not, so she drops Beti. Beti’s attempts to make things better for Friend are never good enough, and are met with much disdain. She tries so hard to support the people who look like her, who share her life stories, life histories, despite how hard it can be sometimes. But despite all that love, all that energy, all that effort, Friend drops her—cold and hard. This time Beti could not hold on, could not fight back—her bruised and broken body had to let Friend go. The system becomes so powerful that it infiltrates our lives in the most profound and unexpected ways. Beti perpetuates the system because she
feels like she has no other choice. It is so deeply ingrained in her body that she does not know where the system ends and she starts. The pain, the abuse, the racism, the violence, the ways that Beti, and others like her, experience the system—it seeps in, replacing the hope and passion that once existed with bitterness and anger. The system burdens Beti. It has not killed her—the glimmer of who Beti used to be is still there—but the flicker is much less bright. The symptoms of the system have taken their toll on Friend too. No one is immune. Friend leaves, physically and metaphorically—like Beti has left so many others before. And that is when she realizes it—being a sister, having a sister, is not enough. The system will break us apart.

“Why do we always sabotage ourselves? As women, especially as women of colour?” Beti asks herself.

Beti is in a system that is breaking her; yet she shows so much allegiance to it, even at the expense of her body and mind. Beti is afraid she will not succeed, so she imposes the burden of not succeeding on those around her. She does not want or mean to do this. She tries not to. She wants to be supportive. Yet somehow her unwavering commitment to this system keeps her in blinders that darken a situation at any given moment. It is buried inside of her, so deep that Beti never knows when the blinders will come out. The constant competition for the one “diversity” position in any given organization has taught Beti that there is only room for one woman of colour. And when she sees that one is her friend, a person she loves, it fuels the rage within her and releases Beti’s worst self. First comes the jealousy of not being the chosen one, which takes Beti to all sorts of school playground moments where she experienced the isolation of not being chosen. These memories of early exclusion, that Beti has only recently had words for, like racism and xenophobia, take her to the place of rage—Angry Brown Woman rage. Then inevitably what
follows is the guilt—how does she advocate solidarity when she cannot even practice it?

Beti sets impossible standards for herself—as a feminist, as a woman, as a person. She is unrelentlessly hard on herself, and that always translates to how hard she is on others, and in turn how hard they are on her. The system is breaking Beti, and she is breaking herself. She is so used to struggle that she just keeps on fighting over and over again with the expectation that the cause, in whatever iteration she is working on right now, is going to get better. Why does it keep getting worse? Because the system is designed to fail—or at least to fail those in the margins, like Beti. Consequently, Beti is constantly breaking herself and the others like her. She acts like a self-cleaning oven for the system—she does all the dirty work by herself.

This is the last breakup, Beti decides. There will be no more after this. But what Beti doesn’t realize yet is that the biggest breakup still stands in her future.

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Beti’s experiences with Friend are compounded by many important factors including the lateral violence within women’s organizing like that experienced at the women’s conference. Many of the activists—Indigenous and racialized alike—explained the challenges of maintaining personal relationships in the wake of working within a violent system, this, they explained, is not only due to the lateral violence that exists in women’s organizations but also the complications of racism and colonization that they experience on a daily basis. This scenario is complicated by Beti’s South Asian identity. In some cases, with even less representation in organizational spaces (communities that are represented in even smaller minorities than the Punjabi communities in Vancouver) the relationship with Friend is even further complicated. Representatives and supportive allies are crucial in developing sustainable structures to maintain self preservation and
continue activist work in organizations. With the lack of support of these important allies this work can become detrimental. In addition the end of relationships such as Beti’s with Friend can also complicate Beti’s ability to look for work in future organizations. Again this is complicated based on Beti’s positionality and must be considered when thinking through this scenario.

As Razack (1999) reminds us, the interaction and negotiation with a settler system that prioritizes white bodies impacts the ways in which racialized and Indigenous bodies understand themselves. Women are not able to keep up on the demands that are presented upon them and as a result experience tremendous challenges in maintaining relationships with community members (especially in situations where they experience these as toxic friendships.) Although Beti’s example is directly related to a friendship—her story is not about friendship per se. This story exemplified some of the unintended outcomes of working within a particularly difficult system and the effects that it has on racialized and Indigenous women—outside of the organizations themselves. This is about friendship—but it is also about the ways in which toxic systems impact women outside of organizations themselves, and how this has lasting impacts on her relationships—with herself and with Friend. This is not to suggest that feminist friendships are not thriving amongst racialized and Indigenous activists, because they are—purposefully and with intention. But breakups related to the mental health outcomes of racist experiences also impact the way Beti can and does experience organizations.

**Nonperformativity**

*Beti does not usually attend the board meetings, but this month she had been invited to present the newly written intersectionality policy. Beti had never been to a board meeting at this particular organization, but she had been to many before in other spaces, so she was pretty fa-
miliar with the makeup. She knew that she would be invited to speak on the intersectionality pol-
icy at the beginning of the board meeting, and then asked to leave. Board meetings normally
didn’t include any staff apart from the Executive Director. It wasn’t that they were not “allowed”
to be there, but it was generally discouraged.

The large board room table in the middle of the space had all the usual suspects. A veggie
platter—with a multi-colour presence of veggies and hummus in the middle, pitas were cut up in
small triangular shapes on a separate place to accommodate those that are gluten free. A similar
multi-colour platter of fresh fruit sat next to it. A batch of homemade vegan brownies sat in a
Tupperware container at the head of the table. Audible mmmm could be heard as the board
member uncovered her treats.

“I made brownies” she said. “They are vegan.” She smiles at Beti—pleased by her ac-
complishment. Beti smiles back. Many older white feminists sat smiling in the chairs, passing
along the brownies. One by one they went around the table informally introducing themselves to
Beti.

“So happy, you could make it today” one says looking at Beti with kind eyes. Another
leans over in what looked like it was intended to be a whisper but in actuality was just her regu-
lar voice.

“I’m excited to hear about your policy tonight. I’ve been asking for it for a longtime.”
They both laugh.

“It has been a long time coming.” Beti responds.
The ED swoops in rushing, carrying a pile of disheveled papers. Her entrances into a room were always comical, as though trailed by an animated puff of smoke. She was always late to meetings, not because she didn’t care but because she always had so much on her plate.

“Sorry I’m late.” she exclaims as she flops down into the only empty seat.

“Shall we get started.” she looks over and smiles at the board chair sitting to her left.

Papers get organized as they get passed around the room.

Beti watched as the board meeting process moved through the room in its usual proceedings—a strange mix of business as usual and feminist politics—as they called the meeting to order with a gavel and then proceed with check ins. Smiles and laughter ensued as each board member shared stories of children and lunch gone wrong. A comfortable familiarity filled the room amongst the women.

When called upon Beti introduced herself and presented the intersectionality policy. She discussed the challenges the committee encountered in getting this work to where it is now, wanting to ensure that everyone had an equal voice and to make sure they carefully thought who was missing in this policy. All the board members smiled and shared nods of understandings as Beti went through the details. They were progressive and supported the policy to its fullest. As Beti passed around copies of the policy board members nodded convincingly—they understood the policy and were happy to finally see it to fruition. Beti explained that the next steps of this policy would be to see how they could implement it within all aspects of the organizations. It was not enough to understand/acknowledge that women experience multiple marginalization, the board needed to think through how to make special accommodations so all women can have more equal access to the organization.
Silence filled the room as a board member looked up from the policy. A little stunned but primarily uncomfortable they turned to the ED to respond to Beti’s concerns.

“Yes Beti, thanks for your presentation. We will think about this further and get back to you.”

“But...It is imperative that someone who wrote the policy be in on the conversation of how to implement it. Actually it would probably make sense for all staff...” ED cuts off Beti mid sentence.

“Thanks Beti for your time. We are open to your ideas and we want to hear more about them. We just no longer have time on the agenda to discuss this issue. But you are welcome to schedule a meeting with the executive to talk about this.”

The finality of the ED’s tone and the nods around the room made it clear. It was time for Beti to leave—the time for her contribution was over.

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Beti was no longer needed. ‘Thank you your time is up.’ This scenario may have played out very differently based on Beti’s positionality. Other racailized and Indigenous women may not have even been invited into the board meeting at all. As discussed earlier the hierarchy of race is evident and does play out within the context of organizations. Beti’s role as a South Asian women within the unique context of Vancouver is very relevant within this story. Others may not have even been extended the invitation. Furthermore, Beti’s reaction to the situation can be read as integral to her racial position in this hierarchy as well. Beti does not fight in an overt way and is
easily dismissed. Race matters within the context of these situations and not all women would have been treated the same.

The intersectionality policy that Beti presents within this story is intended to represent the organization's commitment to diversity—and it was expected to stand on its own. As Ahmed (2012) shows the work of doing diversity is in doing the policy and not in doing the doing. Like many others, the organization expected the policy would be stand alone document that would “prove” their commitment. Beti understands the limitations of a piece of paper “doing” policy, hence her insistence on an implementation plan. Beti knows that a commitment to diversity/intersectionality cannot happen without a plan to implement it, but the board, committed to maintaining whiteness with a respectable level—perceived inclusion that does not disrupt the status quo. The organization wants diversity but does not want to have to do anything different in order to “achieve it” or accommodate it.

Ahmed (2012) discusses how institutions become dependent on the work of diversity workers because the workers’ work replaces individual accountability with an institution that claims to be accountable, even though that accountability does not always materialize the way individuals would expect. This sleight of hand removes individual responsibility for racist actions and/or injustices and replaces this space with institutional propaganda, primarily policies, statements and mandates, that claim to do but often serve as inactive reminders of the NPIC. This can at times be good intentioned and at times be an institutional save to appear more “progressive” but the reason for this move makes no difference in the way it is received and the impact that it has. Ahmed describes an “institutional before and after” whereby feminist organizations believe that by recognizing racism, “we are no longer racist” (p. 47) and ultimately manifesting
According to Ahmed, institutional non doing manifests in many different ways, but especially in diversity models and language, such as, through the Benetton model (a little bit of everyone in a gorgeous smear of colour) or the lip service model (talking about it, but not implementing it). In the case of a nonprofit organization, this nonperformativity might look like a diversity policy that has been written out to promote a collaboration across ways of knowing but is never implemented beyond the papers it is presented upon. Language becomes a concealment strategy of institutions that are talking a lot but doing nothing. It then becomes the work of the diversity worker to move diversity goals up the chain of command, because the more important the person is who is talking about diversity, the more important that diversity is.

What occurs instead, is that people become sick and tired of hearing the worker talk incessantly about diversity, and no one wants to listen anymore. The diversity worker becomes the problem—the killjoy, perhaps—droning on and on about the issues. Organizations want to celebrate diversity—which becomes the one yes in a sea of noes. And in an aim to measure the success of so-called diversity, organizations revel in their commitment to the documents they produce. In this way, experiences are individualized and responsibility is inscribed onto individuals, not systems. Ahmed (2012) argues, “if you look at everyone as an individual you take away from the systemic” (p. 71). This process within the institution reproduces the nonperformativity (or nondoing) of diversity work. The status quo remains untouched, and diversity workers are left with maintaining commitment to the documents instead of actually acting/implementing anything. This is what happens when diversity (among other things) becomes institutionalized. I argue that Ahmed’s insights regarding the institutionalization and nonperformativity of diversity
work can also be applied to nonprofit organizations.

Beti, and therefore the participants of this study are similar to the diversity workers that Ahmed (2012) interviewed. The racialized and Indigenous activists I interviewed discussed how their voices often represented one of a few racialized “perspectives” hired to fulfill the organization’s mandate to serve diverse needs. Because of the limited budgets of these organizations, there is also an expectation that these bodies will provide policy and program support in filling the gaps in knowledge systems—as Beti has often been called to do or has taken upon herself to do. Requiring the program staff to consider these larger systemic issues—and the expectation that they will do so from the sides of their desks after suffering tremendous frustration—is another way the system stays in place. These bodies do not have any real power. Similarly, Beti works to institutionalize social justice through her unintentional replication of a broken system. She works within a system, she witnesses its brokenness (through systemic leadership flaws, lateral violence amongst organizers etc.) she participates in it and as much she maintains it. The system—not Beti—is broken. Organizations are failing because of the oppression within our movements, and because the physical spaces are not conducive to this work. I show how the NPIC remains intact because the entrenched leaders who maintain status quo of ‘diversity’ will not leave these organizations to allow for fresh perspectives and new ideas. These are structural issues. Beti is not alone in these struggles. And despite all of these systemic barriers, she fights on, in small ways, to help the clients and communities she serves. Her experiences are symptoms of the NPIC, not a reflection on who she is or what she is able to do. The system is broken, and the organizations Beti works for are invested in maintaining this broken system, because they are deeply invested in helping maintain the status quo.
Structural Whiteness and How it Cements Both Structural Racism and the NPIC

When Beti and her friends talk about structural oppression, they talk about the NPIC. They know all the words and all the theories behind the words. But still, for Beti, the NPIC is not a big, bad system. It feels more like a familiar constant. This is Beti’s stranger. Beti calls her Gora. She is the everywhitewoman. Gora is a clear way Beti upholds whiteness. The NPIC depends on whiteness in the same way Beti depends on Gora. To understand the NPIC, we must first consider Gora, and how she impacts the lives of those in the margins. Because the reality is that Beti centers the everywhitewoman Gora just as much as anyone else does. Beti depends on Gora’s light to illuminate her darkness. This is intentional.

The mantra that runs through Beti’s mind is Audre Lorde’s famous words: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the masters’ house.” But the reality is that the master’s tools are the only tools Beti has. All she can do is come back to Gora. Gora knows how to manipulate the tools. Gora does it every day. She wears success like a tailor—made jacket—it fits her perfectly. Gora is the one Beti constantly compares herself to, only to realize she can never measure up. Gora centers herself in Beti’s story, and Beti willingly accepts. Beti centers Gora because Gora matters to her more than she matters to Gora. Beti has never been on Gora’s radar, but Gora is constantly on hers. She thinks of Gora all the time, and she knows Gora never thinks of her—except as exotic and in need of saving. Revolving around Gora—the—everywhitewoman is the only way Beti knows, the only way she can see herself mattering. Everybody else knows Beti and her stories. To speak them, to work in close proximity to Gora, as a witness, is to remember, to hold, and finally to vindicate all the experiences of all the Betis who have always been forced to be adjacent to Gora, right behind or beside her. These stories about the institution within the insti-
Racialized and Indigenous participants directly and indirectly discussed the ways they relied upon and upheld systems, individuals within systems and ultimately whiteness. This is further complicated by the postionality of the individual that I interviewed as their relationships with and upholding of systems is different based on the individual experiences they have had and the historical relationship they have had with migration and living in Canada. Of course Indigenous women will have a very different relationship with land and as a result of the Canadian state and the systems it operates than racialized Canadians. As will different racialized communities based on their families experiences with migration to Canada, where they lived once they migrated and how they experienced Canada upon arrival. Beti’s story is over simplified here to illuminate the challenges in upholding systems and can be helpful to consider some of the general points that I am discussing around complacency and resistance. This scenario and the impending results need to be considered from an individual perspective acknowledging that all people will experience this system differently based on intersectional elements and connections to the Canadian state.

Critical race feminists argue that it is imperative to combine theory with experience (hooks, 1994; Monture-Angus, 1995). Through Beti’s story, I am trying to shed light on how personal experiences with whiteness become theorizing about and against whiteness. These theories becomes rooted in the personal. bell hooks (1994) suggests that theory is a way to understand pain, and it can act as a liberatory practice. Similarly, Malinda Smith (2010) asserts, it is impossible to be critical of a system without questioning the system. Before the NPIC can be decon-
structed, there must first be an understanding that this system is built on—and deeply relies on—whiteness.

As discussed in the introduction Razack (1999) reminds us through the use of Fanon (1967), Hall (1992), Said (1979) and Bhabha (1994) the person of colour can only understand themselves through the colonial gaze of the white man. This is foundational to Beti’s understanding of herself. "Gora centres herself in Beti’s story and Beti willingly accepts.” Beti is only capable of understanding herself and her experiences through Gora. If Gora does not validate her experiences, watch them, be witness to them—Beti may begin to wonder if they even exist. Beti has had to comply with a white settler system that sees Gora before it sees her. Despite her rigorous unlearning of injustice at times Beti still falls into old patterns prioritizing white bodies over her own. She is part of the system of reinforcing whiteness, counteracting the system and willfully engaged in the system at the same time. Beti can only see herself through Gora’s eyes. This is how whiteness perpetuates even through Beti’s resistance.

The development of whiteness, particularly in the context of what is called Canada, must be understood as reliant on the colonization of Indigenous bodies on stolen territories. Tuck and Yang (2016) ask the question what does justice want? They suggest that by “situating justice as a colonial temporality—limited action within a colonial moment against colonial structures” it is confined within the systems it seeks to break apart (pp. 6–7). Everything, including decolonization, is based on this foundation. As a result whiteness cannot be understood within this context without first unpacking how colonization plays a role in it (I will return to this in Chapters 4.) The NPIC relies on colonization because it is one of the foundational structures for government and organizations, which, of course, are at the foundation of the NPIC.
The powerful thing about whiteness in white settler societies is that it is so completely ingrained in the psyches of all those who experience it. Whiteness becomes centered by everyone—not only white people (McPhail, 1991; Williams, 1992; hooks, 2000). This complicity is how whiteness remains—because no one is able to question it. And it remains especially off the backs of Indigenous people and people of colour. This becomes the quotidian experience of racism—it happens so profoundly that people are no longer able to identify it. This becomes even more powerful when good intentions are considered. Nice people—benevolent white ladies—especially those who contribute to the NPIC—use the organizational control of these spaces to further their whiteness and in turn institutional whiteness through the guise of a helping rhetoric. Many scholars (McIntosh, 1988; Omi & Winant, 1994) have discussed how whiteness can and is used to promote white privilege. This perpetuation of institutional whiteness/white privilege can also be used within the context of when liberal white folks understand the confounding nature of whiteness; yet still leverage this privilege in the white face of missionary work (Warren et al, 2004), altruistic whiteness (Delpit, 1995; Marty, 1999) or the context of ‘helping’ people of colour. (Endres et al, 2009) Nonprofit organizations can never be perfect because the people who are working within them are not. Human imperfection is a theme that was brought up over and over again in the interviews and is reflected in Beti’s story. The work of helping, and those who are attracted to it, bring out some important and interesting dynamics.

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3 This notion of nice white ladies has a long history in the experiences of women of colour struggling with the narrative of so called “helpful white women.” This is especially rooted in the narratives around slavery and the experiences of Black women in the United States. For example, Harriet Tubman (1822—1913) a prominent slave and activist of her time was known to discuss the limitations of accessing “white woman’s help.” Her words still resonate with women’s experiences today. In her Emmy acceptance speech Viola Davis (2015) quotes Tubman “In my mind I see a line. And over that line, I see green fields and lovely flowers and beautiful white women with their arms stretched out to me over that line, but I can’t seem to get there no how.”
such as saving the racialized other and the politics of empowering, which I discuss in greater detail below.

Whiteness—kind, well-intentioned whiteness—then becomes recentered in spaces that are intended to serve people of colour. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 2006) takes up well-intentioned and not so well intentioned white women in her observations of white and Indigenous feminist relations in Australia. Moreton-Robinson argues that white women/white feminists’ resistance to change is yet another way that whiteness is re-centered and further cements structural racism and settler colonialism. Whiteness and the fragility of its bodies once again becomes the center, and the work becomes protecting this vulnerability (as whiteness is upheld). Racism becomes an accusation (Ahmed, 2012), the frustration of experiencing it ends in white tears (Birk, 2017), and action-oriented bodies are forced to become educators instead of activists (Gibson, 2015)—as Beti’s story and those of the other women of colour in her story exemplify. This upholding of whiteness is how racism happens “without any racists in the room” (Muñoz, 2017).

