Unmooring the *Komagata Maru*

Charting Colonial Trajectories

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ON MAY 23, 1914, the SS *Komagata Maru,* a steamship carrying 376 passengers of Indian origin, arrived on the west coast of the Dominion of Canada. Based on laws implemented to limit the immigration of Indians, Canadian officials deemed the passengers illegal *arrivants,* and consequently the ship and its passengers were refused entry and detained for two months in Vancouver Harbour. The ship was eventually forced to depart for Calcutta, with 340 passengers, with the exceptions of the ship's doctor and his family (given priority passage on another ship), and the remaining twenty passengers, granted entry into Canada since they were considered returnees.

Although ethnic and racial histories of Western nations, including Canada, remain on the margins of scholarship, those few scholars who have studied the *Komagata Maru* conventionally frame it as an incident of past Canadian immigration exclusion (Buchignani and Indra 1985; Johnston 1989, 2014; Kazimi 2012; Macklin 2010; Pollack 1978; SFU 2011; Singh 1989; Srikanth 2002). National histories of immigration exclusion have importantly illuminated the struggles of various marginalized peoples and how nations are forged through discourses of race (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Backhouse 1999; Bannerji 2000; Boyko 1998; Dua 2000; Kobayashi 1995; McClintock 1995; Roy 1979; Stoler 1995; Thobani 2007; Ward 1978). Yet, as we argue in more detail below, contrary to national historical accounts by scholars in Canada, the journey of the *Komagata Maru* cannot be fully contained within the borders of a single national perspective (Mongia 1999; Nayar 2016; Roy and Sahoo 2016). This is not least because

the ship crossed oceans and jurisdictions, including Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Japan, and West Bengal; it held significant implications for the extension of legal, social, and political influences within and outside the British Empire; multiple nationalisms operated both within and against the borders of the emerging Canadian nation-state and other colonizing forces across the empire; citizenship was scripted and regulated at different imperial levels and not just within Canada; and colonial surveillence transcended any one nation-state.[1] Furthermore, through an attempt to be written into the "national" historical record, Canadian national historiographical interventions and reinterpretations can operate to refound and absolve the nation as conciliatory and multicultural rather than challenge its continued colonial forms of violent exclusion, including ongoing dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples and nations.

In raising questions about national narratives, this volume has two main objectives. First, it seeks to expose and challenge how Canada's colonial history is jettisoned by the national historiography of remembering the ship's voyage and its meaning; in decentring national histories in favour of a colonial analytic, it becomes more evident that, contrary to being postcolonial and postracial, Western nations today operate and extend ruling logics of white supremacy and hierarchies of racism.[2] Second, the volume traces how different forms, times, and places of the *Komagata Maru*'s journey can help to map the movement and network of global colonialism in ways that challenge modern universal claims of subjecthood, foreground relations of power that shape transnational movement, and punctuate how historical systems of rule remain relevant in contemporary relations between and among hegemonic and subjugated actors. By colonialism, we are referring specifically to how Europeans implanted settlements on distant territories (Said 1978), claimed political control over the world (Kohn 2012, para 4), and settled people on land to engage in labour for their own improvement and to create wealth (Arneil 2013).

In adopting a colonial framework of analysis rather than a national historiographical one, we also hope that attention is drawn to the formation of the subjectivity of those on board the ship. The passengers are understood here as itinerant subjects of colonialism, whereby their subjectivity was produced – through legal, social, and political means – in a state of movement and precarity. Moreover, the regulation of the journey, technologies of mobility and immobility, and experiences of dislocation and displacement were shaped by colonial systems of rule. Whereas some have

argued that the *Komagata Maru* event best illustrates a struggle for the acknowledgment of the universality of "imperial citizenship" or subject-hood, we hope to highlight the processes through which this determined effort was compromised through a systemic and networked set of alliances that governed processes of migration and what Pramod Nayar (2016) calls "dissident mobilities." Indeed, we examine here the figure of "itinerancy" to challenge the notion that the would-be migrants on board the *Komagata Maru* could one day become or inhabit the position of "national" subjects of Canada. Rather, the subjectivity of itinerancy underlines the formation of political, social, and cultural identities made complex through various diasporas, such that itinerancy can be marked by colonial hierarchies (Roy and Sahoo 2016), cosmopolitan agency, survival, cultural and imperial citizenship, commerce and trade, and political subversion (Nayar 2016). Avtar Brah (1996) has theorized the necessity of examining the diasporic space made up of contingent and complex genealogies of dispersion and belonging. Although this idea of diasporic space informs our understanding of itinerant subjectivity, we hope to highlight the notion that genealogies of migration and movement remain the focus through a colonial analysis of the *Komagata Maru*. Through a sustained analysis and critique of colonialism, we expose a complex understanding of how particular people become subjects of empire through travel, entry, detention, and removal and how nation-states are embedded in global regimes of colonialism.

The *Komagata Maru* in Canadian Historiography

Conventionally, in the emerging body of scholarly work that considers ethnoracial histories generally, and the *Komagata Maru* specifically, its narration starts from the ship's arrival on May 23, 1914, in Burrard Inlet, Vancouver, and ends with the ship's forced departure two months later. The ship, commissioned by Sikh businessman Baba Gurdit Singh Sarhali, carried 340 Sikh, 24 Muslim, and 12 Hindu passengers, including two women and two children. They entered the harbour after clearing health inspections at William Head near Victoria. Since these passengers had not travelled a continuous journey from their state of national origin (i.e., India), they were deemed inadmissible under Canadian immigration law. This requirement was implemented via an order-in-council and an amendment to the Canadian Immigration Act of 1906. The amendment passed in 1908 as the Continuous Journey Regulation, which

achieved parliamentary assent through the Continuous Passages Act. The amendment reads as follows:

> The Governor in Council may, by proclamation or order, whenever he considers it necessary or expedient, prohibit the landing in Canada of any specified class of immigrants or of any immigrants who have come to Canada otherwise than by continuous journey from the country of which they are natives or citizens and upon through tickets purchased in that country. (Government of Canada 1908)

This act was implemented with the clear intention to curb immigration from British India and throughout the Pacific Ocean region (Buchignani and Indra 1985; Johnston 1989; Kazimi 2012; Macklin 2010).

