Fighting Feelings Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life

Gulzar R. Charania



Contents

Acknowledgments / viii

Introduction: Dinner Parties, Classrooms, and Other Beginnings / 3

- 1 Writing People, Reading Life: Methodological Commitments / 29
- **2** Fragments, Feelings, Sometimes Words: From Memories to Racial Literacies / 38
- ${\bf 3}\quad Lessons\ in\ Racism: Enduring\ Memories\ of\ School\ /\ 82$
- ${\bf 4}\quad Quiet\ Queers:\ Gender,\ Sexuality,\ and\ Racial\ Formation\ /\ 146$
- **5** Canada: The Cost of Admission / 175

Conclusion: From Racial Injury to Anti-Racism? / 228

Notes / 238

Works Cited / 250

Index / 274

Dinner Parties, Classrooms, and Other Beginnings

This book has many beginnings. For now, we will start with a story and a dinner party. It was late, and there only four of us left. The light mood and uproarious laughter gave way to more serious conversation; things got quieter. A woman, whom I call Sara, told a story that she had never told – a story that I could not forget. It was the late 1970s, Sara was in Grade 6 and lived in a new publicly subsidized housing subdivision with many young families. Because there was not a school close by, Sara and the other neighbourhood kids were bused to and from the closest school. The kids met at central pick-up points and were dropped off at the end of the day in groups. Describing herself as Brown, Sara recalled another Brown student named Fatima, who liked to be called Fati. Fati was "hassled" both on and off the bus, called racist names, and "chased and pushed around." Sara recalls that at some point - she assumed that it was partly because of these incidents - Fatima was dropped off before the other students, not at the common drop-off place. Sara speculated that the point of this change was to make it harder for the kids to "rough up" Fatima as she walked home. Instead, Fatima's earlier drop-off turned into a challenge for Sara and other students to "chase the kid down." Sara remembered their renewed efforts to catch Fatima: "The people who were sprinting after her were the athletes. It was a bunch of white kids and me. I don't remember calling her names, but I know that I did. I remember very much being involved, but I wasn't the leader. I almost remember having a feeling that the kid was not human. It felt justified."

Sara deeply regretted what she had done, and although she found it exceedingly difficult to remember and recount the story, she also said that it was important to think about why she and others had been so cruel and hateful to Fati. As the years passed, Sara reflected in more pronounced ways on the school's response to the violence. She wondered why teachers and school officials hadn't done more to stop her and the other kids from hurting Fatima. The lesson that all the children had learned was that rather than stopping the violence, they needed to run faster. Even many decades later, this incident was raw and deeply imprinted on Sara's life. Then and now, I was curious about the effects of racial violence in her life and in the lives of other racialized people.¹ As I reflected on the story that Sara told, Fatima was familiar to me. I had also learned to run or sometimes to stand very still. Because we know the story only as Sara remembers it, we do not know how it shaped Fati. How would she tell the story? Is the memory of it something that she carries with her, tries to forget, almost remembers? The story was an opportunity to think more broadly about the racial landscapes in which people of colour find themselves and how we make sense of and respond to them.

The genealogy of *Fighting Feelings: Lessons in Gendered Racism and Queer Life* lies in the desire to understand what racism does to racialized people: how and in what directions do we learn to think, act, and live in relation to racism? This book investigates memories of racial violence in the lives of racialized women to trace their enduring impacts and exacting costs. Its central goal is to understand the complex ways that white supremacy is felt, lived, and experienced, and the divergent political horizons that it fosters.

As I learned in the process of researching and writing this book, the distance between familiarity and understanding can be significant. Things that I recognized on the surface, such as certain responses to racism, were much more complex than I had expected. This complexity became evident when I talked to people about the diffuse and long-term effects of racism in their lives and about how they had come to take up certain positions and practices in response to it rather than others. Sara was much less familiar to me. I was curious about her and what she had learned about racism, but thinking about Sara is not easy. She opens up a set of questions about how people of colour not only contest racial hierarchies but also contribute to their reproduction. We are sometimes its accomplices – some of us more than others. How did Sara try to take cover from racism in ways that took the "heat off" her but also intensified the "heat" for Fatima? Taking seriously how

structures of racism harm and constrain racialized women, *Fighting Feelings* also turns its analytic attention to how racialized people are invited to reproduce racial hierarchies in their bids to stay safe or to respond to brutalizing structures. In other words, racism is not without complications (Farley 1997). The narratives throughout this book reveal how some racialized people try to make white supremacy work for them a bit more or hurt them a bit less. The ways that we sometimes take cover can also cost other people. As I demonstrate, there is no place outside white supremacy. My work attempts to capture a range of negotiations with racism while maintaining clarity about the differential impacts of and invitations into whiteness.²

This book also has another set of coordinates that can be found in my work as an educator in high schools and universities. Among other roles, I was a teaching assistant and instructor in an interdisciplinary social justice program at the undergraduate level. It was a program that attracted many racialized students, some of whom did not have linear educational trajectories. At the same time that I was reading and thinking about how to think about racism, including its organization and effects, I was also teaching, preparing lectures, and marking assignments. Many students took a course in the program as an elective, out of interest; others came searching for a place where they could think in more sustained ways about the social organization of oppression, including its histories and contemporary resonances. Over the years, I encountered students with varying degrees of fluency in issues of racism and social justice. I became increasingly curious about their political formation and about their struggles with and insights into racism and social change. How were these students living with and learning about racism? Like many scholars and people interested in cultivating the conditions that make social justice possible, I have long been curious about how personal and social change happens. How are people changed? How do people change things? How do they develop an attachment to ideas and practices of social justice? In one of my tutorials, as usual, I opened the class asking whether the students had questions, comments, or anything that they wanted to put on the table for discussion. Afua started to share how difficult some of the materials were to read, not only for that week but in general. When I asked her to say more about this difficulty, she talked about what it meant to be a Black person reading histories of slavery, displacement, and racism and about the force of these systems in her life and the lives of the people she loved. As she spoke, she placed her forehead on the table and she wept. For a long time, our collective silence was broken only by the sound of her sobs. Other Black and racialized students started to

share their own experiences of racism and all of the harms that it deposited in their lives, including their struggles with professors and police officers, their difficulties finding employment and housing, but most of all, how exhausting and despairing it was to live with racism and sometimes even to learn about it. In the midst of our conversation, a student arrived to the tutorial late. He was white. Everyone stopped talking.

Both this classroom example and the recounting of Sara's story took place in spaces with only racialized people. This was not entirely surprising to me. As Sherene H. Razack (1998, 48) points out, "Few people of colour have ever considered learning in a mixed-race environment as safe." Sara, Afua, and the students whom I was encountering in university classrooms demanded that I think more about the consequences and complexities of racist realities for Black and racialized people. In other words, what might happen without these white interruptions? In her review of Jodi Picoult's novel Small Great Things (2016), Roxane Gay (2016) reflects that some of her critiques of the book can be attributed to Picoult's imagined mostly white audience. Gay concludes that in subsequent work, she hopes Picoult will write about race "in ways that will also be compelling for the rest of us." Fighting Feelings is a book about race for the rest of us. It revealed itself to me slowly and convinced me that writing only to and for white audiences is a losing proposition. The academy constantly returns us to the authority of these audiences, and this approach needs to be displaced and replaced with forms of accountability that do not consolidate white authority about matters pertaining to racism. Although writing to white audiences is often politically strategic and necessary, it has provided little by way of racial justice or remedy; it has given us so little in return. Racism has proven to be remarkably resilient despite the many decades of research documenting its presence. This book does not set out to prove that racism exists. It assumes the realness of racism and seeks to understand its organization and impacts. Racism is not a problem of lack of information or even misinformation; it is a problem of white people's refusal to know. No amount of evidence will change this. This book refuses their authority.

Fighting Feelings offers critical insights to white readers, academics, and policy makers, but it is written intentionally and unapologetically for racialized readers. In particular, this book aims to dislodge the centrality of racialized men in critical race studies, white women in feminist studies, and white people in sexuality studies. As Black and women of colour feminists have long argued, racialized women are squeezed in and out of these struggles; like racism, these are old, unoriginal, and still relevant problems. Reflecting

on how much whiteness and concerns about alienating white people are centred in solidarity and social justice work, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson insists that creating "alternatives to co-resistance without centring or bowing to whiteness" is essential (Maynard and Simpson 2020, 78). In doing this difficult, slow, and necessary work, Simpson (2017, 231) writes that "our real white allies show up in solidarity anyway." In Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race, Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017, x) also reflects on how the "journey towards understanding structural racism still requires people of colour to prioritise white feelings." Following my participants – full of life, wisdom, and generosity – I have found it promising to explore what kinds of knowledge and insights might be generated when we centre the concerns, priorities, knowledge, and desires of racialized women. How Black and racialized women learn to decipher white supremacy and their search for safety are therefore at the heart of this project. This approach was not always easy, or comfortable, or without complications. However, one of many starting points is to recognize and refuse how much racism, in and outside the academy, shapes the what and how of our research, including questions worth asking and having answers to.