Saving the racialized other

_Beti was working for an umbrella organization coordinating violence-against women groups. In a predominantly white women’s organization, she was working on the “diversity” project, providing information, input, and understanding as to why women of colour “undergo higher rates of violence.” One day after a project meeting, Beti and Gora shared a conversation over coffee. They discussed the ways that the limitations in government funding were impeding some of the work they were doing and also the ways this work has been received overseas. Gora had undertaken academic research abroad and was familiar with the ways of “other” cultures. She observed that multiculturalism can take effect in many ways. She furthered this observation_
by asserting that the hijab is a violent imposition on a woman’s body, and said that she could not understand how women would be okay with covering themselves up for cultural and religious reasons. This is a conversation Beti has had on many different occasions. She was not sure if it was her Brown skin or the fact that the world had been bombing Muslim nations in the name of freedom for most of her adult life, but it seemed that she could not avoid the conversation of women in Islam. She smiled knowingly as Gora detailed her concerns. Beti had never been one to advocate for false consciousness. This is to say that she did not believe that “we” in the Western world have some sort of monopoly on “truth” or “freedom,” the way that many Eurocentric ideologies would have us believe. She did not think that women who choose to wear the hijab or burqa or anything else have any less freedom or feminist will than she did.

Beti replied in the way she always did: “Although I agree it can be challenging to understand why someone might choose to do something, if we are taking the argument of false consciousness, we must apply that to Western culture as well. How can women who choose to lose excessive amounts of weight in order to fit an unachievable standard of beauty be any more enlightened than a woman who chooses to wear a hijab? Furthermore, the few women who do achieve this standard then ‘choose’ to bare it all on the cover of magazines in the name of an ‘empowered female sexuality’ that is only for the consumption of men and patriarchy.”

Gora smiled, hummed and hawed over the ideas for a second, and said, “Okay, either way, I would still rather be a woman here in Canada than a woman somewhere over ‘there’ in the Middle East.”

Beti could not help but laugh out loud.

“Really?” Beti exclaimed. “How can you say that so casually? It all depends on the situ-
ation. I would much rather be a rich woman in the Middle East than a poor woman in Canada.”

Silence poured over Gora. Beti could see her eyes blinking in shock.

“Hmm,” she said quietly.

Beti saw the wheels furiously turning in Gora’s head as she considered the challenges of poverty everywhere. When Gora thinks of “the woman in the Middle East,” she is thinking of “that” woman, “that” poor woman living in a rural village with no access to resources. And when she thinks of the “liberated” woman in the West, she is thinking of an upper-middle-class woman who has access to education, healthcare, and a system she can use to her advantage.

It is no surprise that this would be the case—this is a classic example of the concern Chandra Mohanty (2003) raises when she discusses the woman vs. women dynamic in feminism. That is, when feminism conjures the third-world woman (and more generally, any woman of colour), she is always the same.

After a few silent minutes, Gora conceded. “Wow, Beti, I never thought of it like that.”

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Many of the Indigenous activists I interviewed expressed concerns with the ways in which their stories and experiences were being coopted by mainstream organizations in order to fulfill “diversity” quotients, specifically as they relate to funding streams designed exclusively to meet the needs to Indigenous communities in Canada. Indigenous activists discussed the ways in which poverty on reserves, Indigenous health and Stolen Sisters were being taken up by individuals in organizations with little or no understanding of the historical and continued realities of colonization. This was such a prevalent theme that I go into more depth in Chapters 4 but many of the tenets of systemic exclusion for Indigenous people took place in similar ways as this story.
Organizations replicate injustice through an isolation of programs designed by and for Indigenous peoples and instead use them as diversity add ons. This also will be experienced differently based on the complex hierarchy of race individual activists experience within their relationship to organizations. As discussed earlier there is a clear hierarchy of race in Canada and also in women’s organizations. This undoubtedly informs who is considered saveable and who is not. This absolutely informs Beit’s experience as well as the racialized activists I interviewed. This however, does not minimize the fact there is a white saviour complex that was identified that impacts the ways in which racialized and Indigenous bodies are received in organizations.

Razack (1999) scaffolds the white women saviour complex in a Canadian context using Inderpal Grewal and Edward Said. If white women can save women of colour they reinforce their agenda by positioning themselves as enlightened and free but also showcasing the ways in which racialized women are burdened by their cultures. This psyche is reproduced by white women as well as some women of colour who seek to save others in their quest for moral superiority and cleansing all while absolving ourselves from the sullied realities of complicity. (Fellows & Razack, 1998) Fellows and Razack (1998) discuss the race to innocence amongst women who are looking to absolve themselves from critiques of racism within social justice spaces. Women’s organizations can often hinge upon judgement of the ways social justice is done. Ironically instead of being reflective and changing practice organizational well intentioned whiteness is reproduced and women within organizations look to protect their status within these organizations instead of making meaningful change.

This maintenance of well intentioned whiteness has also become evident within feminist theories of “saving” such as the ways transnational feminism operates within academia. Leela
Fernandes (2013) discusses transnationalism and the Western obsession with the global or third-world woman. Although critical feminisms are intended to disrupt notions of us and them, in many cases the writing and production behind this work reinforces them instead. Fernandes looks at how transnationalism becomes another way the West centers itself and Western ideas. She writes: “Activism often becomes a way of recentering one’s self through the desire to intervene” (p. 166). This statement rings true in Beti’s interaction with Gora: Gora has created a vision of who “the woman in the Middle East” is, and insists that this woman requires saving—“I would way rather be a woman here in Canada than over there”—as though there is only one Canadian woman and one woman over there.

In the presence of difference arrives the saviour, our white knight on a horse who is coming to save the day. Feminism has given white women the belief that they do not have to wait for a white knight. They themselves can be that figure and “save” women, but of course only the women who “need” saving. This is a common shortcoming within many feminist organizations and the main reason why many racialized and Indigenous people shy away from feminisms. Mainstream feminisms have done a disservice to women of colour and other marginalized women by ignoring or minimizing the importance of intersectionality. Intersectional theorists (Crenshaw, 1991; Lorde, 1984; Razack, 2000) have repeatedly demonstrated how identity is complicated and how, at times, individual identities can conflict within white women’s feminism.

Many feminists are nearly required to teach intersectionality off their bodies and identities by reminding others that they are woman and of colour and queer and poor, etc., as the case may be, and that these identities work together in an interlocking and/or intersecting manner. Women of colour are forced to explain how the intersections of these identities and systems work
in their lives, as evidenced by Beti’s colleague Gora, who could not imagine a marginalized Western woman or a privileged third-world woman.

**The politics of empowerment**

Chandra Mohanty (2003) discusses empowerment through her reflection on woman/women and the perpetuation of the feminist ideal of the foreign third-world woman who is in need of saving. By empowerment, I am referring to the idea that a person or group can give power to another person or group through education, ideologies, support, financial independence, etc. This is the type of empowerment that Gora was thinking about when imagining the Middle Eastern woman. Similarly, the “empowerment” that Beti witnessed at the conference when protestors are clashing with session presenters. The one who could be saved with a cultural infusion of white feminist values and ideologies. The idea that one group can give power to another makes the act of empowerment dangerous, because if power can be given, it can also be taken away. (Mohanry, 2003; Hill Collins, 2002) The ways Beti has observed/experienced empowerment shows that members of a community gain personal power when they are “empowered” through the education or actions of another. It becomes this capacity of benevolent white ladies to bestow power on poor Brown bodies. This empowerment is not altruistic—it comes with noose-like strings. These intricacies are what make the relationships between feminists and women of colour tricky and sometimes problematic. Because of the white supremacy in white settler contexts, the saviour dynamic can be reproduced by everyone. People of colour within this scheme also learn the skills of reproducing white saviour structures created by white women within feminist organizations. These structures are often created as a result of trying, knowingly and un-
knowingly, to perpetuate white supremacist systems and ideologies. When liberal people of
colour have been given space or a platform to speak, it is often to reproduce the same dynamics
that were created before them. These people of colour are given this power only because they are
providing uncritical consciousness in the ways it has been expected and encouraged by the white
folks who have provided them this power. Their presence can be even more destructive because
it creates an expectation of behaviour, and when radical people of colour occupy any space, they
are disregarded, dismissed, and asked to step aside to create space for liberal people of colour.
This forces people of colour into a rhetoric of liberal multiculturalism serving whiteness instead
of their own interests. (Bannerji, 2000)

Those who are viewed as less radical and more acceptable are, then, set at the forefront
and are often offered as exemplars when radical folks are discounting liberal ideologies. Fur-
thermore, people of colour tend to shy away from feminist spaces because they are constantly in
the position of having to teach educated, upper-middle-class, smart, well-intentioned white
women about intersectional perspectives. Racialized and Indigenous activists become the
strangers lurking in the darkness (Ahmed, 2000), afraid to come forward out of fear of being
“saved.” There is a constant curiosity on the part of our colleagues about our strange and beauti-
ful difference. Activists become afraid to call out this behaviour out of fear of being seen as un-
grateful to the whiteness that has supported them thus far (Ahmed, 2000), because the reality re-
mains that many of us owe some of our experiences to a benevolent white lady who “saw some-
thing in us.” This debt then burdens us into silence.
The Crazy Structure of Racism

It quickly became clear in this research that racism, mental health, and working in non-profit organizations are often closely linked. Feeling crazy, being crazy, being thought of as crazy causes people to feel incapacitated and, as a result, unable to engage in the essential realities of the work they are performing. I came to this understanding slowly and in a visceral way. It started with reading.

Over the course of my reading critical race feminisms, I realized that many of my stories paralleled the stories of others. This started upon reading Patricia Williams (1992) as I read about her fears of going crazy. At first I didn’t think anything of it—I just laughed and even felt a little relieved at the peculiar similarities my stories had to the stories she described. Then I read I Am Woman (Maracle, 2003), States of Race (Razack, Smith, & Thobani, 2010), and others, and again my stories were paralleled. I began to realize that there was something much larger at play here than sheer coincidence. It did not matter which perspective these women were writing from or what they were trying to say, all of these authors who discussed “craziness” were illuminating stories of structural racism. Burdened by these similarities, I shared these stories with my partner. Is it not weird that Williams talks about feeling as though she is going crazy? This is a particularly interesting conversation since my partner is a psychiatrist who deals with “crazy” every day. He tells me about this study he read—people of colour are statistically more likely to “develop” schizophrenia (Schwartz & Blankenship, 2014). Not only are racialized and Indigenous women more likely to think we are going crazy, we are actually more likely to experience mental illness. Is this a coincidence? I have felt this slow descent into “craziness” and I have spoken to many women of colour who feel the same. My partner conceded that it was a huge coincidence that
there were such similarities in our stories. It was not until he said this to me that I was able to
connect the dots. No, it is not a coincidence. This is structural racism and patriarchy and the
ways institutions operate within these regimes.

When women of colour come up with an idea that is contrary to the mainstream, as we
inevitably do because we are contrary, we often begin to see the whiteness of the institution. Our
contrary ideas become problematic to institutions, they get in the way of institutional progress.
This is also true when we respond to the realities of whiteness that only we see. For example
Ahmed’s (2012) brick wall can only be seen by those who experience it. From the outside if you
do not experience or see a brick wall—only someone reacting to it—the person reaction to the
‘imaginary’ wall inevitably looks crazy. Also as one of the few racialized bodies within the orga-
nizations, others may not share our experiences and as such may not view systemic racism in the
same ways. Our ideas are minimized, ignored and reduced. Racialized an Indigenous women are
made to feel as though our experiences are illusions. Decades of questioning reality makes
women wonder—Is this real? Is this my experience or am I making it up? Racialized and Indige-
nous activists contrary to the mainstream inevitably feel crazy. This experience is echoed as
women navigate all the systems within their daily lives such as universities, hospitals, class-
rooms, courtrooms, and feminist organizations. Structural racism becomes the burden our bodies
carry and reminds us of our difference and slowly grinds away at our sanity.

On the one hand, this limitation is based on the type of people (e.g., the wounded healer,
superwoman which I discuss at greater length later) who are attracted to nonprofit organizations
and the work they do. I have shown elsewhere how racialized activists began their work in ac-
tivism because of their experiences with family, with racism, and with other forms of social in-
justice (Birk, 2009). These experiences have shaped who they are, the type of work they engage in, and how they are able to cope with the experiences that result from working in nonprofit organizations.

The constant need to check in—“Am I crazy?”—and reassuring others, then constantly having them reassure you. Making racialized and Indigenous people feel crazy and identifying them as crazy are important colonial projects that work to control and maintain control over racialized folks. This experience of being made to feel crazy and/or being crazy is an experience that many participants expressed familiarity with, especially when they are constantly dealing with the realities of racism and the symptoms of isolation, loneliness, and exclusion those bring out. This feeling of craziness impacts our mental health and impacts the ways in which we are able to be with one another—as exemplified by Beti’s story with friend. Mental health while working within organizations has lasting impacts on the ways that activists are able to support ourselves (ie. through self care) and also the ways that communities are able to support each other (ie. through friendships breaking apart.) The experiences Beti has with racism and whiteness impact her in a myriad of ways in and out of the organizations that she works in. This is the long lasting impacts of this “crazy” structure. This problematic system of the NPIC cannot be easily toppled. As a result, nonprofits have the language and ideas of change, but no capacity to execute change.

**Capitalism**

“We are all a family.” Gora says to Beti on her first day in the office. A mantra she hears often over her contract in this office. Something that Beti didn’t really feel but often heard as a way of forcing familiarity amongst staff.
“That’s why we all make a point to eat lunch together everyday.” Gora says as she walks through the staff room.

“Forty five minutes uninterrupted—no work, no business—just sitting together and being together. It’s our self care.” Beti smiled somewhat annoyed. Self care for who? she thought. Beti’s self care involved putting her headphones in, listening to music and eating in silence—disconnecting from the machines that controlled her. On a sunny day she liked to use her time going for a walk, being alone, feet on the pavement—grounding.

“We don’t have a microwave—you know cancerous waves and all but a nice toaster oven that staff use to warm up their food. Also a slow cooker, for the monthly potlucks.” Gora smiles proud of her home away from home. The office has a cozy vibe and Beti is looking forward to getting to know the staff in the office. It seems like a really nice place to work, Beti thinks to herself.

The ‘we are a family mantra’ became Beti’s personal inside joke. She would recite it in her head and smile aloud. It became Beti’s elephant in the room. Although everyone would robotically say it to each other, that was not Beti’s impression. It was code for we all have an equal say—like a collective. But the organization was not a collective it is clearly a hierarchy, so Beti didn’t really understand why they would keep saying this—as though somehow they wanted to convince themselves more than the other people in the room. Are we? Are we all a family? If that is the case, why aren’t support staff invited to eat lunch with project staff and management. As far as Beti could see this family was clearly divided amongst class and education lines—just like the rest of society. Just because you call yourself a family doesn’t make it true. Support staff were clearly not invited to the table, and would be asked to eat lunch at their desks so they wouldn’t
miss a phone call. Never mind that the phone barely rings in this tech age of the internet but still—administrative and support staff would be asked to sit by the phone waiting for that elusive call and excluding them from the lunch table.

Beti understood the silent pretext that we pretend to operate as a collective but we are not a collective—because we have a hierarchy embedded in the organization. It’s a dirty little secret that no one wants to talk about. Beti has never understood why it’s such a bad thing. It’s the unwritten rule of feminist organizing. They are not supposed to be hierarchies—but they are. Beti couldn’t help but wonder wouldn’t it be more feminist to just acknowledge that we are a hierarchy—and spend our time and energy focusing on how to have a feminist hierarchy—instead of forcing the organization to run as a shitty collective?

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Interview participants discussed the ways resources and the embedded structures of a capitalist system has both organizational and individual impacts on the nonprofit sector. Beti illustrates one of the many ways that capitalism continues to prevail within her organization. She does not understand the intention behind faking a collective. These are the subtle ways that capitalism manifests within organizations sometimes without our knowledge. Organizations think that they are being more feminist by ensuring that everyone has an equal voice at the table, but there is very little intention in actually doing the work of a collective—as a result—the organization cannot operate as a collective. Through pretending or misinformation organizations disguise capitalism under make believe feminist collective practices. If the organization is not actually running as a collective—the illusion of it only makes the matter worse. In naming the hierarchy the organization makes the practices visible and as a result can revolutionize a respectful hierar-
chy within its confines. The collective illusion cements and institutionalizes capitalism in an in-visible way.

Beti’s positionality impacts both her capacity to "be a family” as well as operate as a collective. For instance whose voice can even be heard in this imagined collective. Racism and the hierarchy of race deeply inform whose voice can be heard within such a space. Furthermore the insistence on eating lunch together creates a forced culture of family that does not provide self care opportunities. In addition it ignores how lunch tables in white spaces inform much childhood traumas of “weird” looks and smells. Indigenous activists also expressed discomfort with these systems because whether they were hierarchies or collectives they were not incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing.

Capitalism operates in a myriad of other ways as well. From an organizational standpoint, having to constantly question the when and where of your existence is a challenge. Will the organization have enough money to continue running this project? This uncertainty leaves organizations constantly money hungry, always looking to feed the hunger or the anticipation of a potential need. Competing with others becomes a necessity, and as a result, organizations are rarely able to collaborate. When foundation and government funding is exhausted or too restrictive, organizations turn to individual donors. Furthermore, especially within “niche” sectors, affluent donors are constantly asked for donations to fill the gaps, leading to donor fatigue. Similar to Ng’s (1996) discussion on the creation of class in organizations, Beti is becoming a cog in the system of capitalism. Her body is becoming an agent that reproduces class markets in a very particular way that perpetuates this system of capitalism which relies on colonization which relies upon racism. Beti as an agent of the organization is upholding these intersectional and interlock-
ing systems that oppress her and the women she is trying to serve.

Beti’s interaction with capitalism is complicated in other organizations based on her positionality. An intersectional analysis needs to be used here to understand the myriad of ways that the system of capitalism interacts within the daily lives of racialized and Indigenous activists. It is clear that race and class have a direct working relationship in the racialization of poverty and the ways in which that is taken up within individual/system dynamics. This cannot be ignored within the context of Beti’s scenario and how it would relate in other situations.

These organizational challenges are passed on to staff, who end up feeling the same anxieties and concerns about where their next contract will be. A lack of job security leads to competition, isolation, and a lack of partnerships among staff. According to PayScale (2017), the average pay for a project coordinator at a nonprofit in Vancouver is between $17 and $26 per hour. Vancouver is also one of the most expensive cities to live in the country which makes it even more challenging to deal with precarious employment. As a result, many activists feel as though they have to choose between a career in social justice or a sustainable livelihood.

The financial burden, in addition to the other complicated aspects of the NPIC, also causes burnout. Folks are drained by the difficult work they do, often on the front lines with clients in crisis, as well as with the politics of the organization. It is exhausting, and often there comes a time when they have to choose the work or themselves. These factors force many activists, especially racialized and Indigenous ones, to leave nonprofit organizations. Because of the history of whiteness in women’s organizations, white counterparts are more likely to seek and find mentorship that will allow them to naturally progress within the organization. This is rarely the case among young activists who do not see themselves reflected in leadership positions. So frequently
they leave, maintaining the whiteness of the institutions.