On the authority of this law, immigration officers did not permit the passengers to leave the ship. They were detained on the ship for two months with limited capacity to replenish their supplies, leaving them on the brink of starvation. During the summer months, while the ship remained in the harbour, a tempest of debate and political negotiation raged on shore, eventually revealing the depth of Canadian resolve to maintain a colour bar that restricted immigration based on race, nation of origin, and religion (Buchignani and Indra 1985; Johnston 1989; Kazimi 2012; Macklin 2010). Throughout the media and in the political debates, the moral assimilability of the Indian migrants was questioned. The debates involved different levels of government, from municipal and provincial to federal and imperial.

The debates on the *Komagata Maru* passengers and the imperative to curb Indian immigration did not exist in a vacuum. Anti-Asian sentiment among the people of British Columbia had already hit a crescendo by 1907 when rioters destroyed property and unleashed violent and verbal assaults in predominantly Asian neighbourhoods of Vancouver (Roy 1990; Sohi 2014; Sugimoto 1973). Anti-Asian riots in Vancouver were preceded by white supremacist riots in Bellingham, Washington, that attempted to drive out Indian lumber workers from that industry (see Roy 2015–16). The Vancouver riot led to a report in 1907 by the federal deputy minister of labour, William Lyon Mackenzie King, dispatched from Ottawa to oversee the aftermath of the riots in British Columbia. His goal was to assess damages to and compensation for affected Japanese businesses, but the report became another way to consolidate further a vision of white

Canada. On the one hand, the report was written for the purpose of international diplomacy; on the other, it was an assessment of the tense race relations developing on the west coast of Canada (see Bhandar in this volume; Niergarth 2010).

In keeping with the "white Canada forever" policy that had fed anti-Asian racism and been laid down in the Canadian Immigration Act of 1910, the Continuous Journey Regulation was deemed necessary because Indians could not be banned otherwise from entering the Dominion of Canada since they were British colonial subjects. Officials in Canada enforced the regulation. Ultimately, after the test case of Munshi Singh, one of the passengers who wanted to immigrate, detention of the would-be immigrants ended after the Supreme Court of British Columbia upheld the regulation. The ship and its passengers were escorted out of the harbour by a Canadian naval vessel to return to Calcutta.

The Canadian focus has been central to many of the prominent accounts of the *Komagata Maru*. This includes Norman Buchignani and Doreen Indra's 1985 book *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada* and Hugh Johnston's 1989 book (updated in 2014) *The Voyage of the* Komagata Maru: *The Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar*, considered to be the primary texts of any Canadian study of the *Komagata Maru* and Canadian South Asian history. In addition, Ali Kazimi's highly acclaimed 2004 film *Continuous Journey* is central in Canadian historiography of the *Komagata Maru*. His book *Undesirables: White Canada and the* Komagata Maru – *An Illustrated History*, which visually documents "one of the most infamous 'incidents' in Canadian history" (2012, 6), followed the film. Kazimi animated the South Asian diasporic archive in an installation central to the *Ruptures of Arrival: Art in the Wake of the* Komagata Maru exhibit at the Surrey Art Gallery from May to November 2014; this series of works included the original composition by the Neemaljit Dhillon Quartet titled the "*Komagata Maru*," a multi-instrumental soundscape performed with visual projections. Finally, there is the 2011 archive-based website created and maintained by the Simon Fraser University (SFU) library (funded by SFU and Citizenship and Immigration Canada), which states that "one of the benefits of retelling the story of the *Komagata Maru* today is that it allows us to build upon the work of previous generations to make sense of one of the most symbolic moments in Canadian history" (SFU 2011).

The Canadian-focused work identified above has attended to examining the absences from Canadian national historiography, which has largely

relegated ethnic minority histories of Canadian immigration and settlement to a marginal space in the Canadian landscape. The authors and projects noted above have challenged this underrepresentation. Although these histories counter a conventional whitewashed Canadian national narrative, we argue that they also operate to support a vision of the nation, albeit one tarnished by racism, recoverable in the face of an expanded idea of citizenship, democratic participation, and liberal values of inclusion. In recounting the *Komagata Maru* "incident" in this section, we identify three interwoven national narratives that have come to dominate scholarly literature and public discourse in Canada: the *Komagata Maru* has been underrecognized in Canada's racist immigration history; it is a story of failed South Asian migration to Canada and a story of South Asian resilience; and it is a dark moment in Canadian history that the nation has now transformed to become authentically multicultural and immigrant friendly.

The **Komagata Maru** *as a Past Incident of Racist Exclusion of Immigrants*

Study of the *Komagata Maru* as an isolated historical incident, examined exclusively from a "Canadian perspective," emphasizes the exclusionary character of past immigration policies and practices directed toward Indians, with specific attention to the Continuous Journey Regulation. For example, historian Hugh Johnston (2014) situates immigration racism within Canadian law (and briefly also US law) and the larger context of anti-Asian racism in which there was white anxiety about the "Hindoo invasion" in British Columbia. Johnston (1989, 2014) is clearly aware of the transnational journey of the *Komagata Maru* and cognizant of the context of Indians in the global British Empire – specifically the ship's departure from Hong Kong; the riot, arrests, and deaths that ensued in Budge Budge; and the national profile of the riot in India. Nonetheless, his primary focus is on "the Sikh challenge to Canada's colour bar" and Canada's immigration policy:

> The full history of the *Komagata Maru* affair, from its origins to its long term consequences, is *an immigrant story writ large.* (2014, xiv; emphasis added)
>
> The outcome of the voyage of the *Komagata Maru* was a devastating failure and tragedy for the passengers, but it stands out as *the most dramatic challenge*

> to Canadian immigration policy ever mounted by any disadvantaged immigrant
> group. (2014, 9; emphasis added)

Aside from the fact that Johnston narrates the resilience of Punjabi Sikhs at the cost of often erasing the experiences of Hindu and Muslim passengers on board the *Komagata Maru* and shore committee members – most of whom were also Punjabi – his critique of Canadian officials turns on the notion that Canada should have been open to British Indian immigrants.[3] In other words, there is a centrally held idea that Canada, as part of the British Empire, should have maintained the universal claims of British imperial citizenship.