Marginalized people have long had to sort out how to harness, position, and represent even their oppression and its pain. One of the major goals of this work is to refuse the constraints of permitted stories of racism and to refuse to orient their telling to white audiences. A permitted story of racism that racialized people can recount is one about a terribly racist encounter that is overt and easily identifiable, allowing all other white people to comfortably distance themselves from the bad racist. The incident must be recounted quickly, and although pain is okay, it should not be belaboured. Anger can be uncomfortable, so if necessary, it needs to be judiciously targeted at the specific racist person and expressed appropriately; keeping an even voice can be helpful here. Finally, the narrator is expected to change gears to resilience and an upbeat attitude and, by way of conclusion, to smile and say something comforting and reassuring about the tolerance of Canada and Canadians. Such is the typical liberal story about racism and the boundaries of its expression. Attending to the everyday lives of women of colour reveals and challenges the power of this standardized account of racism in Canada, which spatially and temporally contains racism to other times, places, and people. It defines the limits of the stories that we can tell and the shape that they should take; it consists of singular racist events and exceptional racist people and is intelligible only when recounted in nonthreatening ways by reasonable people of colour. This story teaches Black

and racialized people that white feelings and comfort always matter more than our lives and realities. Instead, I endeavour to describe more fully the legacies of everyday racial violence in the lives of women of colour, insisting that we not gloss over them quickly but stay in these stories, feel how they were told, detail how they were thought, trace their resonances, and link them to the systems that gave rise to them in the first place.

To return to Afua, she and the other students insisted that our responses to racism should reckon with weeping and feeling. This task is difficult. People of colour often do risky things like weep and feel in private. In public, some of us organize, trace how racism works, teach, compile evidence, and sort out ways to interrupt racist practices. Little material in a yearlong course responded to her despair and to that of other students – to the affective landscapes through which white supremacy is so often lived, landscapes that accompanied the historical and contemporary practices that we pored over in readings week after week. We studied racism as a set of practices and ideas. What to do with feelings in a university classroom? What to do with feelings in a book - this book? These became pressing questions in the analysis and writing of this project. Fighting Feelings is an effort to understand and respond to the despair and privatization of racial harm in the lives of women of colour. Having been harmed by racism in immeasurable ways, many of them participated in this project because they wanted to understand and pass on some of their memories and reflections. And they wanted me to do something with them. Although racial injury was not what I set out to explore, it became relevant, even central, to how the lessons of racism were learned and remembered and to the kinds of responses that they generated. Although I was initially reluctant to focus on injury and harm or, in line with Eve Tuck (2009, 412), to report back on women of colour as "damaged," the stories nonetheless recounted damage in great detail. It took me a long while to sort out how to respond to it. This was a challenge not only because I had not set out to engage with the affective repercussions of racism but, more than that, critical theorists encourage a suspicious stance on emotions, unmasking how they can be used to evade issues of power and accountability.3 Feelings, particularly white feelings, can easily shore up dominance. Writing this project taught me to temper my dismissal of emotions and to think instead about their production and productiveness in the lives of women of colour, to consider what feelings do and how they move people in certain ways and directions. I stopped fighting feelings and started paying attention to them.

Fighting Feelings is concerned with the kinds of practices, politics, knowledges, and affective landscapes that racism creates in the lives of racialized women. It is based on original empirical research with Black and racialized women, most of whom were undergraduate students from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds.4 The book demonstrates that spectacularly quotidian racism is not anomalous but it structures the lives, educational aspirations, and futures of racialized women. Based on this qualitative inquiry, I tarry in microsites and memories of early racist aggression, contending squarely with what racism costs women of colour. We cry because we are confused, hurt, angry, exhausted, devastated, fearful, and lonely, but we also cry because we are loved and protected and dreaming futures that white supremacy makes it hard to imagine. Perhaps the first lesson that I drew from this work at the onset of this study was the injunction not to hurry past pain. Although it would be a mistake to think of people as only hurt or damaged, it is also a mistake to rush past these places. In his work on schools as sites of Black suffering, Michael J. Dumas (2014) insists that although racial suffering is an entirely predictable outcome of state schooling in America, we know much less about how Black and racialized subjects understand, articulate, and know their losses. It is important, Dumas argues, to get under how mundane their suffering appears and to attend to its social production. Sara Ahmed (2007, 164) also reflects on the desire to rush over "unhappy stories of racism." Instead, she points out that institutions are much more eager to solicit stories of good practice and resistance racism overcome. Stories of overcoming racism, Ahmed argues, "can involve a defence against hearing about racism as an ongoing and unfinished history that we have yet to describe fully" (165). Although it does not sum up the lives of participants, this book does turn an analytic lens on these unhappy stories. I amplify stories never told, both those remembered very quietly and those that women of colour have tried desperately and imperfectly to forget. What and how do they remember? What produces the almost forgetting? Listening to participants also evoked far-away memories from my own life, and in some places, I have included them. I excavate the labour and potential of returning to these memories, however difficult and fraught, as well as the incentives for people of colour to keep them buried. It turns out that learning to understand racism requires a lot of labour, and sometimes there are incentives for people of colour not to see. This project illuminates that as

much as "racial literacies" (Twine 2010, 92) are cultivated, they are also powerfully curtailed.⁵

As Charles Mills (1997) notes, the power of the racial contract lies not only in the political systems that it entrenches and in the material consequences that it produces. The power of racism and the post-racial landscape also lies in its ability to demarcate true from false, to declare what is racist and what is not, to delineate correct ways to interpret our experiences from incorrect ones. The racial contract entices people to "misinterpret the world ... to see the world wrongly" (18, emphasis in original), with the force of white authority sanctioning their misinterpretations. Racial domination eviscerates context, history, and structure. It distorts reality. Fighting Feelings follows the tensions that this distortion creates in the microsites of Black and racialized women's lives and in the aftermaths of racial domination. So many endlessly struggle to register, and to convey to themselves and others, racism as a fact – a fact of life, a fact of their lives. They labour to turn it into something real. Mills points out that having access to accurate concepts through which to understand racism in our lives is not a theoretical exercise. Not having these concepts can "hinder learning, interfere with memory, block inferences, obstruct explanation, and perpetuate problems" (7). Ideas have consequences, and there is a lot at stake in the conceptual apparatus that we use to understand racism. This book makes visible the struggles between vastly different stories of racism, narrowly admitted as a relic of the past or as an enduring condition of the present. There are people who bear the weight of these significant variations in the story of what racism can be, where it is found, and what it does. It is their struggles and meaning making that this book centres.

While maintaining a clear focus on racial domination, *Fighting Feelings* traces the complex convergence of race, class, gender, and sexuality in the lives of racialized women. The analysis is animated by how these structural vulnerabilities are lived and navigated simultaneously. Despite the ease and ubiquity with which such intersectional aspirations are now articulated in the academy, many of us continue to wrestle with how structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality work themselves out together in people's lives. The book's account of gendered racism and queer life highlights the gendered force and specificity of racial injustice for women of colour as well as its impacts on their sexual lives and politics. One of the book's foundational commitments is that there is much to be gained from situating women of colour at the heart of our analysis, not only as targets of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy but also collectively as people with compelling insights

into their organization and reproduction and into possibilities for their interruption. Recuperating a clear, analytic lens with which to understand, name, and intervene in racism remains a driving preoccupation of this project.

I began this research imagining that I would be exploring how racial literacies develop across multiple landscapes, from the school to the university and from the home to institutional life. Although I gathered stories and experiences on all these sites, I was overwhelmed by reflections on early schooling and on childhood. Childhood endures. There is undoubtedly a sequel to this book, but in this project, I keep the analytic gaze mainly on the experiences and landscapes of public schools and on childhood as a measure of their importance in participants' narratives. It quickly became evident that one could not understand later experiences of and responses to racism without first dwelling on the context in which racial literacy first develops. I pay attention to homes and families, schools and teachers, peers and strangers, as well as everyday encounters in the national landscape. Together, these places and relationships cultivate and curtail understandings of racism and encourage women of colour to think, act, and speak in particular ways, rather than others, in relation to racism. Principally, this book gives an account of racism and its effects and traces the accounts of racism that it is possible for people of colour to give. Its analysis reveals that women of colour are often caught between feelings and experiences that materialize oppression in their daily lives, on the one hand, and dominant post-racial, neoliberal horizons that evacuate collective histories, politics, and a public language with which to name racism, on the other hand. In short, racial injury is privatized. I explore this primary tension that marked interviews - of becoming entrepreneurs of the harm and pain that racism deposits in the lives of women of colour or throwing responsibility for racism back to the people and conditions that produce it. Not only do ideas have consequences, but the ideas that these women of colour articulate are also best understood as consequences of the landscapes that have furnished them. In particular, I trace the force of Canadian multicultural pedagogies in displacing an analysis of racism and white settler colonialism and in compelling its forgetting. This lesson is learned powerfully in state schools. Although not all participants were domesticated or seduced by multiculturalism, none escaped its influence (Thobani 2007). This book contends with the contradictions and tensions of racial, sexual, political, and affective formation in this murky landscape.