In addition, organizations’ dependence on foundation funding encourages a poverty consciousness. In order to do this important work, one needs to grow accustomed to being poor—suffering as a means of staying connected with the work. If you truly appreciate the work, then you do not mind being undercompensated for it. This dynamic is complicated by the expectation of volunteer labour. The reliance on volunteers is completely natural—activists are engaged, inside and outside of their paid work—but when you look at who is being paid in these organizations and who is not, it is clear that white supremacy and capitalism perpetuate. It is no coincidence that income inequality impacts racialized bodies (those that are considered replaceable). Meanwhile, the foundations that are covering these expenses are primarily operated by white bodies, whose interests rely on perpetuating these very principles.

As Andrea Smith (2007) shows, foundations often run as tax shelters for the wealthy. While their primary focus is on research and raising public awareness “ostensibly to ameliorate social issues” (p. 4), they approach this in ways that rarely challenges capitalism. Complicity with capitalism is an important aspect of the foundations that serve nonprofits, because their funders—as is anyone who has any level of wealth—are deeply reliant on capitalism. Of course this leaves nonprofits in a difficult situation, because many of the social problems and needs they deal with are a direct result of capitalism. The connection of nonprofit organizations to wealthy foundations and funders also maintains white supremacy, because the primary donors are wealthy white families. This reality immediately disadvantages activism that centers racialized and Indigenous peoples. Smith (2007), building on the work of Tiffany Lethal Kin and Ewuare Osayande, shows that “‘alternatives’ to large foundation funding (such as individual giving
through major donors) are still based on the same logic—that wealthy people should be the donors, and thus, inevitably, the controllers of social justice struggles” (p. 9). Eric Tang (2007) argues that as a result of this complicated intersection of state, wealthy foundation, and nonprofit monies, the revolution cannot be funded. He argues that although nonprofits may have a supportive role in the work of activism, change can only be created by autonomous grassroots organizing.

Another way the NPIC upholds capitalism is in becoming a subcontractor for the work governments should be doing, like ending violence against women and providing integration resources for immigrants. Organizations become the cheap labour the government requires and government funding becomes the most sustainable source of money for these organizations. As a result, governments depend on nonprofits—and organizations depend on government money to sustain their future. Nonprofit organizations end up maintaining systems instead of critiquing them—exactly the opposite of their original intentions. Ultimately, the NPIC fosters uninhabit-able working conditions that lead to ineffective organizations. Everyone needs to eat, and individual activists become dependent on organizations for their bread and butter. This then causes change-centered activism to become secondary. In this way, Smith (2007) argues,

the NPIC contributes to a mode of organizing that is ultimately unsustainable. To radically change society, we must build mass movements that can topple systems of domination, such as capitalism. However, the NPIC encourages us to think of social justice organizing as a career; that is, you do the work if you can get paid for it. (p. 10)

As intended by a capitalist structure, activists have become reliant on organizations to sustain our
lives and our livelihoods, and thus at times lose sight of the social change that needs to occur—organizations tame our actions because workers are unwilling to “bite the hand that feeds.”

Beti does not deny this. She is in the system. She perpetuates the system, and she knows it. She knows this structure is poisoning the so-called good work she does. Even the biggest perpetuators of this system will agree that these systemic structures plague the work—more than just a little bit. This is not a mild inconvenience. This is a legitimate structural beast—looking, hoping, to eat Beti and all the clients she serves. Instead of fighting the beast, Beti just gets creative with how to avoid it. And the beat goes on.

*And the Beat Goes On: Perpetuating the Cycle*

In one way or another, the NPIC explains every structural challenge that was discussed within the interviews—first and foremost, the overreliance on committing to anti-oppression and intersectionality in mandates and policy but not following these ideologies with direct action. As was clear with Beti’s presentation with the board on the newest intersectionality policy the organization was quick to adopt a policy but was less concerned about implementing said policy. Even the way the board put the onus back on Beti to have a meeting with the executive because there was no more time on the agenda to discuss her concerns. The board meeting put Beti in a very unique situation to present the “results” but to keep out the process and dynamics of concerns that were addressed in the development of the policy—as though they are not related. Another way the board is willing to “talk the talk but not walk the walk.” A quick look at mission statements and mandates and the beautiful words and promises that have been used throughout them: intersectionality, anti-oppression, acknowledgement of Indigenous lands, social change, social justice. The commitment and intention are unparalleled. There is so much of it, organiza-
tional agents hardly know what to do with ourselves—so we report it. We write reports. We write recommendations. We write guidelines. We have documents—so many of them—and all sorts of smart people who know how to read and write more reports and recommendations, but unfortunately there is a lack of folks and a lack of support for implementing these great ideas. This becomes another way that great ideas become nonperformative (Ahmed, 2012). This nonperformativity is due, not to a lack of intention, but to structural challenges unwilling for change.

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_Beti sits in the dimly lit pub by herself, flickering candlelight shining on her empty glass. The waitress comes over and smiles._

_“Would you like another?”_

_“Yes,” Beti answers unapologetically. Normally she would work a little harder at concealing her isolation while drinking. She would hide behind a phone, or a screen, or a book, but today she just can’t muster up the energy. She is celebrating—allegedly. Today she got a promotion. That is so great—right? But she did not want it. Earlier today, Gora called Beti into her office._

_“Manager left today—officially,” Gora explained._

_Everyone had seen this coming. She had been on medical leave for weeks, but she came back yesterday, exhausted and exasperated, and she left at lunch. That is never a good sign._

_“She is not coming back. Sick, apparently. So we are moving on. The job is yours. You’ve been doing most of her work anyways, so it’s time for you to take the official title.”_

_“Great.” Beti faked a smile. “But…”_

_“Listen, we will sort out all of the details later, so don’t worry about it. It is such a good_
thing for you. It is going to show a great progression on your resumé when you are looking for a new job in a few months when the project is over. Just wanted you to know the good news.” Gora smiled and ushered Beti out.

Beti knew what that meant—we will talk about it later, sort out the details. Just like Manager, Beti would be the next one on “medical” leave. She had no experience managing, and she would get no additional training. She was literally being thrown into the job. She knew the reality: She would work twice as much and not get a raise or support. Beti was working on a project where she had to show that the organization had reduced domestic violence rates by 33% in the city. It was a three—year project and they were in the final term, so she was supposed to be working on all of the final reports. Seriously, how was she supposed to show something like that? And why 33%?

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A number of systemic NPIC complications surface within this scenario, including mental health concerns of a staff member and the resulting breakdown of said person’s body. This breakdown, of course, results in the quick, unexpected departure of the staff member, leaving a gap that needs to be filled. Furthermore contributing to this breakdown are the ways our mental health conditions are impacting how activists are able to support each other as a community to friends. As is evidenced through Beti’s interaction with Friend. The racism Beti and her community experience in organizations, the nonperformativity of these policies etc lead to a lack of capacity to continue working in the NPIC and as a result creates a cycle of unexpected departures. In this case, it is the end of a project and without Manager this position needs to be filled or they could lose their funding—so a need develops for someone to take on the title. Hiring and training
a new staff person this late in the project is unachievable; so the quick fix is to find someone on
the team. The organization is hesitant to pay more, because on occasion project budget surplus
can roll into organizational unrestricted funds, a way to get around funding restrictions. Or per-
haps they need to account for extra monies they spent elsewhere—budget reallocation. There is
also the dreaded reporting phase of any project. As Beti demonstrates, projects are forced to de-
deliver measurable outcomes and report what seem to be arbitrary numbers. Everyone wants to
measure success. All of these unique barriers are the result of a system that prevents organiza-
tional efficiency and, as a result, individual efficiency. These systemic barriers are built into the
organization.

Not only is Beti supposed to accept the situation (a promotion with no raise and no train-
ing, but with plenty of extra responsibility), she should be thankful for it (e.g., the ED told Beti
she should feel lucky for this great ‘progression’). Beti is moving up and being told that is a good
thing, she is being asked to be thankful for this, asking for her benevolence and appreciation for
a faulty system. The organization is operating to promote a capitalist structure and Beti is being
asked to be grateful for this. Similar to the organizational structures that Ng (1996) has discussed
the organization is utilizing capitalism and uses Beti’s body as an agent within this struggle. It is
not about Beti’s merit and opportunity, but rather a way to perpetuate the dynamic of the organi-
zation and as a result maintain the status quo (in this case the interdependence of capitalism and
whiteness that prevails in women’s organizations.) These interlocking systems perpetuate busi-
ness as usual and define Beti’s experience in this organization.

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“Why did you leave nonprofit?” Beti asks Manager. She had taken Manager’s job, and
needing more information on the project, Beti accepted her invitation for chai at her house. Beti sits there on her couch, seeing the physical weight lifted off of Manager’s body. She looks well. She is well. This job had been the tipping point for her, and she has found a new job in the profit sector.

Manager answers almost gleefully. “I left because I had to. I mean seriously, how could I not? I did not really have a choice anymore. I could not afford to do it. I can’t have two roommates forever. It was starting to look a bit sad. And more than that, last time my contract ended, I just could not bear the thought of looking for another job. I had done it so many times it was getting a bit pathetic. I have to admit, though, I am becoming really great at interviewing and looking for jobs, but I am just so exhausted.”

The thought of looking for yet another job depresses Beti, with her contract end date looming dramatically close.

“I never realized this at the time, but the skill set is really transferable, so I was able to find another job pretty easily,” Manager continues.

“Are you happier?” Beti asks, already knowing the answer.

“Absolutely.” She answers without missing a beat. “I miss the feeling of doing ‘meaningful work,’ but let’s face it, I would rather be doing so-called less important work and not have any troubles paying my bills.”

Bills. Paying her bills. Beti salivates at the idea, completely awestruck by how easy, maybe, it could be.

“My turn to ask you, Beti. Why do you bother?”

People ask her this all the time. Why does she bother? She sees the structural inequali-
ties. They are there, everywhere. So why? Why does she do this? Surely she can transfer her skills elsewhere. So many others have. It is such a valid question, yet somehow Beti struggles to answer it. She sits silently looking at Manager—desperate for the logic within the silence.

“Why do I do this?” Beti smiles. She knows the question is rhetorical, like asking the masochist, why do you like pain? I like it because it feels good, she thinks.

“I love it.” she answers simply. “I do it because I have to, I want to. It is what I am supposed to do.” Beti answers matter-of-factly, but she still does not understand completely.

Beti leaves her Manager’s house frustrated by her incomplete understanding of herself. She waits. She thinks. Beti too could make a lot of money, she could do a lot of things, but why, why does she manage programs at Gora’s request?

Is it the perception of good that prevents us from being good? Beti wonders. Or is it the intention of good? We think we are good, therefore we must be good? Is that enough? How can we just actually be good? But more importantly, who defines good and the ways it operates? We assume the organizations we have created under the pretext of good intentions will be good simply because of the intention. At least, that is how it works with everything else that is a good intention. Right?

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Leaving the NPIC

The NPIC is plaguing the structural integrity of nonprofit organizations, and it is leaving activists confused, dismayed, and frustrated. Beti’s positionality factors considerably in this story. Who is expected to take on positions with no compensation? Furthermore, who is asked to
take on this responsibility? The hierarchy of race factors substantially here as racism impacts who is worthy of this position. Nonprofit organizations are dependent on contract work because of the ways that government funding works. Organizations—especially within a Canadian context—rely on project funding that requires measured deliverables. As a result, everyone is constantly leaving one organization for another. The revolving door of recruiting and retraining staff leaves folks feeling like they are never totally comfortable in the work they are doing. The lasting impact of this job insecurity can be an inability to challenge the larger systemic issues because, according to the study participants, one is either always learning the job or putting out institutional fires. Another by-product of this situation is that people feel disposable. So, many activists leave for the profit sector. Just because they no longer work for nonprofits does not mean they cease to be activists. On the flip side, leaving nonprofit and no longer feeling concerned about making rent allows folks to participate in unpaid organizing ventures.

“I left because I had to” Manager tells Beti. Manager no longer felt like it was a choice—it became so obvious that she had to do it. She had to leave. What became abundantly clear in the interviews was that leaving nonprofit, and subsequently the NPIC, was about more than the potential for more money; it was about self-care. When it becomes so obvious that you no longer have a choice, the reasons have become evident—as they have for Manager. Time and time again, Beti thinks of the importance of finding the time and space for self-care—emotionally, spiritually, and physically—yet finding the time to engage in meaningful ways proves difficult. It is not that Beti does not engage in self-care at all, because she does, but rather that the space for self-care is not always respected, prioritized, and centered in organizations. This is also reflected in the relationship between Beti and Friend. Friend is so emotionally strained in her working life
she is no longer able to take the time to communicate and work through her feelings with Beti. This is a common struggle because there is such an overwhelm in the day to day processing of the organization, coping with mental health challenges and doing the work of social justice. As a result leaving the organization can seem like the only viable option. Sometimes the biggest measure of self-care Beti can take is to leave the toxic organization—even if it means trading job security for the unknown.

Crystal Wilkinson (2005a) discusses the superwoman complex—the expectation a woman has of herself to fulfill the superwoman role she has seen the women around her model. This superwoman complex, Wilkinson explains, is what makes it hard to ask for help. Similarly, the women I interviewed spoke of the prevalence, impact, and expectation of doing it all—and how, as a result, they were unable or not encouraged to access the support and self-care that was required. This is something that is difficult for many women to access (due to the prevalence and expectation of the feminist superwoman), but even more so for activists because of the expectation of helping and self-sacrifice that is present amongst women in general and in women’s organizations specifically.

Wilkinson (2005b), writing about her own life, says that “taking care was essential” (p. 130). She began to understand this through the care that others took of her when she was down. This is a lesson many racialized and Indigenous women come to discover at some point within our lives—when our body tells us it cannot take this anymore, when our spirit tells us she is broken, when our life begins to disintegrate. This is when activists have to prioritize our bodies and ourselves, and this was a reality within the lives of the women who spoke with me.

Women discussed the prevalence of mental health issues within their lives and the ways
in which they were related to the structural barriers they encountered. Folks were clear that structural barriers include lack of access to extended health care—which means no access to counselling or to culturally appropriate mental health practitioners who understand and empathize with their positions as racialized and Indigenous folks in society. Another barrier was not seeing colleagues access supportive and preventative self-care practices (or at least not talking about it openly). Self-care practices run the gamut—anything from preventative care, such as getting a massage, taking a vacation, taking a lunch break away from your desk, to seeking mental health counselling when you need it. When all of the women in your life also do everything without ever asking for help, it makes you feel like you are less than if you cannot keep up. Just because you are told that you should do self-care does not mean it will be easy. And even when you do access these resources, it can be met with resistance by those who assume “weakness.” Superwoman culture prevents all of us from being able to access needed resources. That is the problem with holding the realities of racism in our bodies day in and day out. Sometimes, the pain that marginalized bodies experience in society can also be experienced in so-called safe spaces. Although the desire to let go or to dance it off may be present, the prolonged and continued exposure make it impossible. Sometimes self-care, like everything else, hurts.

For the women I interviewed, leaving toxic work environments became a badge of “I am worth more, I am owed more, and I will do it because I deserve it.” Beti’s story reinforces this when Manager tells her “I left because I had to. I mean seriously, how could I not? I did not really have a choice anymore. I could not afford to do it.” Racialized and Indigenous women leave to protect themselves from structural and institutional harm—within nonprofit and other institutions where women have the power, privilege, and awareness to make this choice for themselves. A
recent example is when Dr. Sara Ahmed chose to leave her faculty position at Goldsmiths University. As discussed in Chapter 1, Ahmed shows the ways in which institutional non doing impacts diversity workers and their capacities to engage in institutional change. In 2016, Dr. Ahmed choose to break the chain in the system when she revealed in a blog post that she had left her position due to the gender based sexual violence on campus. Ahmed (2016) scrutinizes the doing and undoing of institutional progress and the lack of action on sexual assaults on her campus and others across the globe. She talks about resignation as a feminist issue. This powerful person leaving an important position because of the institutional nondoing she was witnessing was not only an act of bravery and activism but also a powerful act of self-care. Similarly, Manager leaving nonprofit and talking about it as a self care issue is a powerful expression of living a feminist life. Instead of being viewed as a failure of quitting I understand it as an act of defiance, resistance and protection of self.

In this chapter, I looked to answer the question “What are the structural limitations of feminist and nonprofit organizations and what are the implications for racialized and Indigenous activists who work within them?” Beti’s stories show us that these activists are clearly impacted by the structural limitations of the NPIC. These limitations manifest themselves in a number of ways, specifically through the oppression within our movements, inferior workspaces, structural whiteness, entrenched leadership, and money all contribute to organizations’ nondoing. Beti illustrates that the NPIC creates and defines oppression within our movements, upholds interlocking systems of capitalism, colonialism and racism, contributing to the nonperformativity (Ahmed, 2012) of activism in nonprofit organizations. In the next chapter, I look at some of the other symptoms of the NPIC. I complicate the colonial construct and its impact on working for
justice. Using Indigenous knowledge systems to localize this struggle of how place matters, and how Vancouver matters for Beti. I consider the context of Indigeneity on occupied, unceded Coast Salish territories. Most importantly, I look at the ongoing structure of colonization and how it impacts nonprofit organizations and the NPIC.
Chapter 4. Beti Knows Best: Centering Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Beti takes a big gulp of fresh air as she slowly makes her way through the park. Pacific Spirit Park is one of her favourite places in the city. A little forested paradise that sits at the outskirts of the University of British Columbia campus. Out there, so much chaos, but in here, quiet. She feels small under the majesty of the trees. Eagles perched above, looking down. This place. What was it before it looked like this, Beti wonders. She knew what the statistics reflected, how before contact Musqueam territory had 30,000 inhabitants and then after contact it was wiped down to 100. (Johnson, 2017) The horrifying realities of colonization forced Beti to pause. As a settler, multiply displaced from her own homelands the realities of colonization are not new. But she knew this place was different, the violence here was different and its effects still lingered in the roots of the trees around her. This pause made her think back to the Musqueam origin story she had heard so many times before.