Yet Canada's formation as a colonial nation was not limited to its immigration laws and practices, and, as noted earlier, the journey of the *Komagata Maru* cannot be contained within a single national perspective, even a pro-Indian perspective. Rather, colonialism is most directly expressed through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands/ waterways and their systems of governance disregarded in favour of European (specifically British and French) systems of rule. Canada was not concerned about respecting the rights of "Indian imperial citizenship"; it was concerned about subjugating Indigenous peoples and asserting sovereign control over its borders (see Mawani 2012). This is particularly relevant in the context of the colonial relations between Canada and various sovereign territories of Indigenous nations on the west coast. These intersecting colonial administrative regulations, the land treaties processes, and the persistent forms of regulation of immigration are not isolated decisions but practices of colonial possession. Mainland British Columbia was settled, unlike many other parts of Canada, without a treaty process, and Indigenous peoples and nations never ceded their lands (Alfred 2001; Fisher 1992; Harris 1997, 2004). This highlights the continued forms of recognition of the rights to land that over fifty discrete Indigenous nations are able to make in British Columbia.

Despite this politics of Indigenous dispossession, the framework of Canadian immigration exclusion and South Asian migration history structures the extensive web-based archival material collated by the SFU library. The journey of the *Komagata Maru* is told in terms of the "deliberate, exclusionary policy of the Canadian government to keep out ethnicities ... whom it deemed unfit to enter. These justifications were couched

in racist and ethnocentric views of 'progress,' 'civilization,' and 'suitability' which all buttressed the view that Canada should remain a 'White Man's Country'" (SFU 2011). The SFU website draws on national, provincial, and municipal archives in Canada (especially government and court documents) and uniquely archives oral histories from community members, personal anecdotes, unpublished manuscripts, and family albums. It also offers translations in Punjabi and Hindi, and in a Canadian nationalist vein (because of federal funding rules and requirements) it offers information in English and French, the two official languages of Canada. In 2015, the SFU library expanded the Canada-India connection by working with India's Ministry of Culture to further collect, catalogue, digitize, and publicly share resources central to the *Komagata Maru;* they jointly organized events, talks, tours, and exhibitions in India and Canada as part of the centennial commemorations of the *Komagata Maru* by the government of India. However, though the SFU website repeats that there are significant connections between Canada and India in the journey and contemporary resonances of the *Komagata Maru,* its primary focus is on the ship's relevance to Canadian history and South Asian migrants' desire to be included in the Canadian nation:

> One of the benefits of retelling the story of the *Komagata Maru* today is that it allows us to build on the work of previous generations to make sense of one of the most *symbolic moments in Canadian history.*
>
> One of the unique features of this website is the active attempt to reframe traditional perspectives of this story to include a variety of Canadian Indian voices. This helps for a nuanced and multilayered look at history, while also communicating *the lived realities of Canadians – and those striving to be Canadians* – over 100 years ago. (SFU 2011; emphasis added)

Both Johnston's work and the SFU website are highly influential national accounts of the *Komagata Maru,* and both emphasize past Canadian immigration racism central to the ship's journey. At times, this national history of immigration racism has been at the expense of lesser-known details about the *Komagata Maru*'s relevance even in Canada, such as how the guise of public health screening was used by Canadian officials to classify nonwhite colonial subjects, including passengers on the ship, as carriers of contagious or loathsome diseases who could be denied entry under immigration law (see Wallace 2013 for more details).

The Komagata Maru *as a Story of South Asian Migration to Canada and South Asian Resilience*

In the early 1900s, many ships travelled to Canada carrying passengers of Indian origin. They included the *Empress of Japan* in 1906, the *Tartar* in 1906, the *Monteagle* in 1907, and the *Panama Maru* in 1913 (Buchignani and Indra 1985). Yet the *Komagata Maru* has attracted the most sustained attention in histories of South Asians in Canada. This might be because of the dramatic actions of Canadian officials to detain passengers on the ship for so long, its eventual forced removal, and the successful enforcement of racist immigration laws. But it also seems to be because the *Komagata Maru* has come to represent a story of failed migration of Indians to Canada and a story of mobilization of the Indian passengers and Indians already in Vancouver over the ship's detention and forced departure. This narrative of mobilization is perhaps most evident in accounts emphasizing that Baba Gurdit Singh originally chartered the steamship with the intention of challenging the Canadian Continuous Journey Regulation on the basis that "everyone aboard the ship was entitled to enter Canada as of right" (Macklin 2010, 47). Indeed, Baba Gurdit Singh himself emphasized the importance of challenging the Canadian immigration policy (Waraich and Sidhu 2005, 37). The arrival of the *Komagata Maru* has been understood as a test of the legality and resolve of the Canadian courts to maintain the Continuous Journey Regulation.

In the current period, too, the *Komagata Maru* has taken a central place in the legacy of early South Asian settlement in Canada, and public funds have been sought (especially from members of the Sikh community) to remember past attempts at migrating to Canada and the ongoing resilience of South Asians. The Canadian government has funded educational activities related to the *Komagata Maru* under the Community Historical Recognition Program, run by the federal ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). In 2011, the CIC pledged $82,500 to Vancouver's Khalsa Diwan Society to work with the Vancouver Parks Board to establish a monument to commemorate the incident and $104,000 to develop a museum in its Vancouver gurdwara dedicated to the *Komagata Maru* (CIC 2016). In 2014, the University of British Columbia presented *Performing the Post-Colonial* (UBC Punjabi Studies 2014), a theatrical piece on plays written about the *Komagata Maru*. Also in 2014, the University of the Fraser Valley held a performance entitled *That Land beyond the Waves* (CICS 2014), which focused on the plight of families on shore waiting for their

loved ones to disembark from the *Komagata Maru*. The ship's journey has also been the subject of considerable creative practice, including four other plays (radio plays and theatre productions), a novel, a documentary film, poetry, an extensive scholarly and popular literature, a potential movie by famed South Asian director Deepa Mehta, a number of visual art installations, soundscapes, as well as other forms of memorialization.