Racial injury is where many of the stories discussed in this work begin, but it is not where they end. This book traces the racial politics that emerge from these experiences of racism. As I show, there is no readily available language for narrating racism. For many women in this study, racism was difficult to understand and describe and was lived out in isolated and isolating ways in their childhoods and early years. As Audre Lorde (1984, 152) observes, "racism and sexism are grown-up words," often out of children's reach. I explore how the naming of racism and its occlusion – fragments, feelings, and sometimes words - are part of the powerful racial inheritances that the women share. At times, I dwell in affective landscapes to understand how emotions and feelings pushed up against ideas in the emergence of racial literacies. In other words, children could feel racial injustice even when they could not name it as such. Participants who grew up in homes where understandings of racism were provided by parents and grandparents enjoyed distinct advantages in this regard. Their feelings found words. And these words encouraged them to place disorienting experiences of racism in social and historical contexts, helping them to understand that racism was a system that had been changed, that could be changed. And it was not only knowledge that was inherited but also affective instruction; the girls learned to feel themselves as something other and more than a racist word or a circulating set of ideas put in motion by white supremacy. The love of family members fortified them. If, as Richard Iton (2008, 9) argues, "politics is, among other things, a contest about what matters and ought to be subject to consideration and debate," we have to take love seriously, alongside the longing to feel good and the ability to live positively, and we have to do so in ways that expand our understandings of political life and desire.

"Understanding everyday racism," to use Philomena Essed's (1991) fitting phrase, provides relief, but it also generates divergent pulls and discrepant desires. The participants disrupt linear readings of political formation and development. Their politics are stuttering and nonteleological. They do not move from oppressed to empowered (Kandiyoti 1988; Mahmood 2005; Mahtani 2014; Tuck 2011), and they often confound easy distinctions between progressive and conservative. Their narratives are full of conflicting, contradictory, and disorderly moments when agency is differently articulated and exercised. In some cases, women of colour who have a remarkable fluency in matters of racism turn away from it. Learning about racism is painful and difficult and not always welcomed. As Deniz Kandiyoti (1988, 286) argues, "New strategies and forms of consciousness do not

simply emerge from the ruins of the old and smoothly produce a new consensus, but are created through personal and political struggles, which are often complex and contradictory." My analysis captures this complexity by tracing networks of power and processes of learning about racism, as well as participants' attempts to loosen the conditions of constraint in their lives. Learning to live in a system not intended for your success or survival requires an enormous amount of labour and effort. In this process, people are not heroes or victims. Instead, following Robin Kelley's (1996, 13) writing on Black working-class struggles, I "try to make sense of people where they are rather than where we would like them to be." I write about this complexity without letting go of the need to image collective horizons of life not so heavily governed by racism and its harm.

At the start of this project, I set out to find good anti-racist subjects, girls who grew into women with a strong analysis of their own racial insubordination and were emboldened to fight it. What I ended up with is a much clearer picture of the conditions that regulate and constrain the development of racial literacies and anti-racist politics. In other words, the story most available for the women of colour in this study to narrate is the permitted one. Social justice turns out not to be an easily available horizon. It is in fact a heavily managed project (Lentin 2011; McRobbie 2009). Focusing on the movement in social movements, Deborah Gould (2009) considers what it means to be moved and by what and in which direction. My participants encouraged me to think about how slow, hesitant, and laborious their movements and learning had sometimes been, orienting them not only to social change but also to forms of inaction and stagnation. Often, their movements were not directed to the conditions that had produced oppression. Instead, they had frequently learned how to better live with and manage racism. However, as I emphasize throughout, this finding is not to be taken as an indication of the women's failure to develop anti-racist politics. Instead, it draws attention to the larger institutional, historical, and national conditions that evacuate the ability of many women of colour to name and analyze the racism that they experience. The problem is not of overcoming racism; the problem is that racism is organized to keep coming. In harder to find moments, racial justice does materialize as a possibility and aspiration, and I consider the conditions that cultivate it, the openings that it affords, and how hard it often is to hold onto.

I suspect that many of us invested in social movements and anti-racist politics can relate to the desire for strong and resistant subjects with clearly defined racial literacies and politics. People rarely live this kind of clarity or

coherence. White supremacy leaves diffuse effects and dispersed fears, aspirations, anxieties, and practices that are much more difficult to disentangle in people's lives. It is in investigating these structural forces at their multiple points of articulation, where they land in our lives, that we can come to trace the familiar, unfamiliar, and capacious ways that racism works and adapts itself, the effects that it has, and the lessons that it imparts. Through an analysis of the women of colour in this study, we see the emergence of multiple racial literacies and complex political formations. No singular story emerges, except that racism weighs people down in profound ways, and although racism is a lived condition, it is lived differently. Following Avery F. Gordon (1997, 4-5), I wanted to afford these women the right to complexity in their lives. The "right to complex personhood," as Gordon puts it, "means that people suffer graciously and selfishly too, get stuck in the symptoms of their troubles, and also transform themselves ... At the very least, complex personhood is about conferring the respect on others that comes from presuming that life and people's lives are simultaneously straightforward and full of enormously subtle meaning." I had to learn to listen carefully. I had to loosen my own ideas about radical subjects and resistant politics, how they would present themselves, the words that they would use, and the fights that they would fight. Not everyone is brave in the same way or in ways that are visible. My analysis looks beyond people's theoretical inconsistencies and incoherence in response to racism in order to focus instead on what their responses to racism actually achieve in their lives and contexts. What are the strategies and repertoires on which people draw in their everyday lives, and what are their effects? What do they help them to do? One of the enduring lessons that these women taught me is that in looking for anti-racist, feminist, and queer politics to announce itself loudly and visibly, we miss more quiet articulations of political life and sexual politics. Racialized women with a sharp analysis of racism and oppression can and often do refuse to speak publicly about racism and queer desire. Such women of colour can easily be read or dismissed as people whose politics are insufficiently developed. I argue that we need better and more careful ways of reading their lives and politics. Their silences do not signal the absence of racial and queer politics or analysis. In the case of the participants in this study, they are better understood as strategic calculations of risk in their everyday lives. Women of colour are adept at calibrating risks of different kinds. We have to be. Fighting Feelings provides the backstory about some of these careful calculations.

Anchors: Complicity and Complexity

The theoretical commitments that anchor this project emerge from the insights, tensions, and dilemmas that racialized women shared. Each chapter further develops and interweaves these theoretical conversations in relation to their lives and experiences. This project not only accounts for the harms that racism creates in the lives of women of colour but also investigates the complexity of responses that it engenders. At different times and within the same interviews, racialized women shared their struggles to make meaning of and respond to racist violence, reaching for ways to survive, to thrive, and sometimes to imagine liberation. As revealed by Sara, with whom I open this book, we sometimes survive by harming others. Discussing the complications of identity and community, Cathy Park Hong (2020, 109) asks, "Can I write honestly? Not only about how much I've been hurt but how I have hurt others?" This is a difficult question and Fighting Feelings endeavours to take it seriously. How do we contend with the reality that not only are we subject to harm, but we are also subjects who harm? I engage with and extend the emerging and established feminist scholarship on relational analyses of racism, on Black, Indigenous, and people of colour asymmetries, and on interlocking analytics (Alexander 2005; Collins 2000; Dhamoon 2021; Jafri 2012; Jiwani 2006a; King 2019; R. Lee 2017; Lorde 1984; Lowe 2015; Mahtani 2014; Mawani 2009; Maynard 2017; Maynard and Simpson 2020; Nath 2021; S. Patel 2016; S. Patel and Nath 2022; Razack 1998; Coloma 2013; Thobani 2007; Tuck and Yang 2012). Collectively, this scholarship insists on the relational, differentiated, and interconnected ways that "different racisms and colonialisms" operate (Dhamoon 2021, 876). Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001, 671) are mindful that racism and oppression not only generate resistance, they also create "new sites of power" and solidify existing ones. Theorizing power through a "matrix of domination," Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 287) explains that oppression is replete with contradictions, as "each individual derives varying amounts of penalty and privilege from the multiple systems of oppression which frame everyone's lives." Black and women of colour feminists have been particularly attentive to the complexity of power, insisting that marginality does not preclude one from participating in and reproducing systems of domination.