It must have been a long time ago, according to what the old people of the past used to tell. There was a place called xʷmə̱n̓q̓e:men. It is somewhat grown in now, but it is still a lake. It is shallow, small, and cranberries are what is grown there. There was nothing there though. There was just a lake, a small lake. It was said to be where that monster was sʔi:Aq̓ɬ̓y̓. They were always telling. It was impossible for someone walking to go near. As soon as a child grew up he was told about it and warned. “Don’t be going to that lake back up there. There is a monster. It is a sʔi:Aq̓ɬ̓y̓ that is there. If you are foolish enough to go, you won’t be able to return. They say that if you go near. You will get twisted up and you will die.” That’s why no one could go there. It was truly a monster. Sometimes when it was evening, nearly dark, you heard a duck if you were walking fairly near. “Quack! Quack! Quack!” It was like a mallard but it was very loud. That’s how you could tell if it was not a duck, those who used to know said. They couldn’t miss their way and go close. Only those who knew nothing, people from another place, could be mistaken and think it was a real duck. They were the ones that monster managed to kill, those people, who were mistaken. But the people of that time, from here, they couldn’t go near. If

4 Little boggy place.

5 Double—headed serpent.
they heard that sound like a mallard. Whenever it was sounding, the only thing they did was get away. It was quite a while that it was there in what was then a lake before it came out, according to what the old people also said. It left its den to come down to the shore. It was in plain view. There were quite a few people who had the chance to see it as it came along. It was being watched by people who had known about it for a long time. “It’s a monster. A monster, you folks. Move away. Don’t let it catch you.” So the people remained that way. The people divided so as to make a path for that monster that is called the sʔiɬqəy. it continued on to the big river. Where it went became the course of a stream. Everything that it passed over, grass, ferns, everything died as that monster passed by. There were many people who saw it with their own eyes. They had a good view. It had two heads together as it was dragging itself along. The middle of that monster was like a big storage basket. It was steaming. That is what is called the stomach where everything that the monster swallows goes. Then the old people were saying that is why this creek is very crooked. It is the path it followed when it went out, that monster. When the next year came then the grass grew at what had been the place it had passed when it went along, that monster that was called a sʔiɬqəy. That was a different plant. The people called it when it was another year, next year, then that plant məθκʷəy spread out when it grew it bloomed like any other plant but it was not like any other plant. The old people did not step on it. It was thought sacred. It was from the droppings of that monster, the sʔiɬqəy. It is what fell, that plant that we call məθκʷəy, which came to be growing plentifully all over. So that is why the people of long ago named this place where we are xʷməθκʷəy̓əm. A long time must have passed. When I was a child, myself, they had already been calling this xʷməθκʷəy̓əm. So said my grandmother. (Point, 1963, as cited in University of British Columbia, 2016)

Beti reflects back on the peoples that have walked this exact place before her and all those who will walk it after her. She feels comforted being a miniscule part of a bigger story. It makes everything else feel less big. The rain interrupts Beti’s forested paradise. The drops sound mute as they hit the tops of the trees and slowly make their way down. The moisture on the trunk releases the majesty of the wooden rainforest. Beti takes one last gulp of fresh forested air as she makes her way back to the bus stop.

Despite the rain, Beti gets off the bus one stop early. Still exhilarated for her ground on the forested ground she decides to hit the ground in the urban concrete forest. She gets off in the Downtown Eastside, known by others as the “rough neighbourhood”—to see how it has

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6 Musqueam.
changed. It is changing almost daily, and if she does not stay connected by walking through it, she gets lost, physically and spiritually. She has not been walking through the neighbourhood as much as she used to, not because of the areas so called roughness, but because of the new residents, mostly white people who frequent this area seem to be self—righteous and pretentious, full of all the promise but none of the action of residents who have been in this area for years. People she knows that she looks and sometimes acts like more than she would like to admit. Full of the complacency Beti loathes in others because of the fear it causes in herself.

Beti continues to walk, listening to her nineties remix on her two generations too old iPhone. The only thing revealing the secret world she has created in her mind is the pop of the white earbuds protruding from her ears. She can walk freely not concerned for her safety and well-being. Beti knows her body also represents gentrification, despite her own best intentions. Even though her dark-skinned face mimics that of the most marginalized on the streets, Beti realizes that her class, among other things, transcends those barriers quickly. Beti observes the newly gentrified streets, knowing she is virtually invisible, simultaneously she is aware of the bodies of those who are marked and wonders, what does it feel like to be on the other side? It feels to Beti like us versus them—and it looks like she is on the wrong side of the divide. She sees the newly appointed makeshift barriers that are intended to keep certain bodies out of certain spaces. The barriers have minimal effect, but the intent of who belongs and who is a stranger is clear. There are so many things to learn from space and context. We learn from the people, and we learn from observation,

Looking overhead, Beti sees birds flying in new patterns in a way she has not seen before; the birds remind Beti of the last time she was on campus, and how changes in land use impact
nature. She was visiting UBC Farm. On her way she was walking through a newly built part of the UBC village where forests have been torn down to develop condos—a different kind of land gentrification. This is not the removal of poor people such as she observes in the city centre, but the removal of green space, wildlife and trees for housing. At the top of one these new buildings sat a majestic eagle, closer than Beti had ever seen, so close it left her speechless. Intrigued, she moved closer. Standing at the bottom of the building, she looked all the way up to the top of the building and saw the eagle towering in all her majesty, feathered in brown and white. Two onlookers lying on a nearby bench looked up to see what had piqued Beti’s curiosity. “Cool,” they said. “Spectacular,” Beti responded. The huge bird stared down at them, almost as if to ask “What are you looking at? You are the foreigner around here, not me.” Annoyed, the eagle took flight, her massive eight—foot wingspan soaring past them, causing a gust of wind that sent a cool shudder of air down Beti’s spine. The eagle was telling her something. Teachers are everywhere, she realized.

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This chapter looks at the various ways nonprofit community organizations are impacted by systemic barriers that prevent or limit the participation of Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge keepers. This chapter seeks to answer the question: How does whiteness as a systemic and structural concept operate within feminist nonprofits with racialized and Indigenous activist workers? It is clear that Beti, and all the participants in this study, experience systemic barriers that inform her activism on the Indigenous lands where she organizes. However, these same barriers also reproduce the systemic exclusion of Indigenous people. Creating organizations with mainstream feminist ideals using these Eurocentric ways of knowing and inher-
ently limiting the participation and engagement of Indigenous folks. Within this chapter, I argue that whiteness (along with patriarchy and capitalism) minimizes the importance, understanding and inclusion of Indigeneity within organizations. More specifically, the systemic barriers that uphold the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) are also directly related to preventing Indigenous ways of knowing from entering organizational makeup, all while perpetuating and maintaining structural barriers through whiteness and settler colonialism.

This chapter continues the conversation of the last chapter to showcase the ways that the NPIC perpetuates white settler colonial systems by inhibiting the introduction of Indigenous ways of knowing, even when “called upon” by the organization. In thinking through examples of Beti’s story as it unfolds above and below—specifically, Indigenous ways of knowing, place, land as pedagogy (Simpson, 2014), acknowledgment of unceded territories, and decolonization—I begin to uncover some of the systemic challenges organizations face in genuinely engaging and listening to Indigenous folks and Indigenous ways of knowing.

Razack’s (1999) ideas are helpful to understand how colonization is steeped throughout this place and defines the ways that activists engage and understand the lands—as Indigenous people but also as racialized settlers. Using the example of Pamela George’s murder in Regina, Razack shows how space is constructed through racialization, notions of entitlement, acceptance and belonging. I employ Razack’s understandings to apply the same principles in women’s organizations to understand the ways racialized space is occupied within these places—structurally (in the development of organizations) and physically (in the bodies that actually occupy the space.) I am positing that a better understanding of the systemic barriers will lead to a more complete understanding of how different knowledge systems can effectively enter the program-
matic conversation in these organizations.

**Grounding in Vancouver**

As discussed earlier, Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us that decolonization is not a metaphor. The context of stolen territories cannot be understood without an understanding of place. Place matters. All places matter. That is why Vancouver has become a character in Beti’s story. Beti occupies this place of Vancouver and as a result the city has had to become central in her story. This is why Beti spends a lot of time walking the streets of Vancouver. This walking has grounded her to this land. Although she knows all bodies can and do ground themselves in different ways, Beti knows that walking is “an ideal strategy for witnessing” (Lavarey, 2005, as cited in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 83) and a “sense of relinquishing . . . to a rhythmic state of being” (Miller, 2003, as cited in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p. 83).

Beti’s walking, and coming to know this city as she walked, has been an act of witnessing, but also an act of love. Her stories can and should be read as a love letter—sometimes an angry, confused, and betrayed one, but still a reflection of the time and place she has shared with this beautiful land. Vancouver, as a teacher, has taught Beti self discipline, and Beti’s offerings, in turn, are stories, expressions of witnessing a moment in time in Vancouver’s long history. Everyone has a different story of place—this place. Different stories of origin. Different stories of why they stay. Different stories of why they leave. Different stories of how Vancouver has changed over the days, years, decades they have been here. Many of the participants—some with longstanding relationships spanning their entire lives—talked about the ways they have known Vancouver as she has changed and the many ebbs and flows they have had with the city.
In a city that has changed so quickly, it felt important to mark the varied relationships participants had with this place. Beti cannot, and does not try, to capture all of this. It is not her desire to, but she does recognize the importance of this learning. Without appropriating the knowledges, lived experiences, stories of Indigenous communities, or the feet that have walked along the same streets, Beti pays homage to this place—her home, Vancouver.

There are no victims in this research, despite the ways the stories might sometimes present. Beti is not a victim. She never has been and she never will be. Sometimes stories need to be told just for the sake of telling, and sometimes there is a larger meaning behind why these stories unfold the way they do. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) provide a number of compelling methodologies and examples of their applications that also apply their theory of critical place inquiry, including interviews, walks, mental maps, video, and photography. When used effectively, these can be important and relevant methodologies because they center the survivance of Indigenous people on this land. (Vizenor, 2008; Richardson, 2013; Francis et al, 2017) Not out there—somewhere far away—or even within the confines of our mind, but here, temporally within this place. Building on the work of other Indigenous scholars, Tuck and McKenzie state: “survivance refers to ontologies directly connected to the ways that Indigenous people have always engaged the world and rights to who Indigenous peoples have always been” (p. 129). They cite Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, who observes, “storytelling that emphasizes survivance is an ‘active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry’ (Vizenor, 1998, p. 15) and these survivance stories ‘are the creases of transmotion and sovereignty’ (Vizenor, 1998, p. 15)” (p. 129).
Challenges and Opportunities

This is not to forget the incredible diversity in all of these terms and understandings, as well as their varied applications based on our understandings of the terms. None of the concepts I bring forward in this chapter have been easy or seamless definitions. As a result, it goes without saying that this complexity will reverberate through my limited explanations of them. This work and these ideas are complicated, diverse, and beyond boundaries, not to mention ever shifting based on the particular place and time they occupy. I understand that, and respect that my understanding and explanation of them remains partial.

Empty Acknowledgment

Often, because of the nature of her work, which meets at the intersections of race, gender, and violence, Beti is invited to teach a class or hold a community workshop about Canada’s Stolen Sisters (Amnesty International, 2004). This is the hardest part of her job. She spends the weeks before ruminating over how she can accomplish this important teaching without reducing the entire system to a series of stories about broken women and broken situations. But more importantly what does it mean for her—a non Indigenous community activist to be doing this teaching? Beti knows that it is her responsibility to stand in solidarity—it should not and can not be the sole responsibility of Indigenous people to do this teaching, especially in rooms dominated by non-Indigenous and predominately white bodies. Missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls is everyone’s problem—a symptom of a system that colonial legacies have created (the institutions which she contributes to)—it is Beti’s problem too. But she can’t help but wonder—who is silenced because she speaks?
On this day, the professor who invited Beti to speak to his class stands at the front of the lecture hall and starts by saying, “I would like to acknowledge the unceded Musqueam territory we are gathered on today.” He then jumps right into an introduction of Beti and her work. He has offered no consideration of what it means to acknowledge territory, no context, nothing.

When this happens, Beti looks around the room to see the students’ reactions. You can tell they have heard this kind of acknowledgment before, but there is little evidence that the ideas are having any impact. The students react with the same frivolity the professor did—nonchalant and passive. Beti takes a deep breath trying to let go of the pressure with no success. She stands at the front of the class with the PowerPoint shining behind her.

“I too would like to acknowledge myself as an immigrant settler on the traditional, unceded, and occupied territories of the Coast Salish people, including the territories of the x̱w̱məθkw̓əy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lo, and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil—Waututh) Nations.”

Beti changes the slide to show a map of the traditional territories, marking the importance of context. She discusses the context of living on stolen territories. She lingers on the map a few moments, uncomfortably letting the silence wash over to classroom. Students look at their professor confused—although asking the professor to ease the tenseness of colonization from the room. After watching the professor squirm a little Beti switches to the next slide: the artistic resistance to occupied territories and colonization. Today she features the work Native Hosts by Edgar Heap of Birds and Unceded Territories the 2016 exhibit and book by Lawrence Paul Yuxweluptun, although there are many more. This art and the slides that follow contextualize the presentation on stolen territories. Beti knows that speaking an acknowledgment is only one small
piece of the puzzle—an important part of contextualizing land and resistance, especially as a racialized body, a truth that seems to be lost on the professor who spoke before her, just as it was the countless other times she has heard the empty acknowledgment.

The Non-Doing of Acknowledgment

Why do people and institutions, including nonprofits and some non-Indigenous folks those who work within them assume that an acknowledgment of territory, land history, is an understanding? As Beti experiences in her invited lecture, as well as in other spaces, territory acknowledgment is too often, lip service or a social justice box checked as opposed to a meaningful engagement with colonization in occupied territories, similar to those discussed within the last chapter of organizations—talking the talk but not walking the walk. Although this particular example is within the context of an invited lecture at a university five activists interviewed specifically discussed how quick and decontextualized acknowledgements are common practice at many social justice events. And all of the activists discussed in some form or another the nonchalant representation of Indigenous voices and people within feminist organizations. Beti’s situation is complicated by her positlitionality. This scenario is experienced differently based on who you are and where you come from. This of course is further complicated by the individual as well as systemic representation and relationship with the academy. Although most racialized folks are underrepresented within the academy (Henry et al, 2017) this is further complicated by the hierarchy of race. An individuals perceived authority in a classroom can also be relational with race and other intersectional factors. This further complicates something like a guest lecture.

Indigenous activists that I interviewed talked about the importance of introducing them-
selves in relationship to the land, especially as visitors on the traditional territories of other communities. This is built into their introductions. As a racialized settler, Beti does not want to appropriate the introductions of Indigenous people who connect their introduction to the history of their communities. Beti finds another way to contextualize stolen land—through acts of resistance and expressions of land and sovereignty that comes from local Indigenous artists. The message that is communicated through her introduction is that the class is on stolen lands and everyone knows it—including the Indigenous people who are resisting it at every turn.

Beti works hard to counteract the empty acknowledgement. Although the social justice community that she works within allows for this—the contextualization of land is imperative in any conversation especially ones that include racialized genocide from colonization. This is true in invited lectures, but also in the day to day work of organizing on stolen lands. I have argued elsewhere that institutions use intersectionality as a means of acknowledging their whiteness and welding it as an avenue to absolve themselves of guilt (Birk, 2017). Organizations no longer see themselves as racist if they acknowledge the racism (Ahmed, 2012). Similarly, there is a belief that if, at the beginning of a conversation, one positions themselves as white, middle class, and able bodied, then the embedded racism in the well-intentioned ideas that may follow is completely forgiven. Finally, if someone acknowledges the unceded territory somehow it absolves the people in the room of the responsibility of occupying stolen land. The acknowledgement allows everyone to feel as though they are not complicit in the ongoing occupation of the land they are on.

To suggest that a simple acknowledgment of being on unceded territories is enough to contextualize and understand the historical and ongoing effects of colonization frames things in a
dangerously simple fashion. At the most basic level, it sets up a superficial precedent in the work of settler/Indigenous relations. This is an important place to begin our conversation. If all that is being offered is a territory acknowledgment, can one move forward toward a meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities on lands that were stolen from them? This is not to suggest that an acknowledgment of territory is not necessary and important. Territory acknowledgment is very important. Everything that has been discussed—even when it is far away—relates back to the context of the stolen lands that are currently occupied. When occupying territory, on this land, it always relates back. The context is unique, but when there is a focus exclusively on the individual, the system is lost. Systems within the Canadian state have a role in all of this. The stories one tells and the classes one teaches are about individuals, but they are all rooted in important systems—they are related. Systemic, invisible, unseen, almost impossible to unravel, hard to open, difficult to manage—systems are, in essence, all of these things.

**Critical Place Inquiry**

In order to take territory acknowledgment to the next step, one must first consider the actual territory as an entity within its right. This understanding of territory as an external entity (or, in the case of Beti, Vancouver as an active agent in her story) has brought me to a consideration of land and place, which has become a complicated undertaking. Place, space, land, and knowing all come into question when thinking about how to ground my research on occupied lands. In many ways, the land-based teachings that are pertinent to this work are absent, so I find myself lost. I have to search, sometimes in ways that feel completely artificial, fabricated, and complicated. How does one search for answers when one cannot even be certain of the questions?
Immediately I turn to Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie’s (2015) theories of critical place inquiry, because they offer concrete solutions to some of the questions I have been struggling with/against/amongst. Tuck and McKenzie define critical place inquiry as “research that takes up critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action” (p. 2). Tuck and McKenzie (2015) look at the ways that academic research depends on Indigenous ways of knowing, and also how it denies the existence of said knowledges. Academia is built on stolen ideas, stolen land—so it requires these for its very survival—yet it makes the environment uninhabitable to those who are working with and furthering these ideas. Furthermore, because of this cold environment, when place is introduced in social science research, it sometimes lacks the depth required because of the confines of inflexible Western traditions. Tuck and McKenzie write:

Indigenous perspectives and methodologies in academic discourse is the recognition that alternative, long-held, comprehensive and theoretically sophisticated understandings of place exist outside, alongside, against, and within the domain of the Western philosophical tradition. These understandings of place, often framed in terms of land, derive from entirely different epistemological and cosmological foundations and, thus, cannot be easily combined or absorbed into Western argumentations. They come from, and go to, a different place. (p. 11)

It has become abundantly clear in doing this project that research that borrows/considers/relies on Indigenous traditions will require flexibility beyond the confines of the borders that mainstream institutions have set. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) suggest a need “to move beyond
the understandings of place as a neutral backdrop…to instead theorize and practice place more deeply in social science research” (p. 18). Beti is connected to land and place more deeply than the average social scientist. She grounds on the earth as a way of centering her work, but also as a foundation to everything she knows and does.

Beti and the activists’ lives and experiences upon whom she was constructed understand the importance of Tuck and Mackenzie’s critical place inquiry and as a result are grounded in the context of the land in which they practice their activism. In the case of Beti, she understands the context of the Musqueam genocide that frames every aspect of her movement and teaching. She also contextualizes this in the current context of the stolen sisters. Place is always imperative and in the context of the Coast Salish territories Beti occupies, land is a teacher. The mountains speak and carry the knowledge of generations as a result Beti’s teachers are everywhere. The activists I interviewed, racialized and Indigenous alike, continued to bring up the stories of Vancouver because it matters. If this research had happened anywhere else the unique stories of that place would also be important. Beti reflects this through her stories, experiences and connection to Vancouver.

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The clouds creep above, darkening the blue skies, and the rains have come earlier than expected. Beti pulls open her closet door and rummages for her golashes. Hunter, Aigle, Joe—who knows who is in fashion this year? Is it black or rainbow polka dots? She grabs the first matching pair she can find, patent green Chelsea boots—good enough. Last year the hipster from gravitypope on 4th Avenue with the un-ironic moustache told her they were cool, so she went for it, knowing the style would set her back and she would inevitably be a little late on rent.
The price we pay for beauty, she accepts. With black trench coat and yellow umbrella, she hits the streets of the ever-rainy beauty. Slosh. Slosh. Slosh. It feels like the rain is coming in from every angle today, despite the various protections Beti sports. She gives up on the umbrella and concedes to the watery sky. She goes rogue in the wet. The raindrops pool on her eyelashes and come down in a river every time she blinks her eyes. It is not always pretty, but it is Vancouver, Beti thinks. She looks up and gets smacked across the face by the majesty of the mountains, beautiful and proud regardless of the rains. Standing tall, they whisper to the ocean about everything they see, all the lives they have known, all the days they have spent looking over the city as it changes. Vancouver has always been this beautiful, and Beti could never resist her. The landscape is like no other, and even on a day like today, she calls for Beti—she wants her. Hot and bothered, Beti can’t stand to leave. She cannot push herself away. Beti is in love with her—despite, at times, her better judgment. Vancouver will never love Beti as much as Beti loves her. That is the problem with loving someone more beautiful, Beti thinks. You can never trust her, because there is always someone waiting in the wings. Beti loves her, but on some days, like today, it feels like Vancouver just does not give a damn about Beti.