In the artistic and political reimagining of the *Komagata Maru*'s voyage, the practices of cultural production have expanded. These challenges to the forms of artistic practice are noted in the 2004 feature-length documentary directed by Ali Kazimi titled *Continuous Journey,* which brought to life the limited visual archive of the *Komagata Maru* (see Hameed and Vukov 2007). The visual, literary, and cultural productions on the *Komagata Maru,* beyond articulating experiences and forms of racial discrimination, also play host to a variety of explorations of identity, a politics of resistance, and the networked relationships of the larger South Asian diaspora. This resurfacing through cultural productions, documentaries, radio plays, theatre productions, or films often attempts to bring alive the archival material that reinforces the veracity of the *Komagata Maru* events as a Canadian story. Indeed, the *Komagata Maru* points to an interesting history of being presented, retold, and resubmitted to national attention over the years.

This retelling of Canadian exclusion and South Asian resilience echoes in contemporary memorialization, in which it seems that the commemoration of the *Komagata Maru* is less about what took place on the west coast, one site of historical trauma, than about how this commemoration was taken up in immigrant-intensive areas such as the Canadian cities of Brampton, Mississauga, Scarborough, Surrey, and Calgary – places often typically understood to have more "recent" immigrants from highly diverse communities.[4] It seems that the "pioneering" spirit of the South Asians (East Indians, Hindus) who attempted to arrive in Canada and establish homes and settlements has been emphasized over the transpacific and colonial dimensions.

The **Komagata Maru** *as a Marker of Past Canadian Exclusion and Present Multicultural Inclusion*

The third dominant narrative of the *Komagata Maru* is that it was a "dark moment" in Canadian history, which the nation has transformed and re-

deemed to become authentically multicultural and immigrant friendly. For instance, on the SFU website, Canada's racist past is demarcated from its more tolerant present, deemed multicultural and more welcoming to non-European immigrants:

> Retaining a cultural connection to more than one place is the hallmark of Canadian multiculturalism. The way Canada has viewed non-European immigration has changed in drastic ways during the course of the last century and it has reflected changes within Canada as well as developments around the world. The early struggles of the pioneer community found resolution through landmark changes in governmental policy which included re-instituting the franchise for South Asian immigrants in 1947 and changing immigration laws in the late 1960s. (SFU 2011)

Johnston (2014, xiv) shares this narrative of a reformed nation, noting that Canada today is marked by more multicultural consensus than in the past and that immigration policy has reformed such that people from all parts of the world are now welcome in Canada.

The significance of the *Komagata Maru* as a marker of a changed nation has also been emphasized in the apologies made by various elected officials in Canada. Following public pressure from South Asian groups and MPs, there was parliamentary debate in 2008 about the need for the government to apologize for its past restrictive immigration policy. As well, in the same year, members of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia unanimously passed a motion of apology:

> Be it resolved that this Legislature apologizes for the events of May 23, 1914, when 376 passengers of the *Komagata Maru,* stationed off Vancouver harbour, were denied entry by Canada. The House deeply regrets that the passengers, who sought refuge in our country and our province, were turned away without benefit of the fair and impartial treatment befitting a society where people of all cultures are welcomed and accepted. (Legislative Assembly of British Columbia 2008)

Although highly criticized by members of the South Asian community, Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper acknowledged in 2008 the treatment of passengers on board the *Komagata Maru* at a public South

Asian event in Surrey. His speech was received as an inaudible apology: there was recognition that some sort of injustice had occurred, but exactly what his apology meant could not be determined. For the Canadian nation-state, recognition of this past wrong clearly delineated a "dark moment" in the nation's history that "we" have moved on from; for the South Asian community, the "apology" occurred at an event in the Sikh community without much attention to the diversity of the affected communities. Indeed, the apology infamously took place on the "back of a pickup truck at a community barbecue in Surrey, not in the House of Commons, where an official state apology should take place" (Somani, this volume). In 2016, Liberal prime minister Justin Trudeau offered an official apology in Parliament for "laws that prevented these passengers from immigrating peacefully and securely" (see Appendix 1).

As noted by critics of state-based reparations (Coulthard 2014; Henderson and Wakeham 2013; Simpson 2011; Woolford, Benvenuto, and Hinton 2014), apologies for past exclusions often fail to include substantive material changes in social or economic circumstances. We contend that state apologies for the *Komagata Maru* work to obfuscate the reality of ongoing colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, black communities, Arabs and Muslims, and other people of colour. We also contend that national historiographical discourses of redemption work to minimize Canada's involvement in an international network of regulations and prohibitions that controlled the movement of people from the Global South to the Global North and continue today in the form of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. The nationalist historiography of the *Komagata Maru,* focused on how the event is read as a genesis of Canada's progress toward an inclusive multicultural future, necessarily limits understanding that this was not a singular event in Canadian history. Lost is how this story of transpacific migration includes restrictions and prohibitions on Chinese and Japanese migrants and connects Canada's development and identity to a transnational and colonial network of governance. By emphasizing the *Komagata Maru* and a pioneering people who endured and overcame an unwelcome beginning, Canada is seemingly redeemed through this process of selectively multiculturalizing public space, apology, and recognition. In addition, the nation is further removed from contemporary acts of similar policies and practices of migrant injustice in which the state remains culpable, such as in the case of the detention of Tamil migrants and refugees.

The *Komagata Maru* Journey through a Colonial Analytic

To draw out the complexities of understanding the story of the *Komagata Maru* not as a referent point for a nation seeking redemption or contained by a single national perspective, or the story of the trials and tribulations of the settlement of Indians in British Columbia, this book offers an alternative approach to reading and representing the story. We propose to examine the story of the ship as it traversed international waterways, legal and regulative spaces, and differing temporalities through a colonial analytic, one attentive to networks of power. This lens best represents the conversations and debates raised by the contributors to this volume.