Throughout this book, I draw from this literature on the interdependence of oppression, as it provides an analytic of power that is centred in notions not only of solidarity and resistance but also of complicity. Mary

Louise Fellows and Sherene H. Razack (1998) caution that retreating to positions of innocence or subordination in the face of multiple, interlocking systems of power does not fully capture the range of ways that we are entangled in and reproduce these very systems. Shaista Patel, Ghaida Moussa, and Nishant Upadhyay (2015) insist on an analysis of complicity for differently racialized people which is historically situated, specific, and differentiated from that of white people. Building on an interlocking analysis of power, Beenash Jafri (2012) argues that complicity - distinguished from privilege, with its more static analysis of power – is "messy, complicated and entangled." Complicity relies on a dynamic understanding of power that has the potential to shift our analysis away from "individual absolution of responsibility, guilt, and culpability" and toward investigating not only how we are invited to uphold colonial and racial power but also the collective strategies that can interrupt and dismantle it. Fighting Feelings reveals the texture and meaning of these struggles as they are embedded in the lives of racialized women and their memories of childhood. Black and racialized girls struggle imperfectly, as we all do. Rather than using these imperfections to indict them, this book situates itself alongside these struggles to learn with and from them. It does not give up on accountability, but it also never gives up on Black and racialized girls and women.

M. Jacqui Alexander (2005, 272) invites us to consider the always "unfinished work" of understanding our relationships to power and hierarchy and the political commitments that we come to take up and practice. As Alexander emphasizes, "both complicity and vigilance are learned in this complicated process of figuring out who we are and who we wish to become" (272). As much as the material structures of oppression require intervention, Audre Lorde (1984) reminds us that the work of social transformation is simultaneously individual and interior, exterior and collective. Asking us to account for how we are necessarily shaped by the forces that we are attempting to alter, Lorde writes, "We have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures" (123). Studying our lives is necessary political work. In her writing on complexity and complicity, Alexis Shotwell (2016, 5) argues that rather than searching for a never attainable place of theoretical, political, and situated purity from which to act and live, "complicity and compromise" can offer useful entry points for collective and individual action. Shotwell does not give up on better ways to think, live, and act but reconfigures wrestling and

reckoning with "where we are" (4) as the grounds for this work. There is no doubt about the need to urgently confront white supremacy's elasticity and its enfolding of some racialized subjects. It encourages and incentivizes racialized people to disavow racism and settler colonial violence, or it punishes them for refusing to do so.

My attention to racialized people's complicity, although critical, is not without risks. The relationship between complicity and racial subordination cannot be discounted altogether, yet a disproportionate focus on such incidents obscures pervasive individual and systemic racism, of which white people are the primary agents and beneficiaries. As Razack (2004) also reminds us, although we need to consider the actions of racially subordinate people in relation to racial violence, this focus must not eclipse the extent to which such practices are rejected. This book attends to racialized women's divergent strategies for survival - their refusals, resistances, and complicities while also accounting for the constrained racial conditions in which people come to take up these practices. While individual choices are consequential, Fighting Feelings casts our gaze from individual choices, predicaments, and politics to the conditions that produce them. To return to Sara, what had she learned about racism as a child that led her to align herself with the white children and to participate in racial violence against Fatima? What are the specifics of the Brownness that connect and divide Sara and Fatima? What are we to make of Sara's participation in this violence? These reflections are not meant to rescue Sara or to gloss over her actions and their impacts; rather, they are an effort to understand her analysis and what her actions accomplished. Attending to the lives of ordinary women and girls, like those in this study, can offer important insights about political formation. The tension that recurs in racialized people's lives is that the mess and harm of racism are not only interpreted to produce critical readings of the world or anti-racist actions in relation to it. How might we read and write racialized women's lives with complexity, care, and generosity without ever letting go of accountability?

The question of how to live with racism without becoming weighed down by privatized pain and mired in the work of individual survival is an urgent one. As we see throughout this book, Sara and others also reached for and practised ethical obligations in other instances. It would be a mistake to think of Sara and Fatima as different kinds of people or to imagine people as singularly resistant or complicit. Instead, Sara and the participants in this study remind us that people take up a variety of practices in relation to racism and racial hierarchies. Their responses teach us not only about

racialized women's complicated survival practices but also about the enduring power of racism and their desperate efforts to escape its hold and harm. Following Alexander's (2005) reflections about political positions as always becoming, this book insists on the need for racialized people to have space and time to reflect on how we have been shaped by racism and to sharpen and revise our analysis of power and our political commitments to one another. In this way, one of the primary goals of *Fighting Feelings* is a pedagogical one. The book is an invitation to cultivate curiosity about the legacies of racism in our lives. It is not about performing pain and trauma for white audiences but about creating the conditions to understand how white supremacy distorts, ensnares, and harms us and how we try to survive it in complicated and sometimes complicitous ways. This book intervenes in anti-racist work that is oriented exclusively to white audiences.

White supremacy is a project that requires a great deal of violence on the part of all of us who are invited into it on highly specific terms. Although we are all implicated within racial hierarchies, we are by no means equally implicated or impacted. Following these collective insights and cautions, this book takes on the challenge of capturing the complexities and complicities with which racism is lived and learned without dissolving critical distinctions between white and differently racialized people and without glossing over the costly consequences of racism for the latter. In focusing on Sara and Fatima, in other words, it is critical that we not miss the group of mostly white children who chase and harm Fatima and the white school officials who abdicate their responsibility to care for and protect her.

It is not possible to write a book confronting the subtle and vicious racism that is endlessly visited on racialized girls and young women in schools without contending with the fact that, invariably, this harm is inflicted by white teachers and almost always by white women. This book is more than a call for "deeper self-examination" (Srivastava 2005, 31) on the part of white women teachers, for as Sarita Srivastava observes, a preoccupation with the self and morality often stalls anti-racist work. In other words, white self-improvement comes to stand in for structural change. Anti-racist practices in schools must accompany necessary introspection and individual and collective efforts at accountability, or to return to Lorde's insights, social justice efforts require work on the inside *and* outside. The narratives detailed throughout *Fighting Feelings* require a reckoning with white supremacy; diversity, difference, and discrimination will not get us to where we need to go. Educational accountability to racialized communities, particularly to Black and racialized girls and women, remains urgent and elusive. In

thinking about the everyday lives of racialized women, this book demands that we sit with and sort carefully through these complex landscapes while keeping a clear gaze on the white beneficiaries of racial domination.

Emotions

My analysis of participants' narratives draws eclectically on feminist, critical race, and queer scholarship that recuperates emotion to account not only for the harm that racism creates but also for the role of emotion in producing knowledge (Ahmed 2010; Berlant 2011; Boler 1999; Bonilla-Silva 2019; Cheng 2001; Gould 2009; Hochschild 2003; Jaggar 1989; Love 2007; Million 2013). Rather than conceptualizing emotions as private and interior to the lives of individuals, this scholarship encourages a social, structural, and historical perspective on the affective landscapes through which racism and oppression are lived. Within this broader literature, the specific insights and interventions of Black and women of colour feminists furnish some of the most thoughtful and sophisticated ways of understanding the emotions generated by racism (Ahmed 2010; Davis 2008; Essed 1991, 2004; hooks 1995; Lorde 1982, 1984; Nash 2013; Srivastava 2006; P.J. Williams 1991). This rerouting is critical given the elision of Black and women of colour feminists in affect studies. As Jennifer Nash (2013), Claudia Garcia-Rojas (2017), and Nicole Charles (2022) insist, Black and women of colour feminists have long investigated the production and circulation of emotions to diagnose racism and oppression, exposing the emotional and material harms that they deposit in racialized people's lives and the unpredictable ways that we are shaped by them. The groundbreaking theoretical and empirical work that they have generated on love, rage, pleasure, and a range of social and embodied feelings, Garcia-Rojas (2017, 256) argues, prefigure and are overwhelmingly disavowed in the affective turn that institutionalizes "White affects and White affect studies." As Charles (2022) observes, women of colour feminist theory has been particularly attentive to how racialized people make sense of, navigate, and resist the structures that shape and limit their lives, and Nash (2013, 4) intervenes to centralize Black feminism within "affect theory's intellectual genealogy" (see also Mosley 2022).

Following these collective interventions, *Fighting Feelings* recuperates the earlier contributions of Black and women of colour feminisms into the more contemporary resurgence of feminist, queer, and critical theories of emotion and affect, arguing that the social and political consequences of everyday racial injury need to be better attuned to its affective dimensions.

In this way, this book also broadens an analysis of racial literacy, insisting on the centrality of emotions in making sense of the world and systems of gendered racism. Racialized women in this study live blurred boundaries between public and private, emotional and political, individual and social, present and historical, and sometimes they are subject to racism's devastation before they have the words to name it. The chapters that follow are anchored in describing, understanding, and being witness to the violence that these women contend with and fight against and are motivated by a collective responsibility to care for and about their losses and lives. They insist that the affective burdens of racism are not the property of racialized people and their interior lives but the result of racist practices and conditions. Rather than suggesting that we turn away from political life, the narratives push for a politics that can be responsive to this racial despair and suffering and insist that these emotional life-worlds be considered in the context of making meaning of and responding to racism.