Lately, Beti hasn’t been feeling as much love as she used to. Her heart has been broken a few too many times. She is working, but it is contract after contract, and she is having a hard time making ends meet. Vancouver has gotten expensive—really expensive. Everyone sensible has left: her friends, looking for more space, have moved to New West or Burnaby, her colleagues headed for Kamloops or Kelowna, racialized communities all around her were fleeing to the burbs—when the Indian grocery stores left Main Street, it feels like everyone left with them, and moved to Surrey. She feels trapped. Coming from a working class background means, she
does not have the “family gift” of equity waiting for her the way her wealthier friends do. They can choose nonprofit, choose Vancouver—the way Beti cannot. Beti is stuck! Too poor to stay, but at the same time too poor to leave. It’s not like she has a down payment on a condo. She can barely make the rent every month, never mind setting money aside. And the promotions—well, in nonprofit, they do not come often, and not with enough pay increase to make it worthwhile, so she sticks in the coordinator role, thankful to have a job. There are whispers and now newspaper articles about the “new money” or rich Asians “taking over.” Beti does not buy into that nonsense. It is just another form of racism and white populism where some people are allowed to feel they deserve a piece of the pie more than others. Living here is like . . . it is like . . . well, it is like nothing else Beti knows. A city that is pushing out its poor, pushing out its immigrants (well, certain kinds of immigrants), gentrifying left, right, and center. People are moving into “poor” neighbourhoods, into the corners where marginalized, Indigenous, racialized people live, and then repulsed by their very presence. Beti has noticed the change on her daily walk through Gastown to the office. She smiles at the irony of upscale marijuana dispensaries occupying the same corners where a different drug trade used to happen—gentrifying drugs—kind of hilarious. What gives Gora the right to come into this neighbourhood, push someone out, and sit there judging the remnants of what she has blown away? Of course, Gora does not see this as colonization. Gora believes that she is making a difference. The internalized white saviour complex is in her bones, so deeply entrenched in her soul that the execution feels like the everyday. A big, long Monday that never goes away.

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Walking through the city has been the way that Beti exemplifies the importance of critical
place inquiry. Through these experiences, amongst other things, Beti observes the gentrification that surrounds her. Beti walks through Vancouver and observes the gentrification and the ways that it is displacing certain bodies. This is complicated because she too represents this gentrification. She embodies gentrification/displacement in two ways, first as a person with privilege—whose body can (relatively) freely move across space as a result of class and education. Secondly, as a racialized settler on unceded Indigenous lands. Beti’s ideas, her body, her resistance is complicated by these two positions she embodies. Different communities are going to experience Vancouver differently based on their historical and current realities with the city. Although Vancouver, by Canadian standards, is considered a rather diverse city, when considering the demographics there are sizeable pockets of some historically significant racialized communities. Many other communities have been historically pushed out (ie. Black and Indigenous communities), unwelcome and displace—this changes ones relationship to the city. Beti’s position as a racialized settler from one of these larger subgroups has an impact on her relationship with Vancouver.

The city of Vancouver, the story of Vancouver mimics Beti’s organizational experiences as well. Things are being stolen (ideas/land) and then re-appropriated back to communities in very specific ways, through the cleansing brush of Eurocentrism. For example the organization that Beti works for is complicit in the colonization of Indigenous communities (through its very existence and reliance upon colonization) and as a result has a hand in the current state of affairs. The organization than applies for funding (through another colonizing force) to correct the effects of colonization (ie. supporting Indigenous women.) It then hires Beti—the spokesperson for all things different. And then it asks her to solve this problem—but only using the mechanisms they have set out to do this work. This broken system pits Eurocentric and Indigenous
knowledge against each other as though they are mutually exclusive. Of course nothing can be that simple. In order to understand Beti’s dilemma Eurocentric knowledge must be questioned and its implications and role must be understood developing/maintaining and resisting these organizations and the systems they rely upon.

**Questioning Eurocentric Knowledge and Embracing Indigenous Knowledge**

An important component of questioning implicit Western thinking is to question the Eurocentric knowledge (EK) that defines the Canadian state and systems employed in its name. For example EK is employed when simply acknowledging a territory and divorcing it from any context especially in a classroom when there is room to incorporate in so many other ways. Marie Battiste (1998) explains,

Eurocentrism must be analyzed and challenged at every instance it appears, just as Indigenous peoples must come to understand the sociohistorical context that was created by Eurocentrism and how it continues to affect our daily lives and our negotiated, often manufactured, identities. (p. 22)

EK has forced legitimation through a very narrow lens and way of thinking. As Beti has showed us in her example of territory acknowledgement a justification cannot be enough. This is insufficient and thus unsuccessful to communicate the gravitas of the issues that they are intended to showcase. Beti shows this within an institution situation in an upcoming example. The activists that I interviewed racialized and Indigenous alike spoke over and over again about how sometimes they need to seek out non mainstream resources in order to legitimize the work they do and accomplish it in a ways that are meaningful and useful. Battiste (1998) explains that “many of us
have come to realize that we do not have to be put under a Western lens to be legitimized” (p. 24). When marginalized bodies define and come to understand themselves through the Eurocentric systems, they inevitably fall short. As Minnick (1990, as cited by Battiste, 1998) argues, “only as we particularize what has been falsely universalized will we begin to be able to make judgments about what is and what is not appropriate to all of us in any given situation” (p. 25). It is in acknowledging the false universalization that dishonesty within systems can be addressed and success can be redefined.

Beti slams against whiteness and its Eurocentric barriers daily in her workplace. This happens through the ways in which she has to communicate every aspect of her existence to superiors, to board members, as she navigates a system that was not designed for her but manufactured to make her way of knowing and her community connections useful within the context of this space. Beti is constantly re-navigating sharp corners. For example, with her co-workers when she has to explain the intersectionality of racialized women globally or when she explains the complicated tensions of writing and implementing an intersectional policy. She even encounters this as she walks to work in a perpetually gentrifying neighbourhood, that displaces racialized peoples for its very existence. Although Beti is a settler too—her story and her family histories on this land are steeped in the colonial histories around the world that promote displacement from “home” to new places. The global context of colonization needs to be understood and as such the Eurocentric perpetuation and maintenance of knowledge around the world. Beti is impacted by Eurocentric knowledge, by the ideas and ideologies of colonizers both on unceded Coast Salish territories and also by the systems of colonization that have and continue to consume her lands back “home”—the generations of people and places that have been (and continue
to be) colonized by white settlers. These obstacles set out by Eurocentric knowledge systems shape her daily life. As such, further complicates an empty acknowledgement, like the one from Beti’s story above, because it minimizes the global lived reality of colonization. As a result, for Beti’s wellbeing she is forced to question the EK that allows for only an acknowledgement.

Marie Battiste and James Youngblood Henderson (2009) call for the renewed acceptance of Indigenous knowledge (IK), not only within Indigenous communities, but within society at large. They write,

as a concept, IK benchmarks the limitations of Eurocentric theory and methodologies, evidence, interpretation, and conclusions. It fills the ethical and knowledge gaps in Eurocentric education, research, and scholarship. By animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive other and integrating them into the education process, it creates a new, balanced center and a fresh vantage point from which to enhance Indigenous communities’ capacities. (p. 7, italics in original)

In questioning Eurocentric knowledge, universalized knowledge can be extended and complemented with culturally relevant information that integrates more holistic aspects of identities. The sheer act of exclusively using Eurocentric knowledge are an example of the ways classrooms are colonized. Culturally relevant information is imperative in breaking down these universalized realities to better illuminate the intersectional realities of diverse bodies. Battiste and Henderson (2009) go further to explain,

neither IK nor the Indigenous perspectives is invoking a return to the past; rather they are a challenge to sustain knowledges, renew our understanding of our relationships with the natural world, reconnect to the spiritual dimension of being,
and reshape the institutions and processes that shape our lives with renewed un-
derstandings. (p. 9)

In addition to extending EK, IK is a process of further understanding identities and communities. It is not intended to take us back to “the old way of life” or a more “authentic” life, but rather a way to accept a knowledge that more fully addresses diverse needs and knowledges. Adopting a more holistic perspective allows us to counteract the mind/body split that is demanded of Indigenous and racialized people within Eurocentric spaces. It allows us to act and be more holistic.

Beti exemplifies this in her connection to land and nature. In questioning her surroundings she disrupts the EK she is fed and questions its application within the places she occupies. The sheer act of her walking through the forest, understanding the connection it had to generations in the past is an example of this disruption. Even her connection to the eagle perched on top of a condo building is an understanding of displacement in the same way the people in the city centre are being displaced. These examples parallel across places, generations and connections to the natural world. In doing so, Beti is able to build her own reality and way of knowing that is more holistic than what she is being offered in the Eurocentric toolkit she has.

**Grounding in Knowledge: Learning from the Land**

Through this process of grounding, I am unearthing lessons from the land—the lessons the activists shared with me and the lessons that Beti embodies. I want to know: What are the lessons of this place? Those are not always clear, but what *is* clear is that the streets, the mountains, and the ocean of this ever-changing landscape have just as much of a story to tell as the people who occupy it. As a result, those stories must be taken into consideration. Even more im-
portantly what are the stories of this land throughout the times that this land has existed. Beti thinks carefully about that when she considers Musqueam origin stories—she tries to connect to this land not only as it is now, but as it always has been and as it will be. Vancouver is a changing landscape, it is fluid and as a result in order to understand it, Vancouver's fluidity must be considered. Activists must ground ourselves in the knowledge of those stories and respect that this place has something more to offer than to merely hold the people who currently occupy it. This place—this beauty—this character—Vancouver, brings us all together. She connects our stories and inextricably links them like no other. Although our stories might shift from place to place, those who have learned from her will always carry a piece of her—and she will always carry our stories—each story another raindrop in the colossal downpour this landscape already holds.

Leanne Simpson (2014) offers a number of important insights into how land should be understood as pedagogy. Using storytelling, she shows how kwezen⁷ learns from the land—and tells about all of the ingenuity, self—reflection, and consideration it took for her to engage in this learning. Primarily, she uncovers the systemic barriers that could be, and often are, in her way. Her illustration of the ways in which theory and knowledge are deeply interwoven with experience, generation, and connection is exceptionally illuminating. Simpson offers,

“theory” is generated and regenerated continually through embodied practice and within each family, community and generation of people. “Theory” isn’t just an intellectual pursuit—it is woven within kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal, with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their

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⁷ Using Nishnaabeg intelligence and ways of knowing, Simpson tells the story of Kwezen, directly translated to “little woman,” but used to mean “girl.”
Here Simpson (2014) illuminates the greatest challenges I have encountered in academia. In class, in the readings, it feels as though the theory is separated from the knowing, the being, the existing. Some all important white (wo)man proclaims theory, and because he says it, it is, but that has never felt natural, or the way it should be, in my world. Theory—or the process of coming to know—has always felt innate and been clarified through experiences of doing and observing. This is not reserved for a certain elite subset. Beti exemplifies this struggle through her walking metaphors. Her feet against the pavement of the city allows her to learn through observation. She is learning from/ through the world around her based on her experiences and understandings of what that is supposed to be. Beti experiences the city in all directions, with the rain against her skin, with her feet on the ground (against the backdrop of the forest and the urban forest) and with her head in the clouds as she learns from the eagle in the sky or the whispers of the mountains. Beti is generating theory through her naturalization of the land upon which she is an immigrant.

Simpson goes on to emphasize that “‘theory’ isn’t just for academics, it’s for everyone” (p. 7). This important consideration immediately breaks down many of the barriers within the ivory tower about who should know and how knowledge should be disseminated, and it opens the door for knowledge to come in a different package. Beti exemplifies this in her invited lecture at the university. She teaches through contextualizing the displacement of Musqueam people and dismissing the notion that an acknowledgement of land is sufficient to understand this context—unlike the professor, who has ownership within the academic sphere; Beti, as stranger, resists the emptiness of acknowledgment. Ultimately, expanding ideas about who can theorize is
a step on the long, important road to dismantling the academy in relevant ways. This can and should be done in a number of important ways, but most relevantly within the context of this research, recentering the role of colonization in organizational development. In my own efforts to do so, I thought it was imperative to plant this understanding of systems and organization on the ground—metaphorically and physically.

Academic undoing in colonial foundations will be uncomfortable, difficult, and messy, but it is a necessary task in complicating our relationships to the academy and to the land. As a first step, this will include nonformulaic thoughts and ideas, ones that will not provide easy, clean answers to any of the questions that result from the various searches that have been taken on. Simpson (2014) writes:

We cannot carry out the kind of decolonization our ancestors set in motion if we don’t create a generation of land based, community based intellectuals and cultural producers who are accountable to our nations and whose life work is concerned with the regeneration of these systems, rather than meeting the overwhelming needs of the western academic industrial complex or attempting to “Indigenize the academy” by bringing Indigenous Knowledges into the academy on the terms of the academy itself. (p. 13)

As Simpson (2014) notes, accommodating the needs of Western academia will not suffice in creating waves and new ideas. She writes further, in a footnote, that although the academy has, at times, accommodated new bodies and faces, it has been far less successful in dismantling systems of domination and oppression, dispossession and erasure advanced by the academy. While there are sites of decoloniza-
tion within academic institutions, they still remain a colonizing force upholding
the values of heteropatriarchy, settler colonialism and capitalism. (p. 13, footnote
29)

An experience I argue Beti also has in her work with nonprofit organizations. To create and resist
the dominant ideologies, one must do it on their own terms. Most marginalized bodies, including
those interviewed for this research, have always known this, and this dissertation must follow
suit. Academic refusal of Indigenous ways of knowing and of complicated, messy situations in-
tended to disturb settler colonialism “should be met,” Simpson (2014) says, “with Indigenous
refusal—refusal to struggle simply for better or more inclusion and recognition within the acad-
emic industrial complex” (p. 22). Put simply, to resist, it must be done on the terms of those re-
sisting and under their own conditions, not on the institution’s clock and according to someone
else’s expectations. An attempt at coherence is all that can be asked for at this juncture, but be-
fore any answers arise, there will be lots and lots of mess. It is with an informed understanding of
this refusal that I consider Tuck and McKenzie’s walking methodology and how it applies to
Beti’s story.

Beti is grounded in the land. She learns from Vancouver in more ways than she realizes,
because the city is her permanent backdrop, the textbook from which she learns every day. And
the context—the subtle and overt acts of racism and exclusion, historically and today—informs
the ways in which Beti understands her city, her work, and the people she serves.

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Beti was hired to promote diversity issues throughout the organization. This includes con-
sidering how to support Indigenous communities better within her organization. She loves the
work, but the stress of having to represent all issues of diversity, all racialized, all Indigenous issues is taking a massive toll on her body. She was tighter and more stressed out than she had been in years, but she excused it as being part and parcel of the work. Beti was glad to do the work but was overwhelmed by the incredible diversity in urban Indigenous and racialized communities in Vancouver specifically but Canada more generally. It was not like the home she was twice removed from, through immigration and displacement, a home she has never personally connected to, only in theory and dreams. She understood her Indigenous roots back ‘home’ but those too were muddied by the sullen realities of colonization, genocide and violence. She realized the detrimental connection to land, community and experience in the use of the word Indigenous in Canada much too late. Here, the nations from one place to the next were so different. Added to this, the complex history of residential schools, poverty, addiction, and homelessness—a history she was only familiar with in theory—dropped bodies off in this complicated urban center completely untethered from their homelands. This work felt impossible in a women’s organization that was primarily here to serve survivors of domestic violence. The organization says they do everything, but they primarily work with heterosexual, white, working—class women. However, the hot funding topic this month was “Indigenous,” so they decided to hire Beti under the guise of a diversity worker. You know how the old saying goes: Build the mountain, and they will come. Is that the saying? Beti had doubts. It does not make sense, but neither does what she is doing, so maybe she just did not get it. She was grateful for the job, but she felt uncomfortable that it was taking money away from Indigenous organizations run by and for Indigenous communities.

Increasingly frustrated by the situation, Beti decided to go to Gora and explain the chal-
lenges she was facing with her “clients”. She marched into Gora’s office with a quiet determination. She knew it was going to be a challenge. However, she was sick of it. SICK of it. She felt her exasperation would take her farther this time then it had before.

“You can’t tell women we offer ceremony. We had an Indigenous Elder come in once to offer a ceremony— that does not mean we offer ceremony. I’m not sure how you expect me to explain that when women are here and they need ceremonies I can’t offer,” Beti blurted out, half her body in Gora’s office and the other outside it.

Gora got her back up right away: “I don’t understand. You said you did ceremony.”

“I can do ceremonies, within my own custom and traditions. However, ceremony is not an all-encompassing word. I can only offer certain things at certain times for certain people. I explained that to you when I interviewed. We have to invite local Elders. We have to consult with local communities.”

Gora stared back at Beti blankly. Her silence was penetrating. Beti walked out of her office feeling invisible.

When Beti got back to her office, a woman was waiting. Squeezed in among the books, umbrellas, and extra office furniture, she lingered, but clearly felt tense in the unwelcoming and sterile environment. Her rain—soaked body dripped onto the decades—old carpet beneath her. The smell of rain and mould lingered in the office air. Beti welcomed the woman and offered her a cup of tea. Still wet and agitated from her ride on the perpetually late number 3 bus, the woman happily accepted. The warmth of the tea comforted her from the inside out, and she was finally able to shake the last couple of days. She exhaled. Her shoulders loosened as she explained to Beti that she was having a hard time. She was displaced, felt discouraged, and had
heard that Beti could offer a smudge. She needed that right now. It would cost $150 to get home on the Greyhound, and that just was not an option at this time.

Beti offered the woman a warm smile, but her body began to tense. She knew that now came the hard part. She explained that before she was able to do anything else, she needed her to fill out some paperwork. Just standard stuff—name, address, and demographics to “count” her for the funders. Beti knew this was “colonization through paper”\(^8\) and moreover, that it would be met with resistance. On a previous trip to Gora’s office, she had explained how this was impossible. She could not ask women to fill out all this paperwork before she even knew them.

The woman looked at Beti hesitantly. Exhausted, she just looked up and said, “No, thanks.” As she was about to get up, Beti stopped her:

“I get it,” she said. “At least finish your tea.”

They smiled hesitantly, uncomfortably evading each other’s gaze. Fifteen minutes passed as Beti and the woman sat huddled in the office. They laughed uncomfortably a little, sharing small pleasantries and helping each other get through this cold, wet day. Finally, Beti stood up and closed the office door. Her voice lowered to a whisper:

“Listen, I am not supposed to do this. We stopped inviting Elders to offer smudges because of the new fire codes in the building. But I keep some sweetgrass over here by the window.”

Beti pushed aside several stacks of books and a plant to reveal a window. She kept the sweetgrass hidden behind the books, because of the new rules—but mostly she was sick of the white folks in the office coming around, asking her to indulge them in the new hipster smudging

\(^8\) A direct quote from an interview participant.
Along with the appropriation of Indigenous practices, which she deeply contributed to in this role, she felt uncomfortable with every aspect of this position—but she felt like she was in too far now. An elder in the community where she grew up, showed her and taught Beti the importance of smudging. Although Beti is a racialized settler, she grew up in close contact and connection to the Indigenous community. There was never a feeling of exclusion from the community—people were always welcome as long as they were willing to do the thinking and work to make this happen. Beti was always willing to do that work but now she felt like a fraud—she never imagined that she would be the one to be offering this ceremony in this context. Yet still women were asking for her help, and there was no one else—she was stuck amongst the hardened realities of colonial systems. She cracked the window open and motioned with a nod for the woman to come over. Silently, they huddled in the corner and lit the sweetgrass out the window. Quietly, coercively, the woman performed her cleanse in the corner of the office, half in and half out the window. They were so used to this, a life half in and half out, that it didn’t occur to them it could be any other way. Tears streamed down their faces as the sweetgrass smoke embraced them and they both finally let go.