Colonial networks and connections have been at the centre of recent scholarship on the global phenomenon of early-twentieth-century South Asian resistance and radicalism (Chattopadhyay 2016; Johnston 2013; Mawani 2012; Price and Bains 2014; Ramnath 2011; Roy and Sahoo 2016; Shah 2011; Sohi 2014). There is also a burgeoning area of inquiry investigating the politics of the larger South Asian diaspora in North American contexts (Bald 2013; Chang 2012; Mongia 1999, 2004; Prashad 2000; Shah 2011). In addition, this area of scholarship attends to changing racial taxonomies and both spatial and temporal colonial interconnections between and among Europeans and non-Europeans (Burton 1998; Lowe 2006, 2015; Mawani 2009; Povenelli 2011; Stoler 1995). In a similar vein, this book seeks to explore the productions, contexts, and effects of itinerant subjects through the analytic of colonialism. The concept of the itinerant subject is used here to capture the formation of identity, political subjectivity experienced through movement. Examining itinerant subjectivity through a colonial analytic not only centres the operations and effects of forces of power on subject formations but also centres the precariousness of movement for some travellers, and that precariousness transcends national borders.

The passengers on board the *Komagata Maru* perhaps did not voluntarily enter into this subjectivity; nonetheless, this is what the colonial regime of power (Brah 1996) – as the regulative apparatus that determined the destination of the ship – established. This is not to suggest that the chapters in this volume share a singular definition of colonialism; rather, it is to signal the fragments of power imbued with colonial formations. As Ann Stoler (2001) compellingly argues, pursuing connections between specific governing regimes and the broad dynamics of rule can open up lines

of overlapping inquiry and key conceptual frames of colonialism and imperialism.

An analytic of colonialism, rather than of national history, does not mean that critical inquiries into the nation, constructions of the national, and the borders of the nation-state are not relevant. On the contrary, the colonial dimensions of the *Komagata Maru* journey invite further exploration of the entanglements of and the tensions between global networks of colonial power and multiple nationalisms. In 1914, the events surrounding the *Komagata Maru* functioned in the global colonial context of various competing nationalisms: Indian nationalism in India, in which the struggle for self-rule was paramount among ordinary Indians; anti-British nationalism among the Indian diaspora across the globe (e.g., the emergence of revolutionary Ghadar Movement activities in North America, Asia, and Europe) (Puri 1983; Ramnath 2011; Sohi 2014); the precarious link between being a British subject of Indian origin in India and a British Indian subject with the right to move across nations under the dominion of Britain (Mawani 2012); the emerging consolidation of Canada as a sovereign nation-state, independent of Britain, that could have control over immigration (Byrd 2011; Dhamoon 2014), especially when Britain, its colonies, and its allies were preparing for the First World War; French and British colonial nationalisms within the Dominion of Canada wrangling over federal/provincial powers and sovereignty over territory and governance, evident in constitutional battles and national debates on language laws, resources, and identity (Bannerji 2000; Ladner 2005; Simeon and Robinson 1990); and Indigenous nationhood, violently disregarded and genocidally brought under the domain of British and French law (Alfred 2005; Andersen 2014; Harris 1997; Lawrence 2002; Monture-Angus 1995). These competing nationalisms are entangled webs of colonialism and anticolonialism rather than just independent historical struggles for nation and belonging.

Furthermore, a colonial analytic punctuates competing understandings of imperial and/or British citizenship beyond the borders of a single nation. Following cautions from postcolonial theorists (Hall and Rose 2006; Stoler and McGranaham 2007) against centring British colonialists in accounts of colonialism, we see the *Komagata Maru* journey as an opportunity to trace the contradictions of being British Indian imperial subjects who were differentiated along white supremacist lines and who

challenged the unrestricted movement of white British subjects. Such colonizer/colonized distinctions were complicated by the fact that British Indian subjects in far-flung colonies were in the service of the British army, but they did not have access to imperial citizenship (Bains, this volume). The struggle over determining the parameters of British imperial subject-hood took place beyond any one nation. Colonial officials, some anti-colonialists, and the print media in Canada, India, London, and Hong Kong that wanted to restrict the movement of British Indians engaged with the discourse of imperial citizenship. In particular, despite global shifts toward expanding citizenship rights to white women and all white northern European subjects moving across colonial metropoles on the basis of liberal universal rights, the early twentieth century was also a time when imperial citizenship was dampened for people of colour.

Without understanding larger colonial perspectives, the British system of emigration that largely controlled the passage of British Indians to various imperial sites and Canada's relationship with colonial logic and anticolonial resistance are not conclusively engaged. Although the existing Canadian literature on the *Komagata Maru* narrates South Asian resistance and radicalism through the struggles of the passengers on board the ship while anchored in Vancouver Harbour, through the efforts of the shore committee in Vancouver, and through various legal challenges by South Asians, a colonial analytic invites engagement with literatures and political actions beyond Canada and a singular group.

Indeed, rather than scripting the *Komagata Maru* as a solely Sikh encounter with Canadian racism, a colonial analytic foregrounds how members of the South Asian diaspora came together across caste and religious lines in challenging colonial formations of the Indian as backward, uncivilized, and bound by tradition. This was true of both the passengers on the ship and those on land in Vancouver, California, Britain, and parts of India. For example, some passengers had personal connections with members of the anti-British revolutionary Ghadar Party, which had networks in Oregon, California, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, France, Canada, India, and Britain. Furthermore, those on land, in Vancouver and other parts of the world, were concerned not just about the rights of the *Komagata Maru* passengers to land in Canada but also about the rights of their family members and friends living across the British Empire as well as those family members left behind who faced an uncertain future of

joining their families (Ramnath 2011; Tatla 2007, 8–9). Thus, even among the diaspora, there was no singular national perspective or singular motive for seeking citizenship rights in Canada.

This interconnectedness of colonial regulation and anticolonial concern about migration also illuminates various techniques of surveillance deployed across national borders. Although Canadian historiographical accounts note that one of the key players in the events of 1914 was William Hopkinson, the immigration inspector who tracked "seditious" activity and reported it to Ottawa, London, and Delhi, a colonial analytic opens up lines of inquiry into the transnational networks of colonial surveillance. The movements of the *Komagata Maru* across the Pacific Ocean and ultimately to the west coast of Canada were known well in advance by colonial authorities who utilized networked surveillance strategies that spanned the imperial substrate. For example, Hong Kong officials did not want *Komagata Maru* passengers returned via Hong Kong because they had no power to deport the men (Waraich and Sidhu 2005, 69). Such surveillance – like that of today, which uses satellite imagery to trace ocean voyages of migrants and refugees – reveals the international imperial networks of communication between British authorities in Hong Kong, India, and London and Canadian and American authorities situated globally.