Fighting Feelings, as the title of this book, is meant to illuminate the affective as a terrain of struggle in the lives of racialized women. Sometimes they fought feelings, and other times they used feelings to fight. I follow the multiple registers of struggle that the participants expressed. The book underlines how feelings, such as anger and rage at racial injustice, are mobilized in the fight against racism - in other words, feelings help racialized women to diagnose and fight back against racism. With these examples, we observe how affects are articulated to a sense of political action and social change, with an analytic focus on the conditions under which they are cultivated. Other stories of feelings are much more confused. Participants frequently describe experiencing an embodied dissonance between the rage, harm, despair, loneliness, fear, and pain of racist violence and the injunction to live in multicultural Canada, with its enforcement of racelessness. The nation gaslights them. This policing and patrolling of responses to and experiences of racism permits and fortifies certain meanings and feelings while constraining others. In short, recalling Mills's (1997) insights on racial domination, we observe that participants were disciplined to disavow racism as white people and the settler nation instructed them to do in order to secure white feelings, histories, and interpretations of social life. Racialized women come up against these white blockades routinely. In this particular affective conflict, white violence is invisibilized and white innocence protected. In other instances, participants elaborate on the felt impossibility of living with the relentlessness of racist harm. The desire to live free of this violence meant that participants sometimes laboured to push an analysis of

racism away. They did not necessarily turn their exclusion into a struggle against racism and oppression; sometimes they longed for life to be easier and less painful.

Paying attention to despair, exhaustion, envy, and other emotional conditions opened up the relationship between racism and social inaction. Not everyone wanted to fight back or knew how. Referencing Anne Anlin Cheng (2001), Heather Love (2007, 14) insists on the need to engage "ways of feeling bad that do not make us feel like fighting back." Although Love does not abandon the need to organize and fight back, she does want us to think more deeply "about how to bring that aspiration in line with the actual experience of being under attack" (14). As Sianne Ngai (2005) observes in Ugly Feelings, theoretical attention to emotions such as anger and fear is underwritten by an interest in their utility to political action and change. Instead, Ngai focuses on "minor and generally unprestigious feelings" (6) such as envy, irritation, negativity, and passivity for their remarkable durability and lack of catharsis and for how they interfere with movement, critique, and change. She follows these negative feelings to an agency that is not only "obstructed" (3), "suspended or curtailed" (353) but also incisive in its ability to diagnose powerlessness. Throughout this book, participants describe resignation, irritation, and a much more conflicted relationship to affect and political agency that is not always or only transformative but also ambivalent and exhausted. They claim the right not to care about racism, not to be devastated by it, not to be vulnerable, not to despair. Racialized people are often stuck in and stalled by racism. This understanding clarifies much about the force of racism and how it encloses the possibilities of life and agency for racialized people. We should not have to be heroic, exceptional, or resilient to live, work, and receive an education, but racism often requires an extraordinariness from racialized girls and women in order for them to simply survive. In all of these interconnected predicaments, feelings circulate as social and relational, revealing structures of racial power. "Emotional rules" can secure or subvert "particular hierarchies of gender, race, and class," and they can encourage us, through "learned emotional expressions and silences" (Boler 1999, xxi), to maintain relations of power or to get angry in a way that enables collective forms of analysis and engagement. Sometimes the participants did get angry in this latter way but not many and not often.

Feelings not only diagnose structures of racial harm but also help racialized girls and women to dream and claim spaces of reprieve and rest. The endless stories of racism that racialized girls encountered in schools,

primarily from teachers, were alarming. When I asked what they would like to see change in schools, most talked about how they wanted to feel - safe, respected, believed, capable, smart, cared for, seen. They wanted schools to be places where they could breathe. The feelings that they were denied but desired and were owed can provide us with blueprints for schools that are accountable for the well-being of racialized girls. Their feelings are demands.

Quiet

This book is anchored in the politics of quiet. Teaching has encouraged me to reflect on the different meanings of quiet. While teaching interdisciplinary social justice courses at the undergraduate level, I often discussed with my classes the quiet and important ways that students were living and struggling with the many kinds of racism and injustices that I amplify throughout this book. Students commonly expressed that they did not identify as or relate to activists because they did not participate in organized or overt political action. Their resistance was not loud. The majority of women of colour who participated in this study similarly refused the term "activist" to refer to themselves, and most were not involved in organized social movements. Yet their various engagements with and understandings of racial oppression are important for thinking about processes of social change and for amplifying the tensions and dilemmas of confronting and looking away from racial harm and injustice. They help us to appreciate why things change and why they stay the same. Expanding what counts as politics – who does it, where it takes place, and what it looks like – forms an important backdrop to this project. I am hoping that other people of colour who read Fighting Feelings will find the people here relatable, rather than exceptional, and that this might enable reflection about their and our political horizons and ways of living race.

As Kevin Quashie (2012) argues, a specific focus on loud and public resistance to racial domination has come to define perspectives on Black culture and identity. He does not disregard this important work but supplements and redirects it with a meditation on quiet. *Fighting Feelings* follows Quashie's invitation to think not only about Black and racialized subjects who are publicly resistant but also about what can be learned and observed through and with quiet. For example, the choice of participants to turn away from a recognizable anti-racist politics might also be read as a refusal of a life of protest, where one is required to counter racism or to live in response to it. What quiet practices, relationships to racism, and desires outside of it go unrecognized? For some women, living outside of white

supremacy's grip is both a felt impossibility and an absolute necessity. These women are not subjects who are oblivious to the political realities of injustice that surround them; rather, we observe their struggles for a life not determined by it. They are not the accumulation of devastation and violence. This refusal is also generative, as it suggests that life exceeds the "familiar characterizations of victimization or triumph over racism" (8), and although collective politics and fighting against racism are necessary, so too is apprehending the different ways that racialized people fight, the "work of reveling in flowers or blue sky – the daily practice of understanding what you love and why. That is enough" (72). Sometimes the women in this book refuse to make racism their obligation or problem to solve; racism does not get to have everything. It is important to notice the beauty in their insistence rather than simply measuring it against a specific tradition of racial literacy and politics.

Learning to listen for quiet is one of the many gifts and insights that the women of colour participants offer. They expressed lots of different kinds of quiet in the interviews: the quiet of not knowing what to say, quiet tears, quiet pauses, quiet looking around, quiet fear, quiet rage, quiet confusion, quiet not knowing yet, quiet misunderstanding, quiet searching for a word, the quiet of words trailing off, quiet refusal, unexplained quiet, quiet defiance, quiet shame, quiet comfort, awkward quiet, quiet laughter, loud quiet, quiet quiet, quiet love, hard quiet, quiet queerness, quiet fragments, quiet movements, quiet ambitions, quiet courage, quiet risks, quiet complicity, quiet regret, quiet violence, sometimes quiet, impossible quiet, quiet desire, quiet dreams, quiet desperation, quiet promises, quiet protection, quiet exhaustion, quiet calculations, quiet listening, quiet grief, quiet together, quiet struggling, lonely quiet, quiet prayers. Racism is sometimes loud and sometimes quiet. One of the contributions of *Fighting Feelings* is to rearticulate quiet in the lives of women of colour as meaningful, rich, powerful, and expressive. It is sometimes absence but not always. It is sometimes complicitous but not necessarily. Quiet is also different modalities of living and feeling, thinking and doing politics that we are not always attuned to deciphering.

Overall, *Fighting Feelings* contends with how racialized women are both subject to and complicit in racial harm. White supremacy is a system whose harm is multidirectional. In the pages that follow, we are invited to "thinkfeel" alongside women of colour as they learn about this system, feel its imprint, struggle to give it words, and wrestle with its authority.

Feeling Stories and Accumulated Losses: Chapter by Chapter

Each of the chapters in *Fighting Feelings* engages with how racial literacies are acquired or evacuated, their shifting contours and meanings, and the practices to which they give rise. Throughout, I centralize how structural conditions of racism and oppression are lived and racial literacies developed. In centring the complex life-worlds of participants, each chapter considers how to engage theory with life and what can be gained from thinking about them together. At times, theories are useful for bringing structure, history, and collectivity to lives individually lived. At other times, lives lived challenge us to think about what theory misses or overlooks or about what is to be gained in pushing back against its limits. Chapter 1, "Writing People, Reading Life: Methodological Commitments," confronts and reworks academic conventions and forms. In addition to its theoretical, empirical, and political contributions, Fighting Feelings argues that methodologically, there is something to be gained from rethinking the ease with which academics subject racialized people's lives to use in the academy. Turning people into bodies and bodies into evidence is something that the academy is very good at doing and teaching. The methodological notes in this chapter are guided by the insights of racialized women in this book and by Black, Indigenous, and women of colour feminisms, with the goal of reorienting academic lessons on how to read and write the lives of women of colour. Fighting Feelings is anchored in these lessons.