*The woman left the office, and Beti never saw her again.*

***

Systemic exclusions and barriers to engaging in meaningful and supportive activism with Indigenous women in organizations was a clear theme throughout this research from Indigenous and non Indigenous activists alike. Indigenous activists also expressed frustrations with systemic barriers in doing the work they were being asked to do. Many said something along the lines of: How can I do this work when I am not given the space, acknowledgement or time to do be able
do it? How is this different for Beti as an ally compared to Indigenous activists? Most activists I interviewed, and again especially Indigenous activists because of the exceptionally precarious positions they were made to occupy in mainstream organizations, expressed stories of “breaking the rules” to meet the needs of their clients. In an impossible organizational system, it often felt like the only way. Like Beti’s choice to support her client with the limited capacity she has, the activists I interviewed, like so many before them, have been negotiating difficult boundaries to support their communities. Beti does not offer ceremony because of the complicated dynamics this takes on as a racialized settler—but what she is able to do is “break the rules” to create a safe space and provide the resources for someone to get access to what they need. This experience is further complicated by Beti’s position. Some bodies based on the hierarchies of race experience more surveillance and harsher punishment then others. As a result, “breaking the rules” can have very different consequences. Some, including racialized activists with similar experiences as Beti, might find that this is not a helpful or acceptable way of negotiating boundaries because of the risks of cultural appropriation when a non-Indigenous person is doing ceremony or creating space for ceremony.

There is so much diversity in understandings of the ways in which the needs should be addressed. Even amongst groups who would otherwise have similar ideas and politics. This is no doubt a complicated consideration that Beti is not able to answer. Should Beti be creating this space? I have no idea. But what I do know is there are a tremendous number of barriers for Indigenous women to access services that are useful and appropriate. Colonization through paper does not help because even when women walk through the door, they re-experience the tremendous amounts of structural oppression that is present in the paper work of existing and “count-
ing" in these organizations.

Beti still finds a way to do the work she needs to do through her own individual resistance and awareness of Indigenous knowledges, but not with the support of those around her. Organizations create the space for what are deemed as “marginalized areas,” but only within one scope and one way—one type of Indigenous that means everything Indigenous viewed through only one lens. Beti explains, for example in an upcoming story, how she can be an ally supporting women to find ceremony and healing in culturally specific ways. Beti, as a racialized settler, seeks the support of local community Elders, but the organization denies her request because it does not fit within the narrow scope designed by the Eurocentric organization.

The activists I interviewed, racialized and Indigenous, are well aware of the tremendous burden this perpetuates for themselves and especially for the women who are accessing services. Although organizations are clearly aware of systemic barriers, such as funding constraints and the lack of participation of diverse bodies, the need to account for multiply marginalized women is often reflected in organizational mandates, but very rarely are these needs translated into programmatic action. These barriers are always present, and much of that relates to attempting to provide culturally appropriate and relevant services in Eurocentric organizations that employ Eurocentric philosophies. Even when staff understand the challenges in providing these services—or even when staff are hired specifically to bridge this gap—they still encounter the challenges of the NPIC and rigid systems that are unable or unwilling to flex for the needs of the communities they serve.
Understanding the Canadian Colonial Order

Beti, as a racialized settler, creating a space where Indigenous women can smudge begs so many questions about the ways in which racialized and Indigenous bodies co-exist in white settler society. It is imperative to understand the very different historical and lived realities of Indigenous and racialized communities in this country. Although colonized people live within the context of a white settler society (Razack, 2002), it is no secret that racialized bodies can and do benefit from the occupied territories of Indigenous peoples (Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Jafri, 2007). Furthermore, the ongoing context of settler colonialism in Canada creates an important landscape for understanding the unique experiences of diverse Indigenous communities because the diversity is vast and it cannot be understood with only one set of conclusions. Many scholars have explained the diversity of Indigenous experiences within colonial structures, including education (Battiste, 1998; St. Denis, 2011), violence, especially as it relates to the bodies of Indigenous women (Hunt, 2014; Simpson, 2016), settler colonial histories and systems (Alfred, 2009; Coulard, 2014), incarceration (Razack, 2015), and “participation” (Dhillon, 2017), among others. State structures have embedded colonization and systemic racism in Canada. They have created Canada as a white nation that has cemented violence and injustice throughout its government legislation (Dhillon, 2017; Simpson, 2014; Thobani, 2007) Jaskiran Dhillon (2017) states settler colonialism provides an overarching framework for discussing the characteristics and temporalities of the Canadian Indigenous experience and the legal and political legacies of colonial control that have a profound influence on contemporary negotiations involving urban Indigenous youth. Drawing on the work of scholars who have traced the itineraries of “the colonial present” in settler na-
tion states, I regard Canada first and foremost as a settler colony marked by the ongoing dynamics of colonialism. (p. 16)

Dhillon and others (Coultard, 2014; Razack, 2015; Simpson, 2014; Thobani, 2007) demonstrate the strategic ways that colonization has played out and continues to play out in state recognition and intervention. The nonprofit funding dynamic is a part of this process and continues to perpetuate this very dynamic through mainstream nonprofits’ interest in maintaining the legacy of white settler colonization. These funding constraints impose rules that create certain expectations about the ways in which things can be done (e.g. the way Beti was not able to invite an Indigenous Elder from the community to preform ceremony because budget constraints do not allow for that). Dhillon (2017) writes: “To maintain its sanctity as a settler state while being actively challenged about the legal terrain of its sovereignty, Canada must disguise its colonial goals through subversive means” (p. 176). This subterfuge is evident in nonprofit organizations in the ways that project funding is created, allocated, and supervised. What types of projects are getting funded? Who is being funded to conduct this work and what results/deliverables are required from these types of projects? The varied experiences of Indigenous bodies within a Canadian context generally and on unceded territories more specifically is crucial in understanding the motivation of this research. Let me be absolutely clear: I realize that the experiences of racialized and Indigenous peoples are extremely different, and that suggesting otherwise is deeply problematic.

**Understanding Canadian Multiculturalism Within the Colonial Order**

There are clearly dangers in any collapsing the experiences of Indigenous peoples with
those of racialized bodies. Similarly I am aware of the dangers of essentializing the experiences of women of colour, because racialized women are not the same either. Women of colour, including those interviewed for this research, can and do identify in diverse ways, and their experiences of racialization also vary based on the nature of colonization in their homelands and their personal and collective histories of immigration and diaspora. There are many limitations, not only in conflating the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women, but also in overlooking the tremendous differences that exist in those individual words. Despite these limitations, there is still a tremendous opportunity in this research to think through structural limitations and experiences of systemic racism in organizations.

Similar to common, albeit different, experiences with settler colonialism, racialized bodies can also share commonalities with state-sanctioned notions of multiculturalism. Ghassan Hage (1998) writes about the creation of the “white nation fantasy” in his book where he documents the experiences of Australian nationals with multiculturalism. Hage argues that both White racists and White multiculturalists share in a conception of themselves as nationalists and of the nation as a space structured around a White culture, where Aboriginal people and non—White “ethnics” are merely national objects to be moved or removed according to a White national will. This White belief in one’s mastery over the nation, whether in the form of a White multiculturalism or in the form of a White racism, is what I have called the “White nation” fantasy. It is a fantasy of a nation governed by White people, a fantasy of White supremacy.

(n.p.)

Hage makes an important argument about the construction of bodies of colour within the Aus-
ralian landscape; he argues that whether you are for or against the inclusion of the racialized “other,” it is a matter of debate for the bodies who believe they own and control the nation. Multiculturalism and who is welcome are an argument that white folks are engaged in on behalf of bodies of colour. As Hage shows with his research the fact that white Australians are debating this issue assumes they are the ones who are entitled to make this argument. They are the rightful occupiers of the land therefore they have the ability to argue who should or should not be on it. Hage’s argument can easily be applied to other contexts, like Canada, where there are similar historical contexts of Aboriginal genocide and white entitlement. Canadian-sanctioned multiculturalism within the context of white settler colonialism creates the situational landscape that the mainstream nonprofit organizations I discuss within this project are working in and responding to. This is the state-embedded racism and cemented whiteness (Malinda Smith, as cited in Smith and Austin, 2016) they are operating in.

Organizing on Unceded Territories

Exclusion is part of the systemic set up of colonization—whether intended or not. As exemplified in Beti’s story of smudging and who is allowed to have access in organizations exemplifies the systemic nature of this work. Beti is supposed to create inclusion for Indigenous communities but is not given the resources to do so in an effective manner. Many feminist non profits do not actually want to fully include Indigenous people and ways of knowing, they have settled for appearance. Beti’s body is supposed to do this work—but without the actual work of doing it. She can advocate for ceremony, but does so against the invisible walls of race, class, tokenism, paternalism and shallow intentions. Beti is expected to be the overarching body of `di-
veristy.’ Racialized activists expressed frustrations with over simplifications of cultural communities and ideas, and the expectation they would serve as the all encompassing racialized mouthpiece. Indigenous activists interviewed also expressed this frustration with the ways in which they were expected to serve as Pan-Indigenous, singular tokens in a larger mainstream system that did not want to account for the tremendous diversity that exists within Indigenous communities.

Tokenization is setting everyone up for failure, including the organizations. Although Beti knows there is injustice, having the time or mental energy to do something about it is difficult. And at the end of the day, the fact that Beti is in the organization working means that at least, to a certain degree, she has been included, though not necessarily how she was intended to be included. Beti is as much of the system as she is outside of it (half in and half out). Her partial submission or ‘complicity’ is related to the ways that systems are understood here in Canada. From a young age, the history of Indigenous communities locally and the full context of colonization they experience is largely hidden from the public eye. The government is built within and embedded on racist practices that govern Indigenous people to this day (ie. the Indian Act, the legacy of residential schools, foster care) and as a result the interventions built by this system will be inherently incomplete.

Beti’s organization wants to provide services to Indigenous women, but are unwilling to shift the power structures (and embedded whiteness) to manifest a meaningful and willing relationship to deconstruct the necessary systems. It is never the intention of the organizations to be exclusionary, but the NPIC barriers come into play to prevent activists from actually being able to do the work they “hope” to do. Generations of activists like Beti have worked around the bar-
riers to reemerge into visibility. But is it enough to ask individuals to constantly have to navigate and recreate systems off their own backs? The work of engaging in Indigenous practices becomes a funding requirement, something that feels good, something that works, something that is reported on reports to the funder, but is it actually making a difference? Are activists engaging in the practices if they simply have the hope of doing so? Can wanting to do something be enough? Furthermore, can organizations say they are ‘engaging’ in Indigenous ways of knowing if they are not questioning the Eurocentric and colonial systems that permeate every aspect of knowing? The Eurocentric systems that are imposed upon the nonprofit organizations that Beti works for are not only a product of EK but also of the white settler systems that have built this ongoing legacy. These systems include the institutions that Beti works within and navigates on a daily basis, such as the NPIC, the academy, and the gentrification of the city that surrounds her. In order to understand Beti’s plight it is essential to question the EK within the context of white settler systems.

**White Settler Systems**

Many theorists have taken up these erasures within a multitude of institutions and systems, including the theorists from my introductory chapter. Razack, Ng, Ahmed, Tuck and Yang—in different ways—demonstrate how systems co-opt knowledge and bodies to use these systems to further develop their own agendas. Similarly these theorists have argued how white settler systems are insufficient in creating and maintaining change within institutions because of the ways they co-opt knowledge and repackage it for the purposes of being inclusionary. Other scholars have looked at the incomplete ways in which even critical studies rely on systems of
whiteness to advance and operate, especially how settler colonialism operates on stolen Indigenous lands (Bell, 1992, Lorde, 1984, A. Simpson, 2014, L. Simpson, 2014). Building on this literature, through my use of racialized and Indigenous perspectives, I wish to highlight the problematic approaches to settler colonialism that have and continue to take place within the lives of racialized and Indigenous peoples. I also work to inform the way that racism and white supremacy operate in North America and around the world. Furthermore, this work also seeks to recognize the distinct history and demand for sovereigny that many Indigenous communities continue to fight for. This very struggle for sovereigny calls into question Canada as a whole and all the systems that have been put into place.

I am in solidarity with Indigenous communities. An important part of my work is to question and challenge my privilege in Canada. Racialized people can hold a unique insider/outsider position as both immigrant settlers on unceded territories and as peoples who can and do uphold Indigenous ideologies, ceremonies, and subject positions (Dei, 2011). These unique spaces of isolation, collaboration, and solidarity need to be further explored. This call for collaboration does not diminish or ignore the complicated, heterogenous histories that exist amongst racialized and Indigenous communities. Lawrence and Dua (2005) make a critical intervention in Canadian anti-racism studies to suggest that racialized bodies in academia and activism are overlooking the ways in which they benefit from settler colonialism. Melissa Phung (2011) takes up all of these theorists when she asks “Are people of colour settlers too?” She argues that over-simplifying notions of settlers and Indigenous lead to binary thinking that reduces the complicated histories and relationships across the country.

As I have suggested throughout this chapter, it is imperative to be grounded on the local
land and the specific colonial histories that exist. Nationally, Canadian Indigenous peoples continue to experience colonization, especially through the laws that govern their bodies (Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2014). The Indian Act still governs Indigenous peoples within Canada. It is a blatantly racist document that marginalizes Indigenous bodies, especially women. Historically the Indian Act has taken status away from women who marry “outside” of their communities (Naumann, 2008). This patriarchal and colonial legacy was a tremendous loss for these women, increasing their dependence on the men they marry. Furthermore, it removed them and their children from their communities. This has had a lasting impact (Lawrence, 2003, Bourassa et al., 2004). The Indian Act is one of many barriers that have been systematized within Canadian law (Gehl, 2000, Fiske, 1995). Historic and systemic barriers are the cause of the injustices seen today. Symptoms include poverty, addiction, the epidemic of missing and murdered women across Canada, etc. It is imperative that activists understand how these barriers work in relation to each other, especially the ways they are instrumental within systems that perpetuate colonialism to impact current realities. This colonial context is essential to understanding the ways that Indigenous bodies have been disenfranchised by the imposition of Western colonial systems. There is no way that colonialism can be removed from any system—including nonprofit organizations—without careful consideration and a decolonizing intention (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This will almost certainly mean a drastically different way of working in organizations.

**A Place Where the Word Warrior Rests**

Within Eurocentric spaces, holders of alternative knowledge have expressed feelings of a double life (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2010; L. T. Smith, 2012). It can be exhausting, even impossible,
to have to balance competing, often conflicting, worlds—as Beti experiences in her quest to provide Indigenous women the ceremony and services they need while working within the confines of a white settler system. She finds ways to manage both, but at a cost to her own body and well-being. In most cases, dual knowledge holders are asked to choose between their worlds. Dale Turner (2004) writes,

some of our new warriors must be what I call “word warriors”—that is, American Indians who are educated in the white man’s ways of thinking and engaging in the white man’s intellectual discourses, participating in the dominant culture’s public intellectual life, and gaining greater access to the practices and institutions of the white man’s legal and political communities. (p. 231)

Turner goes further to explain that the “word warrior” is one who, despite having to leave home, will “in a sense, never have left home” (p. 237). Sustaining a strong and clear connection to home, tradition, and history is the inevitable challenge we face as colonized people. Activists search for solace and rest from the cruelty of the world in the anti-racist movement. Racialized and Indigenous people hold a double consciousness (DuBois, 1903) within the world, and there is an expectation and hope that our movements and our communities will be places of understanding, acceptance, and freedom. In the past, this has not occurred due to the violence, ignorance, and pain within our movements which prevented us from being able to engage fully (as exemplified by Beti’s story witnessing violence at the women’s conference.)

Is Beti a word warrior? She tries to be. As a racialized body, her capacity to use culturally specific words intended to signify the intense struggle like warrior has to be met with careful consideration. What does it mean for a racialized person to adopt this kind of terminology. The
unthinking dysconscious (King, 2015) use of appropriating language and ideologies contributes to the erasure of Indigenous peoples knowledges and language. Beti does not seek to be complic-it in the demise of her Indigenous sisters because she realizes that this ignorance will lead to her own demise. As a champion and ally, she must acknowledge the land and the struggles that have occurred on the land on which she fights her battles. Canada is a country with a long history of colonization, a country founded on land stolen from Indigenous communities. Indigenous communities are far too often ignored within our struggles, with no exception within the women’s movement. These lands and stories have been appropriated to further the interests of the state, thereby perpetuating the violence and oppression of colonization. As Beti seeks to enhance the lives of women, she need to consider the lives of all women, not only those of privileged women. As the voices of the privileged few are becoming more diverse, organizations are allowing themselves to glow within the diversity of these voices and ignore the injustices that the state continues to perpetuate against the most marginalized.

Throughout this chapter, using Beti’s experience of providing culturally relevant services through the use of Indigenous ways of knowing, I have questioned Eurocentric systems and knowledges at the center of activist, feminist, and community organizations. Specifically I have looked to answer the question: How does whiteness as a systemic and structural concept operate within feminist nonprofits with racialized and Indigenous activist workers? Beti’s story centres Indigenous ways of knowing and I have unravelled this to help see what can be understood from that. Largely in the interviews this question stemmed from individual activists being interested, committed and supportive of creating organizations that reduce barriers for Indigenous girls and women. Of course, in organizations themselves, largely due to the NPIC, but also for other rea-
sons many limitations presented themselves that did not allow for the actualization of these desires. For example a desire to centre and maintain whiteness within organizations which allow for only a superficial engagement. These limitations impact the ways in which Indigenous girls and women are able to access these services—even when the services are directly intended for their bodies. These limitations started with an inquiry into how organizations are taking on these considerations through superficial measures such as territory acknowledgements with limited commitment to understanding what it means to organize on unceded territories as white settlers, racialized settlers and Indigenous people working through so-called mainstream feminist organizations. Through a continued understanding of the oppression that exists within feminist and activist communities, I look to a meaningful and engaged commitment to allyship—or, more appropriately, a move to the side, so that local Indigenous communities are able to take ownership in the ways that organizing happens on their territories, especially in relation to the services that are intended to serve them. This begins with a thorough and committed understanding of the reports and recommendations from Indigenous communities that already exist like the Truth and Reconciliation report.
Chapter 5: Thinking Through Beti: The Beginning of the End

In this concluding chapter, I think with Beti’s story as she has been written throughout this dissertation. In doing so, I make direct links back to the research questions set out in the first chapter and woven through the body of the dissertation. In re-considering these questions, I explore some of the systemic barriers for racialized and Indigenous women in organizations and how this impacts feminist organizing in Vancouver. I also discuss the limitations of this research and areas for future considerations.