Drawing from various disciplinary approaches, the authors of this book touch on several aspects of the colonialism that we have identified above, each emphasizing some dimensions over others. As outlined below, we have organized the chapters along four parts, which signal clear topics of importance to the colonial journey of the *Komagata Maru*. They mark a voyage that never fully departed and never fully arrived, even as this incomplete voyage resonates throughout a century of disputed territorial lineages.

Part 1: The Politics of Anticolonial Resistance in the Journey of the Komagata Maru

The centennial of the *Komagata Maru*'s arrival in Canada and its subsequent return to British India offers an opportunity to re-examine the multiple ways that this ship has charted the transnational resistance of South Asians against British colonialism and national (Canadian) government strategies to repress mobility, freedom, and basic rights. The chapters in the first section provide an interdisciplinary recalibration of the legacy of transnational resistance politics throughout the commonwealth among

itinerant South Asians. The contributors trace the persistent movement of this voyage from a period of modernist articulations of imperial subjectivities, political movements, and forms of modern agency to anticolonial critiques of the deployment of these relations of power.

Taking the *Komagata Maru* as the entry point in their chapters, Ian Christopher Fletcher, Suchetana Chattopadhyay, and Satwinder Kaur Bains examine these transnational webs of colonial biopower and resistance. Fletcher probes the nature and limits of anticolonial criticism through a careful study of press coverage of and commentary on the *Komagata Maru* in anglophone newspapers and periodicals from Australia, Britain, Canada, India, Ireland, South Africa, West Africa, and the United States. Although this book's other authors also consider formations of indentured labour and South Asian diasporic subjectivity, Fletcher specifically casts a wide transnational net to examine the context of indentured Indian labour throughout the empire and how Indians challenged this system in South Africa, North America, and South Eastern Asia. Chattopadhyay examines radical responses to racialized subjecthood imposed by the colonial state on Punjabi (especially Sikh) migrants in wartime Calcutta. Her analysis reveals that the repressive colonial state apparatus to deal with the *Komagata Maru* passengers and Punjabi migrants influenced the intersections of anticolonial strands in the city during 1914–15 and shaped the organized transmission of the ship's memory as a symbol of resistance among Sikh workers in the industrial centres of southwest Bengal from the 1920s onward. Her chapter importantly demonstrates how radical activism, diasporic identity formation, and labour movements converged. Bains tracks letters from *Komagata Maru* passengers to Canadian officials to illuminate the colonial logic of white nationalism and deception that further fuelled a nationalist consciousness among anti-British Indians in India and the diaspora. Bains specifically explores how imperialist regimes of citizenship shaped Sikh Punjabi understandings of transnational rights, white Canadian nationalism, divisions among passengers on board, and Indian resistance and political activism in Canada and elsewhere across the empire.

Part 2: Migration Regimes in Colonial Contexts

Several contributors point to the continued relationship among the *Komagata Maru,* the politics of securing borders, and the position of migrants in contemporary geopolitics. The assessment of the *Komagata Maru* in

this context is both methodologically and epistemologically relevant. In this part of the book, Radhika Mongia insightfully locates the challenge posed by the *Komagata Maru* to imperial authorities in Canada, India, and Britain in the context of nineteenth-century debates and regulations concerning the migration of Indians as well as the prior legal terrain of indentured migration and the abolition of slavery in British plantation economies. Mongia shows that, as a legal event, the *Komagata Maru* significantly transformed the principles and institutional logics of migration control from empire-states to nation-states. In their chapter, Nadia Hasan, Sailaja Krishnamurti, Omme-Salma Rahemtullah, Nayani Thiyagarajah, and Nishant Upadhyay discuss the complicated bordering practices that take place within interethnic communities (e.g., within the South Asian diaspora in Canada), the temporal bordering that occurs between the *Komagata Maru* and more recent voyages of Tamil migrants on the MV *Ocean Lady* (2009) and MV *Sun Sea* (2010), and the continued practice of border keepers criminalizing migrants. They argue that the *Komagata Maru* acts as a reminder of continued colonial logics and "border imperialism" (Walia 2014) through the construction of nonwhite itinerant subjects deemed criminals, queue jumpers, or terrorists, and immigrants deemed good or model minorities. In her chapter, Davina Bhandar examines the *Komagata Maru* within the historical and current racial landscape of migration to Western nations. She argues that there is a twin racial logic at play in which the anti-immigrant politics of the early twentieth century operate similarly to the logics of exclusion and border management that inform the policies of immigration and use of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program in Canada today. How the *Komagata Maru* is remembered 100 years later, Bhandar argues, is closely connected to how nonwhite bodies serve as foreign cheap labour, temporarily situated, both in the past and in the present.

Part 3: Colonial Temporalities of Memory and Cultural Production

The story of the *Komagata Maru* has been told through print media, documentary film, radio plays, theatre productions, literature, poetry, visual arts, and soundscapes. These numerous cultural productions are instructive in understanding the networks of colonialism and diasporic relations and how the transpacific as a geopolitical space is also an artistic and culturally productive space. The multiple dimensions of memory work found in numerous cultural productions about the *Komagata Maru* and

the various forms of analysis applied to narrate its colonial voyage speak to the complicated networks produced by nationalism, transnationalism, diaspora, race, and intergenerational forms of memory. This is true of memoir, whether by Gurdit Singh, the stalwart businessman who chartered the ship, or through the retelling of memory or "postmemory" passed down through generations of those once on board the ship. The chapters in this part of the book foreground "the mediated nature of memory" (Roy and Sahoo 2016, 86), making memory contingent as a site of historical truth claims.