Chapter 2, "Fragments, Feelings, Sometimes Words," is concerned with the prominent place of early racial memories in the emergence of racial literacies. The memories are sometimes small snapshots that are difficult both to remember and to forget. These "firsts" marked violent and confusing interruptions of childhood as well as introductions to old and suffocating histories. Not everyone wanted to talk at length about their families, childhoods, or early encounters with racism, but most discussed how profoundly these "inaugural moment[s]" (Hartman 1997, 3) of racial violence had shaped them. This chapter integrates feminist and Black feminist autobiographical scholarship to explore the complexities of racial formation, including the histories, forms of survival, and longings for futures into which these complexities are folded. It explores the affective landscapes through which racism is experienced. Some of the women inherited explicit racial instruction, and this chapter traces the intergenerational transmission and reworking of racial literacies. In other cases, they are left with feelings that have no name. These participants pushed back against the search for racial literacy

in words alone, and the analysis provided explores how silences and words together facilitate shifting orientations to race and racism. I dwell in microsites of racial aggression to understand how the political horizons of participants were caught up in the feelings and meanings that racism produced. This chapter works toward rendering a social, historical, and structural account of encounters with racism and the harm that it leaves behind. It also recuperates earlier contributions of Black feminisms by integrating them into the more contemporary resurgence of feminist, queer, and critical race theories of emotion and affect, arguing that the social and political consequences of everyday racial injury need to be better attuned to its affective dimensions

A focus on what racism looked like and felt like in schools and how racialized women live with its enduring memories constitutes the heart of Chapter 3, "Lessons in Racism." The analysis builds on critical race scholarship in education to illuminate how racism operates but is dismissed and denied in schooling contexts. This chapter traces the profound consequences of these institutional practices on racialized girls and intervenes squarely in post-racial and post-feminist turns in educational discourses. Tracing their loud and quiet desperation in schools, I argue that racialized girls and women often fall through the "posts" in both post-racial and post-feminist landscapes. I hope to make such quiet, gendered desperation in the lives of racialized girls count more in educational studies. Despite the academic success of these girls, the analysis accounts for the many ways that schools fail and harm them and traces the different orientations to race, schooling, and futures that they develop. I consider the interpretations available to young racialized women for understanding and articulating their experiences of racial injury and the many ways that they are encouraged to quietly master and overcome the pain that racism deposits in their lives. Included in this chapter are considerations of how the category of model minority is lived and of the labour required to live it, as well as an account of this category's mutability. The participants teach us that being favoured by white supremacy is a dubious distinction, and they provide insights into how non-Black racialized people are collectively mobilized in the service of anti-Black racism. Racial literacies are developed not only in relation to whiteness but also between racialized communities. This chapter strengthens feminist contributions to critical race studies and lends critical race insights to feminist interventions in educational studies. It also suggests more expansive ways of reading the relationship between schools, emotions, racism, and resistance. These retrospective memories are

gathered to explore the collective losses that racialized girls and women suffer and the complicated bargains that they make.

Chapter 4, "Quiet Queers," attends to interlocking forms of power and centralizes the importance of gender and sexuality to racial formation. I illuminate how and why queer women of colour can so easily go missing, particularly in high schools. Just as the previous chapter follows quiet desperation, this chapter considers ways of being queer that require nuanced readings of queer desire. Few of these relationships were articulated within more familiar lesbian, queer, or bisexual taxonomies. It is easy, in other words, to miss them if we look for queer life to announce itself loudly and proudly. Partly because of the pressures and vulnerabilities that racism and heteropatriarchy created in their lives, the women were often unwilling to give up the limited protections afforded to them by heterosexuality. I dwell on their paths to queer life and on their sometimes quiet expressions of queer religiosity, arguing for a feminist practice of listening attentively to how racialized women make sense of and respond to structural vulnerabilities in their lives. Racialized women, including queer women, are constantly forced to calibrate risk. One response to this risk is to live and love quietly. By reading quiet queer lives as only shameful or insufficiently proud, we miss more open and expansive understandings of queer lives. In addition to reconsidering how sexual politics are lived, felt, and articulated, this chapter opens up productive questions about rethinking the secular inheritance of feminist and queer analytics. Gayatri Gopinath (2005, 46) discusses the "dangers of privileging antiracism as a singular political project," and the women I spoke with insisted that her caution be taken seriously. In particular, the lives of girls and women of colour instruct us in the inadequacies of racial literacies and anti-racist practices that are not also explicitly queer and feminist. One of the best ways to strengthen the ability of women and girls of colour to live queer lives is through an increased commitment to feminist anti-racist politics and organizing. If schools had been less racially hostile, young women of colour may have found less harmful ways to queer. This chapter insists that improving the lives and conditions of schooling for racialized girls and women requires strengthened interdisciplinary conversations, commitments, and crossings between critical race, feminist, and queer scholarship in education.

The fifth chapter, "Canada: The Cost of Admission," is divided into two thematic sections and is concerned with how racism is lived and learned in the nation. The first part of this chapter establishes the racialized underpinnings of Canadian citizenship and its consequences for racialized women.

In centring the experiences of different Brown subjects, I consider how some women of colour are offered a place in the nation through a multicultural politics that requires racism to be forgotten or privatized. This is the cost of admission. How racialized subjects are invited to reproduce postracial mythologies and to privatize racial injury is an important dilemma confronted by racialized subjects in contemporary Canada. Racism is simply incommensurate with the kind of place that Canada imagines itself to be and with the kind of people Canadians think that they are. Schools feature prominently in cultivating a standardized story of Canada that spatially and temporally contains racism in other times, places, and people. This containment puts into motion different strategies of provisionally embracing, critiquing, or repudiating the nation. This process unfolds in the context of the discursive authority of the nation to adjudicate how, where, and when racism is understood to take place. One of the analytic threads that I continue to trace throughout this chapter concerns the conditions and constraints under which racialized women are permitted to think, speak, and act in relation to racism. The second part of this chapter investigates the unsurprising erasure of settler colonial violence in these women's narratives. I reflect on this absence and consider the small openings afforded by a few of the participants to think in more meaningful ways about settler colonial practices. The question of how to take something up that is missing or barely there has been a challenge, yet the need to investigate settler colonialism's structuring and "powerful effects on Indigenous peoples and settlers" is urgent (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013, 8). Even as racialized people try to forge a home, find security, survive, get ahead, or claim a national space, a settler project continues and invites them and us to continue it. How are racial literacies formed in settler contexts, and how might they be formed otherwise? There are increasingly productive tensions and debates that not only push critical race and queer of colour scholars to articulate our relationship to land - to Indigenous struggles for sovereignty - but also point to the limits of thinking about racial formation outside of settler colonial practices. Relying significantly on the interventions of Indigenous, Black, and women of colour feminists, this chapter complicates and expands the critical race scholarship on which Fighting Feelings extensively draws. I work with the concept of relational racial literacies to underscore how we might be better schooled in entangled histories and experiences of oppression and domination and how they knit together white, differently racialized, and Indigenous peoples. In other words, how can we develop racial literacies with reach?

Anti-racism is a slow business. The book's Conclusion reflects on this slowness and on how difficult it is to arrive at and to sustain anti-racist commitments, particularly given the constraining consequences and regulatory effects of Canadian neoliberal multiculturalism. The state works hard to confiscate or contract the words, categories, and analyses that we require for resistance. I also reflect on how provisional offers of inclusion in the nation domesticate anti-racist politics, making it difficult to remember and to speak publicly about racism as a contemporary practice. To do so is to immediately enter a white landscape of denial or demands for proof. For white people, doing racism, condoning it, and creating the conditions for it to be expressed and enshrined in state practice are not the problem; being called to account for their racism is. People of colour are left struggling with this injunction to leave racism behind them even when it is before them, to forget racism while it is happening, and to live without a public language with which to address all the ways that it shapes their lives. I trace the struggles, tensions, and dilemmas that these multicultural pedagogies produce. I also consider under what conditions quiet politics might become loud. Thinking in sustained ways about racial harm and complicity together enables a more expansive and critical examination of how some marginalized people can be domesticated by the promise of inclusion. Inclusion can and does authorize dispossession. How to cultivate vigilance toward invitations into white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and other forms of domination, even while we long for some of the entitlements and protections that they purport to offer, is a difficult and necessary insight. At this project's end, I think about the spaces that multicultural Canada offers to some of us more easily than to others. Non-Black people of colour are sometimes offered and too easily take up positions in racial hierarchies against Black people and communities. How the model minority and our own ways of trying to survive racism are mobilized in the service of anti-Black racism remains a persistent question throughout this book. As much as we need to fight back against exclusionary citizenship practices, we also need to be wary of the relational and provisional conditions of inclusion. We must remain attentive to the elasticity of white supremacy and to the absorption of racial politics in line with neoliberal multicultural aspirations.