As noted previously, over the course of this study, I interviewed 15 racialized and Indigenous activists, including myself, who have experience organizing in the Greater Vancouver area. These interviews were the foundation of the counterstories I developed, which featured Beti as their protagonist. Beti is all of us and none of us at the same time. I created Beti as a composite to take the individual onus of stories off the participants and to focus attention on the structural challenges organizations impose on individuals. After careful consideration, as discussed throughout this dissertation, Beti reflects the racialized participants who I interviewed. Throughout the dissertation, I have also highlighted how Indigenous activists contribute to my understanding of institutional exclusion from their unique perspective as Indigenous women on unceded Coast Salish territories. This composite was created to reflect the flattening of experiences mainstream feminist organizations impose on the bodies of racialized others within their spaces, who often times are filling the niche of diversity projects, culturally specific projects and special projects related to funding sources outside of the realm of usual project funding categories (although not always.) Furthermore, my analysis of Beti’s story throughout the dissertation also considers the ways a hierarchy of race is set up in the Canadian state to privilege some bodies of
colour over others. Beti’s stories illuminated a number of structural challenges, particularly in relation to the interdependent relationship of the NPIC, capitalism, and colonization, and the organizations’ inability to center racialized and Indigenous women in nonprofit organizations.

Beti’s stories answered three key questions. These questions include:

- **What are the structural limitations of feminist nonprofit organizations and what are the implications for racialized and Indigenous activists who work within them?**
- **How does whiteness, as a systemic and structural concept, operate within feminist nonprofits with racialized and Indigenous activist workers?**
- **How do activists understand their work of supporting racialized and Indigenous girls and women within institutions? What are the pressures and tensions of such engagements?**

Although I intended to answer these questions through Beti’s stories. I uncovered some interesting truths discussed below and I have been left with many more questions. The three themes I want to highlight in this conclusion are

1) **NPIC: The preservation of the NPIC through its reliance on capitalism, colonialism and racism**

2) **NPIC and Indigeneity: The deeply intertwined relationship between the NPIC and the ways Indigeneity operate within organizations**

3) **Resistance and Intentions: The ways in which resistance and intentions are a primary player in thinking through feminist organizations and activism.**

These themes offer opportunities for a closer examination of the complicated places in which multiple marginalized identities work together and in tension. As a result I will conclude this
chapter by thinking through implications and future directions for this research.

**Thinking through the NPIC**

Throughout this research, it became clear that the NPIC is working in a number of ways in collaboration with capitalism and colonialism to reduce the efficacy of racialized and Indigenous activists within nonprofit organizations. Despite the willingness of organizations to balance the injustice through the introduction of racialized bodies creating relevant programs, many organizations are still unwilling to confront the need for systemic change. Ultimately, due to funding limitations and an inflexible system, the NPIC prevents effective programs from making meaningful change within organizations. In recentering whiteness and capitalism, the NPIC relies upon racist and colonial systems that prevent activists from engaging fully. Structurally racist systems create isolation, mental health difficulties and a variety of other challenges that prevent a continued engagement within organizations. Furthermore, few spaces exist for racialized bodies, leading to competitive work environments and reducing opportunities for building solidarity. In turn activists feel under-supported by systems which contributes to getting sick and/or burn out. Furthermore, colonization and the NPIC are deeply intertwined, which precludes creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing and healing and thus perpetuates the NPIC. After years of fighting against these limitations, the nonconforming bodies within these spaces become overwhelmed and exhausted, until finally they leave. After they leave, new Brown bodies come in who reproduce the cycle of the NPIC and perpetuate the entire system.
Thinking through the NPIC and Indigeneity

These findings corroborate other studies. For example, in 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) put forward 94 recommendations to begin the long and overdue process of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in response to Canada’s longstanding history of residential schools and colonial violence. Beti speaks to many of these calls to action in an attempt to reconcile and work through the many challenges that the TRC findings bring forward, specifically in relation to structural forms of racism and colonization that Indigenous women continue to experience. In many ways, she speaks to the work that still needs to be done by all, work that is messy and difficult, innovative, and also pertinent in moving forward in all of the fields that Beti speaks to, including social justice, education, health, and community building. Systems (and as a result organizations) are unprepared and unwilling to take the recommendations of the research and reports that have already been done. Governments, organizations, foundations, universities commission many reports and strategies but reluctantly and rarely implement their recommendations, as exemplified in Beti’s story with the intersectionality policy.

The activists and organizers who I worked with employed creative means to subvert the systemic barriers they encounter, and, like the many racialized and Indigenous women before them, they are ‘manipulating’ systems to do what they need to do and to serve the communities they always intended to serve. Similarly, I have tried to create space for different ways of knowing by producing a story that is unlike any other. Both the activists in their work and I in this dissertation are creating space in an inflexible Western paradigm for alternative realities that counter mainstream ways of knowing. Beti is more than a reflection of a deeply problematic NPIC. She
also holds a mirror to all of the inflexible systems that want Beti but do not want to make the changes necessary for her to thrive. Instead—like always—they force her to shapeshift to fit their mold, even if it costs Beti her being—her body, spirit, idealism, hopes—her fire.

**Thinking through Resistance: Situating Beti’s Refusal**

Researchers before me have asked critical questions around the nature and expectations of marginalized researchers within the academy (Simpson, 2007; Spivak, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Why, who benefits, what is the point, and at what cost?—these questions set the stage for the scope and limitations of working within academia, but more importantly, they set the stage for the ways to create boundaries around my contribution to the creation and maintenance of white settler colonialism. I decided a long time ago—well before I started this dissertation—that I could no longer be the academy’s native informant. I would try to not share stories that would put Indian women, young women, racialized women, etc., under a microscope to be dissected and reused by the academy—knowing full well that once I tell a story it is no longer mine. I was willing to work in a mutually beneficial relationship where I would give a little to gain a lot. I would provide some insights into the experiences of institutions to reflect back solely on the problematics of the institutions. This is an exercise to reflect back on the systems, the structures, and the brokenness of whiteness in predominantly white institutions and not on the challenges, pain, and suffering of women of colour. As a result, I knew that it was essential to complicate my position and my research project, which I began in the first Chapter.

Tuck and Yang (2014) discuss three axioms in research that create the landscape for many marginalized researchers within the academy: (1) the subaltern can speak, but are only invited to
speak our pain; (2) there are some forms of knowledge that the academy does not deserve; and (3) research may not be the intervention that is needed (p. 224). Tuck and Yang use these axioms as a foundation to theorize refusal:

Refusal is not just a “no,” but a redirection to ideas otherwise unacknowledged or unquestioned. Unlike a settler colonial configuration of knowledge that is petulantly exasperated and resentful of limits, a methodology of refusal regards limits on knowledge as productive, as indeed a good thing. (p. 239)

Refusal and resistance have been employed in every aspect of this research process from start to finish: in the construction of the project, in the interviews, and especially in the final product. In these stories that have been shared with me, the power behind them is located with the women I interviewed, as the authors of their own stories. Instead, Beti is born—a way to reflect back on the system, substantiated by research and stories, without sacrificing the bodies of those who are sharing the stories. In my work, I have used refusal primarily as a way to turn “the gaze back upon power” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 241). My refusal is resistance an unwillingness to shape shift to accommodate a system that refuses to accept me.

**Thinking through A Citation Challenge**

Resistance and refusal are employed through how I have navigated this system of higher education. This dissertation is resistance—resistance to the ways in which institutions expect information, research, and racialized people to be disseminated and shared across space and time. This is an important consideration because this work is done with intentionality. It is nothing if it is not carefully curated and considered, especially regarding the ways in which race is made and
has persisted throughout academia. As a result, I must also be careful with how knowledge is reproduced, thus my insistence on careful citation. As discussed in Chapter 2 I have employed a Citation Challenge within my research. Others have reminded us of the importance of making feminist points (Ahmed, 2013) and building on the work of racialized and feminist scholars by speaking to and adding to their work (Ahmed, 2013; Simpson, 2007; Tuck et al., 2015). I am careful who I cite, citing almost exclusively racialized and Indigenous people, primarily women, understanding that the life of the academy is made off the backs of these racialized and Indigenous people. Specifically how the knowledges, cultural practices and ways of knowing of these folks have and continue to be appropriated with little to no recognition in a systematic power play of white privilege. This citation challenge is a conscious form of resistance, bringing historically excluded bodies into conversation in the academic sphere.

Like everything else, this form of resistance does not come without its difficulties. For example, I have struggled tremendously in citing Andrea Smith. I acknowledge how exceptionally contested Andrea Smith is in the field of Native American Studies/Indigenous Studies. It is clear that many Indigenous scholars have refuted Smith’s claims to Indigenous ancestry and that her presence as a well-cited scholar in this field is an affront to the many Indigenous scholars who are doing important work and who face many more institutional barriers within academia than Smith has faced. I recognize this debate and use her work with caution. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I find it difficult to take a side on this debate. I have no idea who should control Indigenous “authenticity” but I certainly know it is not me. Yet, I am fully aware of the favouring of light skin privilege, the desirability of consuming Brown bodies, and the many settler moves to innocence (Tuck and Yang, 2012). On the other hand, Smith has undeniably made significant
contributions to understanding the ways that community organizations and the nonprofit industrial complex are built and maintained. In order to personally reconcile this dilemma, I have decided to primarily cite her work around organizational development and maintenance (Smith, 2007.) As often as possible I have looked to cite other Indigenous scholars as well.

When sifting through the names and research of the individuals I choose to cite, I open up another entirely different political sphere of how one goes further into the depths of who can and should identify with these categories: Who has institutional privilege to their advantage? How are light skinned bodies benefitting from both sides of the coin, white privilege but also the insider voice of the marginalized other? And, on the flip side, who may be a person of colour but also manipulates institutional power to ensure that other bodies of colour do not join them in the ranks of privilege? Who has solid LGBT2SsQ+ politics? Who understands mental health and the increased barriers racialized and Indigenous people face? Who understands poverty dynamics and how that operates within the confines of every institution, including the academy? Who teaches in an accessible fashion? Who supports their graduate students and sets them up to succeed after they finish? Finally, who not only understands but also acts in ways that exemplify their understanding of how all of these systems work together in the lives of racialized and Indigenous peoples?

These are complicated questions that I have spent countless hours considering. It is an impossible feat to answer these questions. All of these struggles remind me of Roxane Gay’s (2014) *bad feminist*. It is one thing to measure everyone, including myself, by these impossible standards—but then what? This citation challenge is supposed to be a difficult one. I realize that, but nonetheless, I have not been able to do it easily, clearly, or without conflict.
Just as the citation challenge is meant to institutionally resist the knowledges that are expected in every aspect of our work, Beti is resistance. Throughout this dissertation I have discussed Beti as both resistance in the larger milieu of nonprofit organizations, and Beti as my resistance to collapsing or under theorizing intragroup differences. Here, I use Beti as a reminder to not only rely on those who are expected to provide “knowledge” and also trust in the knowledge that has persisted through the generations within communities. Some people are cited often because there is an expectation of who should be cited and why. I no longer follow that expectation, because I realize that a system has been created to allow for certain voices to move up through the ranks and gain access to privileged spaces, which in turn has allowed for certain white bodies to institutionalize authority, because there is an expectation that these voices know more—so much so that we as racialized bodies no longer trust our own voices. This redefinition of knowledge holders is resistance—personal resistance and institutional resistance—that starts with different kinds of voices sharing different kinds of stories and centering different kinds of ideas.

Thinking Through Good Intentions

Throughout my quest for resistance, I realized there were also another themes that was inadvertently appearing—good intentions. Good intentions became a larger theme of my dissertation than I realized. It flows through so much of what I had come to know from the good intentions of organizations (ie. doing the government’s good work), to the good intentions of nice white ladies, to the good intentions of activists, to my own good intentions. Based on my own history in women’s organizing there were some themes that I expected—the challenges with the
NPIC for instance, as well as unexpected—the impact of mental health on the lives of activists who work in mainstream feminist organizations and the ways this clearly connects to systemic racism and colonization. Good intentions is another theme I was not expecting even though I had thought about it before undertaking this research. I knew it was there, I knew it would come up—but I did not realize how deeply steeped it was in everything, until I saw how often these intentions came up in conversations with activists and then Beti and then again in my own writing. Good intentions have served me and motivated me but they have also gotten in my way.

My good intentions of trying to not replicate imagery of broken Brown folks—also created a similar problematic situation where I inadvertently replicated exclusion and appropriation. In trying to think through Beti as a composite character, lumping the experiences of racialized and Indigenous activists mirrored the systems I was trying to dismantle. These are the types of good intentions that become problematic and I reproduced without consideration. As it became clear problematic good intentions can and do rear themselves in unexpected ways. It is almost like Intentions has become another character within Beti’s story. The more my intention was to clarify the story—the more complicated and muddy it became. Intentions like Gora, the NPIC and sometime Beti herself has become another obstacle in Beti’s story. One that requires further consideration and research.

**Thinking Through Beti’s Questions**

At the outset of this research, I formulated guiding questions that constructed the research process. The questions were inspired by my work in organizations and by my time in the “organizational world of nonprofit activism.” Although these are complicated questions, Beti’s coun-
terstory has shed light on some limitations within organizations, which I summarize below.

**What are the structural limitations of feminist nonprofit organizations and what are the implications for racialized and Indigenous activists?**

In chapter 3 of this dissertation I looked at the ways the NPIC has created and perpetuated systemic exclusion through eight interrelated themes; entrenched leadership, physical spaces, oppression within our movements (or lateral violence), nonperformativity, structural whiteness, mental health (or crazy structures), capitalism and perpetuating the cycle. It is clear through Beti’s stories that whiteness and its interlocking relationship to racism, colonialism and sexism are key in the ways structural limitations are experienced by racialized and Indigenous activists in feminist nonprofit organizations. Throughout this dissertation I have shown this by returning to the theorists that I outlined in the introduction.

These theorists have been formative to my understandings of Beti because they have helped shaped my understandings of race, racism and whiteness within the Canadian context and/or within organizational spaces. Razack discusses the ways systemic exclusion happens in structures through the use of the colonial gaze on the bodies of racialized and Indigenous women. Ng also shows this through the racialization of labour in women’s organizations showing how immigrant women are used as a social construct to maintain the white and wealthy interests the Canadian nation state. Finally Ahmed, through her understandings of the nonperformativity of diversity workers shows us the ways systems prevent diversity from being implemented in formative ways due to the desire to centre whiteness. Beti also reflects these realities through her stories. She reminds us of the ways organizational systems flatten the experiences of racialized and Indigenous activists. Beti also shows how organizations prevent activist intentions from
flourishing within organizations due to the maintenance of whiteness that appoints them. Non-profit organizations (especially the feminist nonprofit organizations reflected in this research) are built on the feminist ideals of the 70s which centre white women’s experiences of exclusion through patriarchy.

Beti’s stories paint a picture of experiences that show how individual bodies are reduced to their ability to open doors to supposed cultural dialogues or checking multiculturalism/diversity boxes. She illustrates how mainstream feminist nonprofit organizations flatten the experiences of diversity through a perpetual revolving door within institutional whiteness, creating an infinite cycle of fresh Brown meat that is never able to counteract the powerful system of whiteness. Beti’s stories illustrate the ways in which whiteness operates through the solidified expectations of the NPIC and thereby prevent racialized and Indigenous people from being able to do the work that they were intended to do. This disconnect between the foundations of feminist nonprofit organizations and the contemporary realities of women’s organizations leave a disconnect that results in experiences of isolation and a failure to thrive in institutional spaces.

How does whiteness as a systemic and structural concept operate within feminist nonprofits with racialized and Indigenous workers?

Chapter 3’s illustration of the NPIC show the systemic and structural ways that whiteness operates throughout feminist nonprofit organizations. It shows the intricate ways that whiteness operationalizes within these spaces and particularly the effects that it has on the experiences of racialized bodies within these spaces. Chapter 4 builds on these understandings of the NPIC to clearly articulate how Indigenous ways of knowing are overlooked to maintain the white status quo thereby reinforcing whiteness as a systemic and structural concept.
Organizations pose Indigeneity as an agenda item in response to project calls that demand Indigenous engagement or Truth and Reconciliation—but fail to recognize the ways in which these ideologies need to be addressed throughout the organization. A commitment to Indigenous ways of knowing need to extend beyond a territory acknowledgement or other superficial examples that reduce Indigenous ways of knowing to organizational checklists as opposed to the long-standing traditions that they are. This chapter illustrates the need to return to Indigenous ways of knowing to understand Beti’s position as a racialized settler on unceded Indigenous territories in an effort to show that place matters—and in Beti’s case Vancouver matters.

Chapter 4 also engages with Indigenous ways of knowing and the systemic limitations of their use in organizations. Systems (e.g., academia, organizations) use Indigenous ways of knowing with limited understanding of their meanings and complexity. Instead of dedicating time and thought to structural change to implement these ideas, organizations use empty acknowledgments and other makeshift practices to implement ideas through projects. This is partially due to the funding structures that guide these organizations but also due to the fact that organizations (based on the systemic whiteness they rely upon) do not want to engage in meaningful change. In this chapter I rely on Tuck and McKenzie (2015), Battiste (1998), Battiste and Youngblood (2009), and Turner (2004), among others, to think through how organizations can better understand and apply Indigenous ways of knowing in their structures. I also problematize how the diversity of Indigenous bodies globally (Dei, 2011) and racialized bodies locally (Jafri, 2007) can interrupt organizing practices within nonprofit system.

How do activists understand their work of supporting racialized and Indigenous girls and women within institutions? What are the pressures and tensions of such engage-
Beti reflects the tensions experienced by activists in so many ways throughout her stories. Beti thinks through the tensions of supporting communities in authentic and meaningful ways but not having the institutional support to do this effectively. Also the personal tensions that Beti experiences in consistently coming up against a painful system—rife with injustice and pain of the interlocking systems the NPIC supports and maintains—most notably the racist realities that racialized and Indigenous activists experience within these institutional spaces. This is the work of Beti. Throughout the stories Beti represents the pressures and tensions of racialized and Indigenous activists supporting racialized and Indigenous folks in their organizations. Specifically, she is speaking to the dynamics of working in organizations, often as the sole body of colour, charged with ensuring representation—not only of her own community but of all marginalized bodies. Beti is reflecting the expectations of working with racialized and Indigenous people on diversity projects and within mainstream feminist organizations that are not completely in tune with the needs and demands of said communities. This is both the understanding, tension and pressure of doing this work. How can activists engage meaningfully with their communities and make the changes they set out to make using broken tools? Nonprofit organizations are failing to meet the needs of racialized and Indigenous communities and these organizations (or at least the leaders within them—the well intentioned whiteness that runs these organizations), so they hire the bodies (the Betis) who they think will service these communities, give them legitimacy in the areas where they need it most—but still these activists, these Betis are not able to work within the confines of the system because organizations are unwilling to change to accommodate this diversity. The activists interviewed understood this tension; yet still found ways to navigate these
complicated barriers to do what they needed to do in order to deliver on the promises they set out. Unfortunately, this subversion takes a toll on racialized and Indigenous women’s bodies through self care, through their relationship, and mental health, and ultimately forces them to consider other more sustainable options (often resulting in leaving nonprofit organizing all together.)

Thinking Through Beti’s Implications and Contributions

Despite these complex conclusions, this research offers a number of methodological contributions to the fields of education, gender studies, intersectionality, and critical race methodologies, among others. Most clear is a direct application and advancement of the role and use of critical race studies in a Canadian context; specifically, how critical race studies can apply to feminist organizations and institutions in Canada. Beti’s story also has implications for storytelling methodologies, especially in the way it highlights the value of counter-storytelling and composite storytelling. These strategies allowed me to combine the stories of many participants to refocus attention and put pressure on the structural exclusions clear within these systems. In addition to offering insights into organizational behaviour and structures and the understanding of how the NPIC excludes racialized and Indigenous bodies, Beti has offered an opportunity to think through Indigenous ways of knowing within the context of the NPIC and to consider their potential for doing things differently.