The function of memoir is emphasized in the chapter by Kaori Mizukami, who focuses on the itinerant subjects completely ignored in Canadian historiography – the experiences and views of the Japanese crew on board the *Komagata Maru*. She examines a short essay written in 1936 by Yokichi Shiozaki, the Japanese owner of the ship and a fellow passenger. Prior to this publication, Shiozaki was interviewed by Sadao Yoshida regarding the incident, an accompanying text that Mizukami discusses. Although Mizukami finds sympathies for the position of the Indian migrants, she also notes that Japanese nationalism operated alongside imperial relations and the sovereign authority of Canadian border practices. The Japanese position in the history of the *Komagata Maru* speaks to the layered negotiations of colonial and sovereign authorities that act as powerful nodal points throughout the transpacific region.

In a complementary fashion, Irina Spector-Marks rereads the journey of the *Komagata Maru* through nationalist and anti-imperial struggles. In her chapter, she discusses the immense print-culture archive produced by the journey. Her analysis allows for an understanding of how transnational mobilization also had local or regional reverberations. For imperial officials, controlling information was a way to control Indian bodies out of place in an avowedly "white man's country." In contrast, for Indian newspapers across the empire, the details of passengers' intentions and experiences mattered much less than the potency of the ship as a symbol used to assert or reject imperial citizenship.

Through a study of Ali Kazimi's 2004 film *Continuous Journey,* in her chapter Ayesha Hameed offers what she calls a temporal method that rubs historical moments together to reveal simultaneously a sense of resonance and an acute disjuncture between history and the present. Her method illuminates unexplored links between historical archives and aesthetic dimensions of migration and "crooked lines" between the legal aporias

of the *Komagata Maru* and ships on which refugees travelling to Australia today are detained and/or violently deported. Hameed's exposition also reveals a play with borders through memory, sound, and temporality that collapses time and space.

Part 4: Disrupting Colonial Formations of the Nation

In the final part of the book, Enakshi Dua, Rajender Kaur, and Alia Somani return to the Canadian nation as a colonial and colonizing formation. Dua reveals how nation building is involved in heteronormative practices of social reproduction. Through an analysis of the *Komagata Maru,* the centrality of the heteronormative family is brought to light in the negotiation of itinerant subject formation, the border, national identity, and the context of colonial-imperial relations. Dua sheds light on the gendered and sexualized dynamics simultaneously reproduced by the Canadian nation-state via racialized immigration regulations and British imperial authorities.

Analyzing literary representations of the *Komagata Maru* in Canada, in her chapter Kaur tracks patterns of disappointments, betrayals, and disaffections of diasporic subjects (in this case Sikh diasporic subjects) across history and geopolitical borders. She explores links between representations of the *Komagata Maru* and the bombing of Air India Flight 182 as a way to track diasporic Sikh subjectivity radicalized by disaffection through state policies contained within colonial frameworks. Her method reveals that ethno-subnationalisms have their roots in the home country (in this case India) but are also nurtured abroad by a diasporic community (in this case Sikhs) insecure about its position in the adopted country. Kaur tracks the distinctions between memories made through national state narratives and those found in official reports and state archives that reveal counter nonstatist memories that give rise to Sikh nationalism in India and Canada.

In her chapter, Somani challenges nationalist projects of constructive forgetting, as in the case of Harper's apology in 2008. Somani illustrates how current narrations of the *Komagata Maru* have led to foreclosures made in national histories that potentially contain the impacts of traumatic events. Somani prompts us to question what is at play in a public act of forgetting and retelling. How is this performative forgetting an essential tool in the politics of restitution or apology? In the act of forgetting about the *Komagata Maru* and then recovering the memory of the travellers on

the ship, is the "white innocence" of the white settler nation of Canada reproduced?

The book concludes with a brief analysis by Renisa Mawani on the *Komagata Maru* as a minor event with global colonial significance and several poems by Tariq Malik on the echoes of its journey. Mawani asks what it might mean to think about the *Komagata Maru* not as a national or global history but as a minor one. Minor histories, she points out, challenge classifications and genres, opening new methods and frames of analysis. Malik's poems are an important contribution to rethinking the movement of itinerant subjects on board a ship that has implications across geopolitical borders, for both the past and the present, and for relations of power. Overall, the chapters reflect the imperfections and resistances encountered in any well-planned trip. Whereas a national historiographical approach makes room for a greater critique of racist immigration policies and includes group histories otherwise marginalized, it can also falsely support visions of the nation that has overcome racism and obscure continuing abuses of control and rule. A colonial analytic of the *Komagata Maru* opens up lines of inquiry into contested formations of imperial and British citizenship; how the colonizer-colonized binary moves through migration and surveillence histories of South Asians, Chinese, and Japanese and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples; how the conditions of competing nationalisms are structured by the ruling classes and anticolonial resistance; and the relationship between historical and contemporary modalities of governance. As Mawani says in her chapter, the *Komagata Maru* might be a minor event, but it has global colonial significance.

A Journey without an End

In our own journey of investigating the colonial trajectories of the *Komagata Maru,* three areas of inquiry stand out as requiring further investigation. First, since the national narration does not seek to question the normative formation of gender relations, such relations are largely rendered invisible. In British India specifically, the formation of gender was highly regulated through specific laws that targeted customs of marriage, family and kinship relations, and religious practices (Mani 1987; Sangari and Vaid 1990). Although the "Western" imposition of morality on the family was seen as part of a great civilizing force throughout British colonialism, for forms of indentured labour and the regulation of Indian

emigration there seem to have been other standards of family formation (Bahadur 2014; Ramsarran 2008; Tinker 1977). In the case of the *Komagata Maru,* the significance of women on board is not fully appreciated or even recognized in historical accounts. The fact that women were on board suggests that the passengers resisted the idea that they were sojourners, migrant workers not interested in relocating to and raising families in Canada. Rather, the presence of women and children underlines the possibility that families were being reunited and rejects the claim that the migration and settlement history of South Asians was exclusively that of men. Some of the chapters in this volume examine the gendered colonial contexts that affected itinerant subjectivity (see Dua, Somani, and Bains), but there were specific gendered and racist barriers to the migration and citizenship of women that need to be investigated further.

Second, there is little surviving information about the passengers on board the ship, including their lives before and after their arrival in Vancouver, how they practised their diverse religious beliefs, the relevance of caste relations, how Gurdit Singh's business interests were affected especially when Singh could not sell the cargo that he had brought with him on the ship, and how shore committee members managed financial and legal support for passengers. There have been literary interpretations of the ship's journey and other forms of representation that give a sense of the intimate lives of the passengers. Although we know that there were distinctions among passengers such as class, caste, and religion, the implications of these distinctions while they were on board are not revealed by the histories that exist on the *Komagata Maru.* A colonial analytic lends itself to a more heterogeneous understanding of itinerant subjects of empire, whereby the physical, economic, legal, and familial routes travelled necessarily signal divergences among the South Asian diaspora, such that the journey is not just one of Sikhs, despite popular claims (Roy and Sahoo 2016), and that there are variations among Sikhs involved. The homogenization of South Asian identities through migration and resettlement is also not unique to the narrative of the *Komagata Maru.* There is a dearth of academic research on the colonial networked history of Canada and the South Asian diaspora in which the diversity of caste, class, ethnicity, and religion within the communities of the South Asian diaspora is not fully recognized. These distinctions, while exposing a less than egalitarian understanding of universal forms of equality, are nonetheless important in examining how the South Asian diasporic communities have settled,

built their communities, and established networked connections. With some exceptions (e.g., Roy and Sahoo 2016), these distinctions, absented from scholarly representations, operate to occlude possible tensions or solidarities within the South Asian diasporic community. Instead, we are left to imagine, speculate, and interpret what the passengers on board the *Komagata Maru* perceived or experienced on their forward voyage, detention, return voyage, and (for some) subsequent incarceration.

Finally, how might the journey of the *Komagata Maru* be situated within what Jodi Byrd (2011) calls "a transit of empire," in which empire expands itself through notions of "Indianness" and Indigeneity? As Indigenous activists and scholars have long argued, the continued settlement of non-Indigenous peoples on their traditional lands and the presumed sovereignty of Europeans over Indigenous peoples comprise forms of both historical and contemporary colonialism. Some refer to this continuing form of rule as "settler colonialism" (Rifkin 2013; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006), which encompasses structural and everyday/commonsensical manifestations of power and controlling imperatives to dissolve Indigenous societies in order to erect new colonial societies on expropriated lands. The entanglements of past and present colonialisms and claims of nationhood (whether Canadian or Indigenous) are not outside how South Asian diasporas make claims of inclusion in present-day Canada. For example, there is tension between South Asians who seek federal government funding for *Komagata Maru* memorials across Canada and Indigenous peoples when that government continues to dispossess them of their lands through settler colonial law. How might these shifting colonial configurations be reimagined in settler colonial contexts? This focus on relations between Indigenous peoples and nonwhite immigrants, and on various forms of forced and voluntary migration and settler colonialism, has been growing over recent years (Bhandar 2016; Dhamoon 2015; Grieger 2014; Jackson 2012; King 2016; Lawrence and Dua 2005; Leroy 2016; Mathur, Dewar, and DeGagne 2011; Mawani 2009, 2012; Saranillio 2013; Vimalassery, Hu, and Goldstein 2016), but the dynamics of power across different kinds of colonialism have yet to be fully explored.

In marking the commemoration of this voyage and reading the *Komagata Maru* through a colonial analytic, the contributors to this volume raise important methodological questions about how the migratory experiences of the radically dispossessed can be viewed in a contemporary moment of international politics that seeks to flatten out and erase the inconsistencies,

revolutionary politics, and challenges to normative national claims to identity and belonging. The chapters offer an incomplete perspective on the *Komagata Maru* and its continued relevance to the formation of colonial logics, geographies of the transpacific, and challenges to nationalism from a migratory political position. Ultimately, the contributors illustrate the extensive parameters that the voyage of the *Komagata Maru* has undertaken over the past 100 years – it continues to be a voyage without a conclusion.

Notes

1   Use of the term "citizenship" has been highly varied across political regimes. Our use is not limited to legal forms (e.g., designated formal citizenship) but extends to substantive forms of subjecthood and belonging. Veronica Strong-Boag (2002, 69) outlines the inconsistencies in, and the unsettled nature of, the Canadian state post-Confederation by examining debates on the franchise, arguing that "Canadians had to learn the specifics of citizenship under the new regime." In her discussion of the Federal Franchise Act of 1885, she notes how the act served to define the specifics of national identity, inclusion, and belonging. In this way, enfranchisement was situated as a key right in determining the relationship between subject and state, at the time, as now, regarded as a key feature of modern citizenship.

2   As Augie Fleras (2014, 47) notes, the terms "racist" and "racism" encompass multiple meanings and overlapping frames, including racism as biology (intelligence/morality/skin colour/phenomarkers determine superiority and inferiority); racism as ideology (in which ideals and structures of society assert or imply the normalcy, acceptability, and superiority of one racialized group over another, together with the institutional power to put these perceptions into practice); racism as culture (whereby exclusion and inferiority are assigned through assessments of cultural practices against dominant cultural norms, often entrenched in discourses of national unity and cohesion); racism as structure (embedded in the normative fabric of society, whether formally or informally); and racism as systemic power (which protects ruling classes and norms of whiteness). Following the extensive work of scholars who have examined discourses of race and nationalism in Canada, we note that its immigration policy has entailed all five of these frames.

3   See Roy and Sahoo (2016, 86) for a further critique of the narrow focus on Sikhs in accounts of the *Komagata Maru*. The journey is commemorated as a Sikh narrative of martyrdom, the emphasis is on Sikhs on the ship, government apologies are mainly directed toward the Sikh community, and speeches on the topic typically end with Sikh religious greetings. Roy and Sahoo suggest that this framing of the *Komagata Maru* as a Sikh event reflects the hierarchical arrangement of colonized subjects by the British and the rights accorded by the British to Sikhs as favoured subjects of the empire (88).

4   The commemorative events in India also act as different interpretations and affective relationships of memory and sites of political identification. On September 29, 2014, the government of India announced a year-long centenary commemoration of the *Komagata Maru* incident at a presentation that included the presence of three of Baba Gurdit Singh's granddaughters and issued a set of commemorative coins in denominations