1

Writing People, Reading Life

Methodological Commitments

In searching for a truthful way to write about race, Cathy Park Hong (2020, 62) reflects that she was left with a "trail of failed forms." *Fighting Feelings* struggles with form, particularly with academic form, and this chapter elaborates on and engages in this struggle, not to resolve it but to render it explicit and to understand its stakes. Following the insights of the racialized women in this book and Black, Indigenous, and women of colour feminisms, this book argues that as academics, we too often, easily, and carelessly use the lives of racialized people to make arguments and shore up claims. The methodological notes in this chapter ask us to pause and reconsider this routine and its routineness in the academy. It is guided by an effort to prioritize what we owe to the people and communities who make our research possible. How could the complexity of their lives and their reasons for participating in this project reorient how we read and write women of colour? *Fighting Feelings* is grounded in these efforts.

Fighting Feelings does not provide an overview of participants demographically, as is standard in much educational and social science research. There is no chart or participant overview section that tells readers about their demographic profiles. Both this approach and how I wrote about participants were deliberate decisions made over a long period of time and after experimenting with a number of ways of writing this research, including writing out all the incidents of racist violence, which in the end I opted not to do. As Katherine McKittrick (2021, 1) observes, writing about and

30 Fighting Feelings

theorizing harm in an "intellectual economy that is oversaturated with racial violence" is difficult to do. She wonders how to do this work without endlessly explaining or rehearsing racism. McKittrick navigates this landscape by proposing a Black methodology that is not definitive but complex, opaque, contradictory, and rebellious. Reflecting on how her academic work takes shape, Audra Simpson (2014, 98) considers "what analysis will look like, or sound like, when the goals and aspirations of those we talk to inform the methods and the shape of our theorizing and analysis." Describing the Western academy as a contested "place of unwritten rules, old implacable cultures, and high stakes," Dian Million (2014, 35) observes the many ways that the theories and intellectual traditions of Indigenous peoples and women are disciplined and discarded. Stories, poetry, memoir, oral traditions, personal testimonies, and documentaries, she argues, are "felt knowledge" (32) that illuminates structures, histories of pain, relations of settler colonialism, and Indigenous survival and futures. It was in the work of Black, Indigenous, and women of colour feminisms that I was reminded not to allow the academy's preoccupation with theory as commodity (Christian 1988) to drive my work. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017, 33) encourages us to be unfaithful to these academic conventions, "refusing to be tamed by whiteness or the academy." Harmed by racism in immeasurable ways, many of the women who participated in this research did so because they wanted to explore, understand, and pass on some of their memories and reflections. For them, participating in this research was part of a long tradition of preserving stories to protect other racialized people, about keeping themselves and others safe, and about contributing to forms of collective knowledge that help us to better understand and interrupt the racial conditions of their and our lives.

The places that we come from, where we live and learn, how we call ourselves in the world, and how we are called into the world by others all matter. Although the birthplaces, cultural and racial backgrounds, migrations, and family configurations of the women in this study are significant, they also do other things: they make us think that we know who people are and who they might become; these details can result in abbreviated ways of reading. The challenge is to balance the material weight, histories, and effects of categories with the ways that they appear to render people knowable. I disclose details about the specificities of people's lives in more diffuse ways, revealing them slowly throughout the book. We still do not know everything, or sometimes we do not know everything at once. This approach often requires reading practices that are slowed down and nonlinear, as well

as contending with gaps in information, sometimes until later in the chapter or in subsequent chapters. Sometimes all we have are fragments. Some participants did not want to be quoted or known. Readers will infer racial designations through the names of participants and close reading practices and by connecting up references to the same participants throughout the study. This might be frustrating, even disconcerting, to readers. My intent is purposeful. Racism is hard. Reading about it should not be easy or efficient. Things are left on the page that are not required for a line of thinking. Not everything is tied up and folded into an argument. Sometimes *Fighting Feelings* dwells in stories and other times in faint memories, absences, or forced forgettings. Sometimes I refuse to tell. Not everything belongs in or to the academy (A. Simpson 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014). Taken together, this way of writing people challenges academic readers' right to know and works actively against reading practices focused on mastering the lives, experiences, and pain of racialized women.

This book quarrels with and writes against the academic tendency to efficiently extract meaning from life and, in particular, to read racialized people through what Toni Morrison (1992, 67) calls an "economy of stereotype," summing them up, categorizing and sorting them, and making them types that can stand in for entire groups of people. In the end, I gather defining and diffuse memories of racial violence that are imprinted on the lives of racialized women. The challenge of working with these stories and with this method of moments is how to do so without losing focus on structure. Racial domination eviscerates context, history, and relationships of force, demanding that we live perpetually in an atomized present tense. Racism works partly like shorthand. This became clear to me in my own life when I tried to teach our daughter about the meaning and uses of a dash. She was no more than four, and we were looking for our gate at the airport as we travelled home from an academic conference. There was a sign directing passengers to gates 34–45, and our gate was 37. Our daughter did not know what a dash was, and I tried to explain that this little line stood in for all the numbers between 34 and 45. She found this explanation confusing, or perhaps I take the dash so much for granted that I did not explain it carefully enough. In the end, I got out a piece of paper on which to write out all the numbers between 34 and 45. The dash, I said, took the place of all those numbers. She was amazed that a dash could do all that. In describing the work of the dash and how to read it, it occurred to me that racism works in a similar way. It comes to stand in for all kinds of things that do not need to be articulated, providing abbreviated ways of reading people and

32 Fighting Feelings

communities. Racism pretends that it is small, like a dash, but this book insists that we observe and account for all that it swallows up. The more that women of colour shared their own quarrels against racism's reductive knowability, the more they challenged this assumed practice of slotting people into categories. This challenges us to reflect on our own reading and interpretive practices. In other words, naming racial and cultural identities and biographical information in a more diffuse way is not a tactic of evasion; it is "part of the pedagogy" of this research.² I focus on the moments but follow their patterns and structuring logics so that context, history, and events are written together. The moments collected together – the anomalous and the widely shared – prompt us "to begin thinking, not to finish" (Z. Smith 2009, 203).

My practices of self-location are also decidedly diffuse. At times, I include my own stories, when I believe that my experience is relevant to something that I am writing about or when the participants' stories evoke mine. Writing about my own life might also provide some insight into my own investments in this project and into how I, too, make meaning. To me, this is more weighty than a few lines of self-disclosure that are often left on the page without any further engagement or any consideration of the relationship between who we are and the knowledge that we produce. What does the listing of one's social locations accomplish? Is it a reflection of a political commitment, an effort at accountability or transparency, or something that scholars do in order to be done with it? I had to sort out how to reach for a practice of meaningful embeddedness in my work.3 I came to these decisions partly by way of a participant, Ayanna, who explained that she does not readily disclose her racial and cultural heritage. While she is Canadianborn, the question often asked of Ayanna is about the birthplace and background of her parents. She elaborates that her reluctance does not come from shame but from a resentment at efforts to pin her down as being clearly from this place or that and from the persistent need that white people have for her to be from elsewhere. She always has to explain herself. To fight the readily waiting meanings of who she is, she waits as long as she can before disclosure, defers the questions, and avoids offering up her life as someone who is reduced to a racial designation. For as long as she can, she refuses to allow people to turn her life into a dash.

Locating myself as a racialized woman and person within this book does not do away with the critical distinctions and power relations between me and the participants in this study.⁴ Racialized is a big category that flattens histories, specific racial formations, and distinct

relations to the state. It illuminates and conceals, hides and tells. In tracing the history of the Atlantic slave trade and in recounting her travels in Ghana, Saidiya Hartman (2008, 233) offers an enduring caution about the dangers of "waiting to hear a story with which I was already familiar." As she remarks toward the end of her journey, she had come to realize that in setting out to find her story – that of the "children of the captives dragged across the sea" - she had almost missed the different stories told by "those who staved behind" (232). Not only do the stories signal different orientations to the past and different longings for a future, but they are also fashioned from different circumstances and from what Hartman describes as contested and plural African identities and histories. Without dissolving the critical distinctions between Hartman's analysis and my own, Hartman's caution gives me pause in thinking about and rendering explicit the stories that I was listening for, the ones that were more familiar, the ones that I wanted to hear, and the ones that I missed or misunderstood. At times, participants truncated incidents and interpretations of racism, trailing off, "You know what I mean." This was not stated as a question but as an invitation. Participants were asking me to fill in the blanks about what racism is and what it does, assuming that I knew without them having to articulate it. They were relating incidents to me as someone they assumed would get what they were trying to say about racism. Often I did, or I think that I did. Many of the participants recounted experiences and reflections that were awfully familiar. For example, because of my childhood, some workingclass lives and families seemed more familiar. I related more to white educational spaces because of the halls that I had walked in for most of my school life, and I was good at reading for cues about queerness. How I experienced racism and life had a lot to do with how I listened to and made meaning of participants' stories, the things that resonated and came alive, and the stories that felt more compelling. Still, in the interviews, I would insist, "I think I know what you mean, but please tell me." It was surprising how haltingly and slowly participants sometimes filled in the blanks. Truncating incidents seemed to be not only a shorthand way to recount experiences that circulate between people of colour but also a way to circumvent having to say certain things at all. In other instances, participants recounted stories, desires, and ways of understanding that I did not get, at least not in the same way. Sometimes this lack of familiarity was due to our different racial locations, our different cultural experiences, or how differently we had made sense of our lives.

34 Fighting Feelings

Attention to Brown complicity with anti-Black racism and settler colonialism emerge from efforts to think relationally and accountably along-side racialized women in this book. Writing about and listening to racial experiences that I do not share reminded me, as did Hartman, that racial identities and histories are not monolithic. There is no definitive or all-encompassing experience of racism. All knowledge is produced from someone and from somewhere (Haraway 2003). The participants remind me to listen carefully, both to things that I think I already know and to those that appear less familiar.

Finally, as scholars doing critical work in the social sciences and education have observed, research conducted with racialized or marginalized peoples is too often simplistically read as being about specific populations under study. In other words, "certain critiques of power are flattened into theories of identity" (Tuck and Yang 2017, 9; see also Pillow 2003). My reluctance to offer up consolidated demographic profiles in this study is one strategy to account for the importance of subjectivity in the world while also insisting on the limits of knowledge through demographic profiles. Racism is not only or primarily about racialized people. It is about a system of power that classifies and organizes people and knowledge into hierarchies. It distributes opportunities and resources and makes life more livable for some and less for others. Many participants in this study reflect incisively on how racism and whiteness are organized, its effects, and the multiple relations of power in which different people and communities are variously situated. In her book on the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, Mona Oikawa (2012, 8) argues that the internment not only incarcerated and produced Japanese Canadians as its subjects but also secured and continues to secure a "racial social order in Canada" that benefits primarily white people and communities. The narratives of racial harm abundantly recounted in this research are not written to elicit sympathetic responses or to help good anti-racists distinguish themselves from bad racists (Thompson 2003). Feeling "bad" with or for people of colour will not end racism. Examining how to "give up racial power" (Razack 2007, 391) and acknowledging the "dominant group's refusal to examine its own complicity in oppressing others" (Razack 1998, 40) are more difficult yet generative starting points for engaging in anti-racist scholarship. Partly, I endeavour to recuperate participants' experiences and harm not only as something collective and socially produced but also as something that secures a white racial order in Canada. The durability of white supremacy is a central problem that we must collectively confront.

Trading Pain for Proof

In her book on ACT UP's fight against AIDS, Deborah Gould (2009, 6) starts a section with the heading "When Your Data Make You Cry." Much of her book focuses on the role of emotion in social change and activism. Gould explains that she did not regard emotion as central to her project at its outset, but she increasingly began to appreciate how pivotal emotions were to social movements – to moving people in particular ways and directions. She describes how, having set out to explain the origins of ACT UP, the political work that it did, and its eventual decline, she ended up with an archive of materials full of death, grief, sadness, and loss that often left her "thoroughly undone" (6). For a long time, I also felt undone as women of colour detailed all the big and little injuries that were piled up in their lives, the names that they were called, the ways that they were and are hurt, how their lives were relentlessly limited and constrained through racist practices, and how little accountability or acknowledgment they were able to exact for it all. Transcribing the interviews was a very slow and laborious process, and I listened over and over again to the stories that the women told – to the tears, anger, and humiliation. With my foot on a pedal that allowed me to move the recorded interviews back or to pause as I transcribed them, it was hard to stay with so much pain for so long and in slow motion.⁵

Many of the interviews were punctuated by long pauses and hesitations – one, two, three, four. While counting the silences as I transcribed interviews, poised to catch the words on my computer keyboard when participants resumed talking, or while forcing myself to let the room be still during interviews, I wondered about all their meanings. I often asked whether participants wanted to terminate interviews, change its direction, or take a pause. Sometimes they did. In recounting racial harm or remembering it, many participants were moved to tears. On occasion, the tears made it difficult to understand the words. I wondered what I was doing. Nearly all the interviews were full of emotions that I could not detour around. Trying to be respectful of the emotional worlds that came to occupy a prominent place in the interview process while also trying to think about the responsibility that I had in creating, following, or amplifying these conversations was paramount. I reminded myself not to assume meanings based on things like tears and asked all the participants about the process of being interviewed, including the reasons for their tears.

The question of how to extract value or meaning from the racial oppression that the racialized women in this study endured and the question of what value one could extract have been ongoing preoccupations in writing

36 Fighting Feelings

this book. These questions are magnified by the kinds of harm that I observed and that students recounted to me over my many years of teaching and working in schools. What kind of response to accounts of racial oppression could be responsible to the magnitude, everydayness, and accumulation of these losses? Partly, the desire to turn away from white authority about racism is due to the relentless and never-ending demand to prove that racism is real. Who needs more evidence of the existence and brutality of white supremacy? How many people of colour need to attest to a similar experience of racism and racial injustice to make the accounts believable? What would the counting add up to? Would it provide proof? Would the tally of pain and woundedness add up to evidence in the sociological study of education and racism? Could pain be traded for proof? And if such proof could be offered, the evidence served up, what then? Might it provide justice? Racialized people's experiences are regularly diminished, dismissed, denied, or translated into innocent misunderstandings. The imperative to count, prove, and document the many ways that racism is real and really happens is a response to this white power and authority. Critical race scholarship engaged in counting and accounting for harm often relies on turning harm into evidence. This is important scholarship, as the work that many of us are trying to do would not and could not exist without these prior and ongoing efforts. There are good reasons to count and quantify. Still, I did not want everything about racialized women's lives to be something that was turned into something else. This book struggles with instrumentalizing or repurposing the experiences, analysis, and pain of women of colour. In trying to understand what racism costs racialized girls and women, Fighting Feelings unconventionally turns away from the question of evidence, setting it aside momentarily to think about how we might listen and respond to the narratives outside of counting and proving. It resists the need to make everything, including pain, count. Sometimes the damage does not pay off or get transformed into something politically productive or hopeful. It simply hurts people. Documenting that hurt, letting it take up space and insisting that it matters is part of the contribution that this work seeks to make.

Anne Anlin Cheng (2001) argues that the pain and sorrow of racism are not only dismissed by racist culture but also seen to be threatening to advocacy or activist projects. Not being regarded as the "proper" stuff of politics or organizing and written off by those who wish to cast racism aside entirely, there remains "no place for such anger and grief, which must go into hiding" (18). And although "it can be damaging to say how damaging racism has been ... it is surely equally harmful *not* to talk about this history of sorrow" (14, emphasis in original). Analyzing the role of emotions in anti-racist work

within social movements, Sarita Srivastava (2006) traces how the tears, distress, hurt feelings, and emotional expressions of white women are encouraged, nurtured, and centralized, often obstructing anti-racist commitments and practices. She argues that we must be attentive to the profoundly unequal space afforded to racialized women, to process, articulate, and share their emotions. Ruby Hamad (2020) illuminates how the strategic expression and deployment of white women's tears and feelings have resulted in the affective patrolling of racialized women's lives. As observed by Hamad and others (Cooper 2018; Phipps 2021), white tears and victimhood are often a way for white women to avoid accountability to racialized women and to mask their participation in domination. In response to the ways that grief, sadness, and emotional life are dismissed, peripheralized, and cast away, Fighting Feelings takes seriously racism's consequences and the labour required to manage it in the lives of women of colour. In Chapter 2, they turn our collective attention to their first encounters with racism, both difficult to remember and difficult to forget. These "firsts" or early experiences marked violent and confusing interruptions of childhoods and inaugurations into old and suffocating histories.

© UBC Press 2023

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Fighting feelings: lessons in gendered racism and queer life / Gulzar R. Charania. Names: Charania, Gulzar R., author.

Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230490301 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230490743 | ISBN 9780774868990 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780774869010 (PDF) |

ISBN 9780774869027 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCSH: Racism—Psychological aspects. | LCSH: White supremacy (Social structure) | LCSH: White privilege (Social structure) | LCSH: Minority women—Psychology. | LCSH: Sexual minority women—Psychology. | LCSH: Feminism and racism. | LCSH: Race relations. | LCSH: Critical race theory.

Classification: LCC HT1523 .C43 2023 | DDC 305.8—dc23





Canadä

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Set in Segoe and Warnock by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Copy editor: Robert Lewis Proofreader: Jesse Marchand Indexer: Emily LeGrand Cover designer: Alexa Love

Cover image: And the world waited. To caress her by Kosisochukwu Nnebe. Photographed

by Ingrid Forster

UBC Press The University of British Columbia 2029 West Mall Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2 www.ubcpress.ca