Beti also contributes to anti-racist feminist research in a number of ways, primarily because she offers an alternative way to think through “researching” marginalized bodies. She offers valuable insights into desire-based research (Tuck, 2009). I did not want to reduce these par-
ticipants to one interview—one moment in time with me. I wanted instead to give life to the sto-
ries of resistance, struggle, and survivance that they shared with me—and I wanted to do this
through my own resistance to an academic system that is unwelcoming to my body and others
like mine. I wanted to do it on my own terms, putting onus on broken systems by using the inspi-
ration of racialized and Indigenous scholars and activists who put words, imagery, and music to
the systemic injustices they experience every day. In addition, my storytelling methodologies
have raised questions on how to consider racism and institutional whiteness when thinking
through racialized and Indigenous identities.

In addition to the methodological implications of this research, Beti offers several theo-
retical considerations. She offers a way to think through the structural implications of the NPIC
and how it impacts racialized and Indigenous folks programmatically and theoretically. In con-
versation with the established research and theory in the field, Beti has offered a new way to look
at the interrelated relationship of colonization, the NPIC, and the upholding of systemic white-
ness. Mostly Beti offers a different way to think about whether activists can use the master’s
tools to dismantle the master’s house (Lorde, 1984). As racialized and Indigenous activists’
spend a great deal of time in isolation—within mainstream organizations, in mainstream institu-
tions, and subsequently in the struggles within these spaces I did not want my participants to be
isolated on these pages. I wanted Beti to stand for solidarity and sisterhood—imperfect and in-
complete, but together, even when it is breaking apart.

There are limitations to this research as there is with all research projects. As with any
research that seeks to understand how communities and people work, participation in the project
is limited to the people I interviewed within the time and place they were interviewed. This is
complicated by the power relations inherent within organizations and within research. Beti, as a racialized settler, is insufficient to speak to the unique realities of Indigenous activists on unceded territories. I know this now. My good intentions paved the way for ignorance and incompleteness. Intention becomes the focus instead of what the intention was set to address. Intentions also serve as a move toward our own innocence (Fellows and Razack, 1998, Tuck and Yang, 2012.) When left unhinged intentions become tools of distraction from our own complicity in unjust systems. This is the very nature of working with the masters tools (Lorde, 1984.) I have paid close attention to all of these limitations. Nevertheless, I have positive expectations for this project while being aware of its limited scope and capacity. This research will only begin to unveil some of the complicated dimensions within institutions, and I do not / will not expect systems to change as a result of this research. On the other hand, beginning to unravel some of the systems is a project that has been a long time in the making. There is a great desire to see these questions addressed, and I think this research can spark exciting momentum in this work.

**Thinking Through Beti’s Future**

The interviews, analysis, Beti’s stories and the writing process have taught me in no uncertain terms that if nothing there are so many more questions that can and should be answered. Of those, the most pressing is Beti’s mental health. It is imperative that organizations consider the mental health of racialized and Indigenous activists working within organizations, amongst systems of whiteness, forcing them to conform and perpetuate these same systems and the ways in which this takes a toll on our bodies—physically, spiritually and emotionally. Beti decides, with the indirect help of Friend, that it is time for her to leave the NPIC to find a new home for
herself. Beti is fulfilling the cycle of many within this broken system, which is telling of the disposability and replaceability of racialized and Indigenous women within the NPIC. Furthermore, it also speaks to the ways that this system forces us to turn upon each other, again despite good intentions. Solidarity exists and continues to thrive, but it does not discount the ways in which symptomatic results that leave allied organizers unable to support each other. These are essential areas for future consideration.

Equally important there needs to be more done in terms of the research implications of doing alternative work in mainstream institutions like the academy. How can institutions support racialized and Indigenous grad students to do this work in ways that still feel true from them? I know for certain that I am not the first person to struggles with some of these challenges. But still where are the resources? These resources must include formalized mentorship and guidance on how to do research in communities that have hard histories with the academy. As well as resources on how to navigate the academic process, from choosing committees to finishing within the allocated timeframe of the program. I know that some of these resources exist but they need to be taught in the classroom with racialized and Indigenous teachers. Furthermore, these resources need to be understood with an intersectional understanding that some racialized and Indigenous grad students (especially first generation post secondary students) will have more barriers than others. This work normally falls on individual mentors who volunteer their time, despite being overworked and overburdened in a number of different ways. What can be said about the lack of these resources? And how can activists support each other so that we do not have to recreate the wheel every single time we set out do to a project like this? Again like Friend, the system breaks down and activists are unable to support the next one—how can we rectify the gap
in this system, knowing how long it has and continues to exist? Malinda Smith (2016) and others reminds us, whiteness is cemented into every aspect of our institutions and identities. The only way to address this reality is through the deliberate dismantling of whiteness. Beti is an example, a process, an idea that I hope will spark discussion of structural isolation within institutions. She is only one small and incomplete crevice on the iceberg of whiteness. So much more needs to be done. In so many ways, Beti was unable to tell the full story. Many, stories and ideas of injustice and resistance have been left untold. Huge cracks continue to exist. There is also the aftermath when these organizers leave nonprofit organizing. Where do they go? What do they do? How are they effecting change in different ways now that they are gone from nonprofit organizations? Also how do these systemic barriers present in other institutional feminist spaces like women’s studies departments?

How can organizations think of new and creative ways to uncover these systems of power—ways that do not use another, equally oppressive, system (e.g., the ivory tower) as its tool? How do activists preserve Audre Lorde’s question “Can the masters tools dismantle the master's house?” while also pushing ourselves to not simply back down from engaging in what seems like an impossible task? Furthermore, how can activists put responsibility back onto those who have benefitted from and continue to maintain the legacy of oppressive systems, those who soak in the pool of their unexamined privilege, or even worse, those who understand their privilege but do nothing about it? Beti has taught me so many lessons about systems, but primarily my own inability to deal with unravelling the systems on which I rely—the delicate dance of dealing with the competing tensions of personal/communal ideals and institutional expectations.

Some questions remain unanswered about organizations’ behaviour and structure and the
ways the NPIC has operated historically and continues to operate. For example, how does the organizational climate differ in different environments with different relationships to Indigenous communities? This research can be used as a starting point to answer some of these other questions. In connection with organizers, Beti can offer creative ways to effect change toward dismantling the NPIC. Now, comes the harder work: How do I take this (imperfect and incomplete) work and support the work of organizers (who are already) dismantling this system in a particularly volatile (Trump/Brexit) world, all while continuing to center racialized and Indigenous women’s bodies, ideas, and momentum?

Beti, and the learnings she has taught me have been instrumental in my own journey and next steps. As this dissertation comes to a close I have accepted a position as the Executive Director of a national nonprofit organization. This has been a complicated struggle for me—because at the onset of this research I was not sure that I would be heading back to nonprofit organizing. When I started this project—I was in my own process of completing Beti’s lifecycle tired and finished with the NPIC and the ways in which whiteness perpetuated throughout these institutional spaces. Throughout this research I feel as though I have re-lived Beti’s lifecycle—and I was left with more questions. I have come to realize that despite these questions and the many unknowns, Beti has helped illuminate tremendous understandings about the nature of power and the structural limitations within organizations. I have many questions but I also have many answers. I am entering a new white boys club (as the first racialized person and one of the few women to run this organization in its 25 year long history) and I intended on taking Beti (and all of the teachings she has provided) with me. I will be in a new position to think about structural whiteness and racialized and Indigenous women—this time armed with the knowledge and lan-
language to consider, articulate and potentially change the ways in which racialized and Indigenous women will be understood in this organization. Although minuscule in the vastness of the ocean of issues that have been raised throughout this project, I am filled with satisfaction knowing that my next steps will be in taking these ideas back to the communities I had always intended to serve. My hope is that this small offering will provide some satisfactory closure for all those involved.

Thinking Through Calls to Action

In my introductory chapter I set out to “understand how organizations can change to better suit the unique and varied needs of racialized and Indigenous activists working in nonprofit organizations,” I seek to return to this objective and to provide concrete recommendations. This is a series of considerations organizations can take to address the findings presented within this research and change the impact of white settler colonialism and capitalism in their daily operations. Although there is much work to do before systems of racism, capitalism and colonialism will dismantle within organizations, these calls to action will interrupt, disrupt and resist these systems at a daily level through small institutional interventions. Below I list five calls to action for organizations:

Call to Action 1: Maximum terms

In Chapter 3, Beti identifies a number of stories where progress cannot be made because of long-standing leadership. Impose maximum terms for organizational leadership, including executive directors and board of directors. After a given term the leaders should leave the organization en-
tirely for at least another term before rejoining in another capacity. Not only will this reduce en-
trenched longstanding ideologies it will also provide more people with the opportunity to devel-
op leadership skills and experience.

Call to Action 2: Physical space
As identified in Chapter 3, space matters and location matters. Consider physical spaces, both in
terms of the location of the office and the design of space inside as well. Ensure the physical spa-
ces that organizations are housed in are located in accessible neighbourhoods and that the office
design accounts for some of the challenges identified, including natural light and heat. Also iden-
tify the ways physical space and individual mental health are connected.

Call to Action 3: Mental health
Building from the previous call to action, mental health impacts racialized and Indigenous ac-
tivists in organizations. As identified in many of Beti’s stories in Chapters 3 and 4, especially
through her relationship development, her stress in navigating challenging systems and her anxi-
ety dreams, the mental health of activists working in nonprofit spaces is deeply impacted by the
challenging work they do within these organizations. Address the mental health implications of
doing service work, especially for communities of colour. Financially support confidential, cul-
 turally appropriate mental health services to be used at the discretion of staff. Formally imple-
ment culturally appropriate and individualized forms of wellness in the office.

Call to Action 4: Implementation plans
As evidenced throughout this dissertation organizations cannot only address diversity through policies and diverse bodies. Create implementation action plans for any diversity/ culture/ multi-cultural policies in the organization. Develop realistic timelines and attach funding dollars to this plan to ensure effective execution. Create tangible, longterm plans to implement reports into action acknowledging the time and energy required to develop and maintain relationships in communities.

**Call to Action 5: Removing colonial barriers**

As evidenced throughout Chapter 4 and building off the last call to action, organizations need to seriously consider Indigenous ways of knowing. Create institution specific ways to address occupying stolen territories that go beyond acknowledging the territory. Identify the historical context specific to the land occupied and create a plan based upon the history. This may include developing relationships and networks with local Indigenous communities, asking for advice and following through with the advice given. Acknowledge that developing meaningful relationships can and does take years. Ensure that the plan you develop is long term. Ensure you are following local community protocols and not unnecessarily burdening communities with historical racism and ignorance.

**Thinking Back to Reena**

With all of this consideration, it is important for me to come back to my original motivation for this research: Reena Virk. Twenty years after her death Reena continues to inhabit my anxiety dreams. She inspires me to think differently and do better in understanding the systemic
cracks that erase people. After her death, it became clear to me that systemic injustices were causing more than cracks—they were leaving a gaping, dark abyss, imprisoning dark girl bodies into these holes and leaving them there—to die. Reena died, not only because of those girls and one boy under the Craigflower bridge. She died because she fell into this abyss, and the people who wanted to support her, who were trying to, could not get to her, because this broken, Swiss cheese system would not let them reach her. As the years went on, this became more and more evident as I saw more examples of this happening. Not all of them garnered the same attention as Reena—but that said something too. When a group of young white girls kill, the victim gets more air time. In other instances, when the perpetrators are brothers, fathers, lovers, clients, or the stranger lurking in the bushes, the loss of life seems less important. Beti has made it clear to me that the system of whiteness frames everything. More than anything, what this research has taught me is that nothing is a coincidence.

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Beti opens her eyes. All she sees is darkness. Oh no—the anxiety dream again? The one where she is running through the darkness, looking, but unable to see. Do you see me? she asks, hope against hope. The question is rhetorical, because she already knows she cannot be seen. She has this dream often—more often than she would like to admit—so she knows the signs. Blackness surrounds her, darkness fills her, like the sunken abyss of drowning in the ocean. She cannot see her body, but she can feel it—heart racing, the hard thuds reverberating in her chest cavity—so she knows her physical body is still there, somehow connected to this racing mind, grounded to something, one way or another.

Do you see me? Beti asks again. Do you see me? The darkness lifts into a hazy grey and
all of a sudden she starts to see light. A room full of people—her colleagues, her friends, and duplicates of herself—over and over again. Silence. The piercing kind. It makes her wonder if she even asked the question. She asks it one more time, just to be sure. Do you see me? And then she wonders if anyone is there to hear. If no one is listening, is the question still being asked? This time the question is not rhetorical. Beti wants an answer. She begs for an answer. DO YOU SEE ME? she screams. Tears stream down her face. She cannot hold them back any more. She needs to feel the warm water dripping from her chin, to feel the pain and sorrow in her heart, to feel anything, just to prove she is still alive. I am here, she asserts. She collapses to the ground. Her knees fall hard on the floor. Yes, the ground is something she can feel—something she can always count on—this land—something that will always meet her body with supportive resistance. The scaffolding to hold her up when she feels she will crumble into a million pieces. She feels the hard, cold concrete push back against her bare knees. She pulls in shallow breaths, willing her body to calm. The people all around her watch, but say nothing. She knows they can see her. She stares back at them and asks, “Why is nobody answering me?” The silence pierces her again.

She recognizes this dream—she knows it well. But this time she makes a different choice. Instead of pleading with those around her, she focuses. She focuses on taking deep breaths. The oxygen sustains her in a way that affirmations will not. She takes a long sigh of relief to her core—her breath grounds her in the here and now.

Beti has learned to work within white settler systems to see the light. She powers through, slowly and with diligence, to see in the darkness, to see any light within the systems—to help her weave in and out and throughout. She powers on, quietly disturbing shit in little corners, watching and waiting for the system to collapse.
Her hands rush to her chest, looking for something. Open-handed slaps move across her body, desperately searching, panicked, until finally she finds and pulls out her treasure. A small box, so familiar that she opens it instinctively, even with blurry sight, and pulls out a wooden match. She strikes the match across the box and with a swift flick the flame erupts. In the glow of the yellow-hazed fire she can see. A deep sigh of relief turns into a half smile. Beti can see. The room, the office, the system—her life—with more clarity than ever before. She takes a deep and full inhale as she looks around one more time. She wants to make sure she remembers all the details—before it is over. Exhaling slowly, she drops the match to the ground before the flame can reach her fingers. The muted thud seems heavier than it is, relieving an undeniable weight from her shoulders and sending a rush of freedom up and down her now seemingly weightless body. The crackling flames gain force as they catch the furniture, the floor, the walls, until the whole building heats up under the light. The light she knew so many Indigenous and women of colour, including Reena Virk will not experience because the system swallowed them whole—and took their lives. Beti can feel the heat behind her as she confidently strides out of the room, but she does not look back. Just as Beti leaves the room, the blaze literally and metaphorically envelops the building behind her and the darkness she once knew. The shackles are off, and nothing is left except Beti’s freedom.
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Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

Dear Community Activist,

My name is Manjeet Birk and I am a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. I am writing today to invite you to participate in my research project entitled *Transpar-ent Organizations: A Critical Analysis of Activist Experiences within Organization Serving Racialized and Indigenous Girls and Women*. This research considers the experiences of Indigenous and racialized activists working in or having worked in nonprofit organizations. Participants of this study will explore experiences of working with and advocating for Indigenous and racialized girls and women. They will also consider nonprofit organizations and structures and how they have impacted these experiences. Research of this kind is important because it will help nonprofit organizations in better supporting the engagement of Indigenous and racialized girls and women within organizations.

If you wish to participate you will be invited to a semi structured interview for approximately 1.5 hours. You may also be invited to an optional follow up interview, a focus group and an opportunity to review raw data. These subsequent meetings will be voluntary and only if time and interest permits. Participation in this project will require a minimum of 1.5 hours up to a maximum of 7 hours of your time over the course of an 8 month period.

If you are a community activist, that works or has worked in nonprofit organizations serving racialized and Indigenous girls and women and identifies as racialized or Indigenous please contact me to learn more. I can be reached by email or by phone. My supervisor Dr. Lisa Loutzenheiser is also happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Manjeet Birk

*Please forward this letter of invitation to anyone else you think may be interested in participation.*
Appendix B: Consent Form

Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education
2125 Main Mall, Scarfe 309
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4
Tel: (604)822-8638
Email: grad.educ@ubc.ca

Consent Form

Transparent Organizations: A Critical Analysis of Activist Experiences within Organizations Serving Racialized and Indigenous Girls and Women

Principal Investigator: Lisa Loutzenheiser, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, University of British Columbia

Co-Investigators: Manjeet Birk, PhD Candidate, Cross-Faculty Inquiry in Education, University of British Columbia

You are invited to participate in a study being conducted by Manjeet Birk as part of the requirement towards completing a PhD in education.

What is the purpose of this study and why should I take part?
This research considers the experiences of Indigenous and racialized activists working in or having worked in nonprofit organizations. Participants of this study will explore experiences of working with and advocating for Indigenous and racialized girls and women. They will also consider nonprofit organizations and structures and how they have impacted these experiences.

Research of this kind is important because it will help nonprofit organizations in better supporting the engagement of Indigenous and racialized girls and women within organizations.
What is involved?
Should you agree to participate in this study, your involvement may include:
A series of up to two individual, semi-structured interviews. The interviews will focus on a) your experiences and identity as an activist, b) your experiences working with and advocating for Indigenous and racialized girls and women and c) your understandings and experiences of nonprofit organizing and structures.

Optional participation in an additional focus group with up to six other community activists discussing similar themes as the individual interviews. Interviews will be audio-recorded and are designed to last no more than 1.5 hours. They will take place in a convenient location of your choice between September 2015 and January 2016. Upon completion of the interview you will be invited to review transcripts and provide feedback.

Optional participation will also be welcome in reviewing raw data and shaping the analysis. If you wish, this can be done in person or via email at a location and time convenient for you. I expect this phase to be conducted sometime in March 2016. The total participation for this project is a minimum of 1.5 hours up to a maximum of 7 hours of participation over the course of the next eight months.

Study Results
The results of this study will be reported in a publicly available dissertation and may also be published in journals and books. This study is funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Are there any potential risks?
There are some psychological risks associated with this study. Some of the questions may seem personal as you will be asked to reflect on your personal and professional experiences. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want. Should you have any concerns please let one of the project investigators know. Although every effort will be made to ensure participation comfort, the interview material may touch on sensitive topics such racism, discrimination, marginalization and isolation. As a result all participants will be given a resource list with appropriate Indigenous and racialized counsellors and support workers who will be available to discuss any concerns that may arise from this research.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
You may be helped by this study by creating a space to share your stories and experiences in organizations. In the future, others may also benefit from what we have learned. Furthermore, conclusions from this study will become best practice guidelines for nonprofit organizations to support the engagement of racialized and Indigenous girls and women within their organizations.

Confidentiality
Your confidentiality will be respected. Information that discloses your identity will not
be released without your consent. However, information may be disclosed if required by law. All of the information we collect will be kept in encrypted files on a password-protected computer or in a locked filing cabinet for a period of 5 years. If you choose to participate in the focus group every effort will be made to maintain your confidentiality but it cannot be guaranteed. We encourage all participants to refrain from disclosing the contents of the discussion outside of the focus group; however, we cannot control what other participants do with the information discussed.

Will there be compensation?
We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study. As a gesture of appreciation you will receive a small gift (e.g., a mug) upon completion of the interview series. Any costs associated with participating in the study, including transportation or parking will also be reimbursed.

Who can you contact if you have a complaint about this study?
If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Further, your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature                          Date

________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant