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## Discovering a Silenced History

It's June 2005, and I am driving home from a Narika meeting with Veena, my Punjabi-American neighbor.<sup>1</sup> We are crossing Hill Street in San Francisco when she asks me if I've heard of the Ghadar Party. The Ghadar Party, she tells me, was a revolutionary organization made up primarily of working-class Punjabis, initially headquartered on 436 Hill Street in 1913. Her grandfather, Godha Ram Channon, had been active in the Party while also engaging in other anticolonial movement work.<sup>2</sup> By the time we near our homes, I am struck by my unawareness of this early South Asian history.<sup>3</sup> As both a graduate student of social and cultural anthropology with an emphasis on post-colonial South Asia Studies and as a second-generation South Asian American woman, I could not help but wonder how I had never heard of the Ghadar Party prior to that moment. I anxiously await the next semester, hoping to have an independent study on the subject approved. I write a proposal weeks before classes begin, in anticipation. After badgering me on the details of how this research will be connected to my dissertation, a regular ritual we engage in, my advisor approves.

Contributed by Simmy Makhijani. © Kendall Hunt Publishing Company

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<sup>1</sup> Narika is a domestic violence intervention organization that works primarily with women who trace their origins to South Asia (which they constitute as Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and diasporic communities of Fiji and the Caribbean).

<sup>2</sup> For primary documents on Godha Ram Channon's engagement at the time, see the South Asian American Digital Archive: <https://www.saada.org/search/Godha%20Ram%20Channon>.

<sup>3</sup> The term "South Asia" refers to the southern region of the Asian continent and generally includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and sometimes includes Afghanistan, Burma, and Iran. It is both a geographical and ethnocultural term. "Indian subcontinent" and "South Asia" are used in this text somewhat interchangeably. South Asia is used to distinguish from East Asia, but also overtime it became a way to decenter India and frame the region in a way that reflected its great diversity. However, when referencing the early history of migration to the United States, the first migrants were predominantly from India and the term "South Asian" was not used at that time—and that is why it appears in both ways in this text.

In the following months, I visit the Ghadar Memorial Hall, located on 5 Wood Street, at least once, if not twice every week, with escorts from the Indian Consulate (often on their lunch break).<sup>4</sup> Each week I studiously read every publication written in English archived by the Party, in two-hour increments. I also make weekly visits to the Bancroft library in Berkeley to access a “partially restricted” Ghadar collection. Here, I come across rare transcriptions, documents, dated articles, memos, project notes, and lists of revolutionaries titled “Martyrs.” In this way, I begin to cultivate a relationship to silenced histories through dusty archives—learning to listen for gaps, investigate for the missing, read between lines, including those not yet there.<sup>5</sup>

## The Ghadar Party

The Ghadar Party was the best-known radical organization of South Asian migrants of the early 1900s in the United States. The Party was established in Astoria, Oregon in 1913, headquartered later that year in San Francisco for most of its lifespan, and formally dissolved in 1947 (Jensen, 1988; Leonard, 1992; Ramnath, 2011).<sup>6</sup> In most accounts (Jensen, 1988; Puri, 1993; Ramnath, 2011; Singh & Singh, 1966), the Ghadar (mutiny/revolt) movement was understood as an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial formation that sought to overthrow British colonial rule in India.

The historical context that led to the formation of the Party is critical reading, but for the purposes of this short chapter I can only briefly synopsize. Please refer to Chapter 5 in this anthology

<sup>4</sup>The Party shifted headquarters there in 1917. The building has been in the custody of the Indian Consulate since India’s independence and at the time the hall was not open to the public.

<sup>5</sup>Using a critical ethnographic approach (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Marcus, 1999; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), several sections of this chapter were previously published in my PhD dissertation, *Which Side Are You On: Black and South Asian American Youth, Solidarity Activism, and New Generation Politics* (2015), which relied heavily upon observant participation, 29 oral/relational histories and *testimonios*, along with open-ended interviews as a set of strategic research methods that aimed to reflect, above all, an activist ethnography (Hale, 2007; Vargas, 2008). I have drawn upon the work of the Latina Feminist Group (2001) for the term *testimonio*, which has been used for theorizing meaningful ways of encouraging a shared group process in curating stories of resilience, opposition, survival, and bearing witness as a practice of self-determined community research. What primarily distinguishes the relational *testimonio* from the group interview is that it surfaces out of community struggle and shared experience. In this way, the relational *testimonio* reflects a greater politics of horizontalism in that it allows for the community of research participants to inform the direction of the questions and thereby limits risks of objectification that are harder to avoid through the traditional group interview where a research agenda is usually imposed on the “research subjects” by an “interviewer,” in this case, myself as researcher. I also draw on autoethnographic methodology as a way of stitching the narrative together to foreground the oral histories/relational *testimonios* (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Elis et al. 2011).

<sup>6</sup>There are debates to the actual founding of the Ghadar Party and the spelling of the name. The Party used “Gadar” in its publications, but the pronunciation calls for an aspirate “h,” so I conform to the spelling of “Ghadar” throughout this chapter. As to its founding, according to an essay that Kartar Dhillon wrote in “The Gadarite,” a quarterly publication of the Gadar Heritage Foundation (Reprinted 1999: Berkeley, CA), the Ghadar Party was founded first in Astoria, Oregon in 1913. Historian Harish K. Puri also suggests with his research that the organization was first called the Hindi Association of the Pacific Coast and can therefore be understood to have first been organized in Portland, Oregon under the leadership of Har Dayal and with the support of immigrant farmers and laborers who “appeared restless for some substantive political activity” (Puri, 1993, pp. 67-68). The name changed to “Hindu Association,” which has caused confusion about the exact dates (Puri, 1993, p. 68). Another historian, L. P. Mathur suggests that the Ghadar Party evolved from the Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast which was first established in 1908 in Oakland, CA (Mathur, 1970, p. 20). I cite San Francisco as its location because this is where the Party was headquartered, its final location still standing as the “Gadar Memorial Hall” on 5 Wood St.

for more background. Vital links connect conditions of colonial displacement and coerced migration that greatly informed South Asian American political activism in the early 1900s. Simply put, South Asians, forced to migrate under conditions of colonization/imperialism and other horrid conditions, experienced xenophobia/virulent racism and repression in the United States (and also Canada) all the while having their labor exploited through American capitalism. This context of multiple interlocking oppressions was politicizing. South Asians in the United States started resisting in all sorts of ways—some networked with other people of struggle and started connecting the dots of oppression nationally and globally, while others used the court systems to try and campaign for rights (property, land, citizenship), and others went further and politically organized through formations such as the Friends of Freedom for India in New York or the Ghadar Party on the Pacific West Coast (Bald, 2013; Divakaruni, 1997; Gould, 2006; Hess, 1974, 1994; Kazimi, 2011; Leonard, 1992, 1997; Makhijani, 2013, 2015; Ogden, 2012; Puri, 1993; Ramnath, 2011; Singh & Singh, 1966; Slate, 2012; Sohi, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

Ram Chandra, an early Ghadarite, responding to the hostility faced by South Asian émigrés, wrote a series of articles collected in a Ghadar pamphlet entitled “Exclusion of Hindus from America Due to British Influence” in 1916 (Chandra, 1916).<sup>8</sup> In these articles Ram Chandra offered counter-narratives to the dominant circulating racist discourses of the time. He asked simple pointed questions, such as, if “Hindus” were considered undesirable, what kind of immigrant would be desirable in America? He went on to defend the “moral character” of Indians and refuted discrimination by skin color, writing “So far as color is concerned all physicians who have dissected the human body agree that under the skin all look alike” (p. 4). He contradicted the narrative that migrant Indians were undercutting white labor by offering cheaper labor, by stating frankly, “Hindus are too poor to come here in vast numbers unless they are brought by American capitalists, in which event it would be the duty of wise statesmanship to restrict the activities of such capitalists,” skillfully shifting political responsibility to the capitalist employer and not the migrant worker (p. 5).<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, he underscored capitalist exploitation in stating

<sup>7</sup> Also see “Hindus Driven Out: Citizens at Marysville, Cal., Attack Them—British Consul Informed,” in the *New York Times* (1908); “Exclusion League Objects to Hindus,” in *San Francisco Call* (1910); “The Hindu Question,” in the *Marysville Appeal* (1912); “Hindus Too Brunette to Vote Here,” in the *Literary Digest* (1923); “Hindus Are Whites: A Plea for Fair Play to Americans,” in *Hindus Citizenship Committee* (1927); “Here’s a Letter to the World from Suicide: Hindu Art Dealer, Dead by Gas, Writes ‘Examiner’ on ‘Why’ Before ‘Destroying his Body,’” (1928); and “The East India Company: The Original Corporate Raiders,” in *The Guardian* (2015).

<sup>8</sup> “Asian Indians” were often referred to as “Hindoos” by British and American officials and media outlets, a category that subsumed Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs (Leonard 1992; Shankar 2008). It is also important to mark here that most of the Party’s publications were penned by upper-caste Hindu-identified members, including Ram Chandra, whereas the Party’s rank-and-file members were predominantly working-class Punjabis. This was a point of great tension and contradiction in the Party per my conversations with Ghadarite Kartar Dhillon and her daughter Ayesha Gill (2007-2008).

<sup>9</sup> According to the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* (2010, sec. 8.39, 402) shorthand racial categories such as “black,” “brown,” or “white” are to be written in lowercase, but nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, and races, such as South Asian and African American, are to be capitalized. Others argue that “Black,” “Brown,” and “White” should be capitalized as they are proper nouns and do not refer to color as a descriptor. In the following chapter, I have chosen to capitalize Black and Brown, but not white for political reasons and therefore I am breaking from the *Chicago Manual of Style* in this case. Black and Brown here refer to unique cultures and peoples who historically have not been acknowledged as such. To capitalize Black specifically is also an attempt at following the example of W.E.B. Du Bois when he argued in the 1910s that the lowercase of “negro” was a “personal insult” (Du Bois and Aptheker 1997, p. 171) and the example of the affinity solidarity action group that I am a member of, Asians 4 Black Lives, that also made a collective decision to capitalize Black and Brown, but not white for similar reasons. (I was active in these conversations when we drafted the Asians for Black Lives Principles and Protocols statement where this usage was decided.)

directly, “we ourselves, do not wish to have the Hindus come here exploited and made to work for less than the standard American wage. All immigrants coming to this country should be put on the same basis” (p. 10). He concluded, in more than one instance, that the true root fear (one he suggested was harbored by the British and forced upon Americans), was that diasporic Indians would “become imbued with pestiferous ideas of political freedom” (p. 3). This fear was in fact nurtured into reality by the experience of U.S. racism, which politicized Indian migrants who found themselves in a perpetual state of un-freedom, whether from their location of home or abroad.

In an undated Ghadar handbill, “Dynamiting Women and Children in India,” with the opening lines, “You remember the terrible crimes committed by the Kaiser’s aerial forces in bombarding defenseless cities and thus slaying helpless women and innocent children,” the Ghadar Party urged American labor to join in protest with Ghadarites and all oppressed peoples of the world (para. 1):

Will American labor stand idly by while its brothers in another land are put down in this ruthless manner? Remember, if the airplane and the armored tank can be successfully used against the strikers in India, they can, and they will, be used against the strikers in America. Already the capitalist masters of this country are planning their use....

Now is the time for the common people of the whole world, India, America, and every other nation, to join together in a might effort to overthrow the system which forges the chains of ever-recurring war and fraternal slaughter upon them...

Men and women of labor: Bring this subject up in your labor meetings. Use the tremendous power of your economic organizations to prevent this ruthless oppression of the labor movement in other countries....

Raise your protest everywhere against the use of bombs and the slaughter indiscriminately of innocent women and children. Demand the purposes for which you suffered and gave your son [sic] shall be carried out. Self-rule for India, Egypt, as well as Ireland, and the right of the workers everywhere to control the conditions of their own lives. (Hindustan Gadar Party, n.d., paras. 6–9)

These early writings of the Ghadar movement attest to the complicated ways in which the organization positioned itself in the United States. Ram Chandra’s questions clearly point beyond a radical questioning of colonialism and toward an equally radical questioning of American racism and its binding to capitalism.<sup>10</sup> This pamphlet, urging American labor to support labor struggles in colonial India, Egypt, and Ireland, does so by asking union members to raise these issues in their local meetings. The Ghadar Party was unique, therefore, not simply because it was anti-colonial but also because it was anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist. In the decades to follow, the Party’s reach would extend throughout the United States and Canada, utilizing globally networked alliances with marginalized communities in shared struggles against imperialism, racism, and other structural forms of oppression (Ramnath, 2011). The Party organized uprisings and struggled apace with activists in the United States and South Asia; its publications were instrumental in organizing South Asians worldwide against British colonialism and eventually against international capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Glaringly absent in that time (and until recent years) is a gendered and caste analysis bound to the analysis of racial capitalism.

<sup>11</sup> For elaborations on Ghadar as anti-capitalist, see Ramnath (2011). Also, for Ghadar as anticolonial, see Harish K. Puri (1993), Karen Isaken Leonard (1992), and Kushwant Singh and Satindra Singh (1966).

## A Century of Ghadar

Chasing the scent of a silenced history requires many skills. Beyond listening for the forgotten and learning to follow trails of breadcrumbs, orange peels, and disappearing footprints, one must be patient for the unexpected. After almost a year of scouring whatever I could find on the Ghadar Party in print, I came across Ali Kazimi's documentary film "Continuous Journey" at the San Francisco International South Asian Film Festival in November 2005. The film narrates the tragedy of 376 Indian migrants, including Ghadar Party members, who traveled on the chartered Japanese Komagata Maru ship in 1914 with appropriate passage papers only to be denied permission to dock in Vancouver, replenish food and fuel, further threatened by hired ex-cops armed with guns borrowed from the militia (Kazimi, 2011). The film features official documents and newspaper clippings, some that I too have come across in my research. I hope to one-day meet Kazimi. That wish came true when he visited Berkeley a year later to screen another one of his films. At the screening I meet activist friends who invited me to join a post-film dinner discussion. It was at this dinner that Kazimi found out about my own wild goose chase with Ghadar and asked if I had met Kartar Dhillon, the last surviving female member of the Party. I was beside myself. There was a living connection to Ghadar in neighboring Oakland! He insisted I meet her as soon as possible given she was in her early 90s (time was running out!) Within the following few months, introductions were initiated, and I finally met Kar (as she's affectionately called) and her daughter Ayesha Gill.<sup>12</sup> My life, and its course—forever altered.

In that first meeting we mostly talked about the most critical struggles of our times, from the housing crisis, police brutality, to struggles for living wages, and struggles against extremist supremacies in the United States and abroad. I was asked about the campaigns I was engaged with on the ground through youth organizing and arts activism work I was involved with in Oakland. Kar was most interested in this as she too was an artist. Our conversations also naturally touched upon Kar and Ayesha's family histories in ways that revealed that these two women, who represented two generations—bookended by the Great Depression and the neoliberal turn, were not living in any sort of nostalgic revolutionary past, but were still very much radically engaged in the present as they had been their entire lives. Conversations with Kar understandably had gaps often filled in by her daughter Ayesha.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> A note on style: during the ethnographic vignettes throughout this chapter, I have chosen to break from the traditional style of referring consistently to all those introduced in the text by last name, after first introduction of first and last name. However, outside of the ethnographic moments, I do return to the norm of referring back authors and so on by last name alone; I've made this style choice to reflect relationship and make the ethnographic moments more accessible (which is in part their purpose).

<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this chapter I merely summarize a few moments in Kar and Ayesha's lives, drawing on years of conversations and a few relational *testimonios* (see footnote 5), while also sourcing existing published materials (which are almost nonexistent). Ayesha is currently writing up these stories in a collaborative project with her daughter Erika Surat Anderson and asked that I withhold accounts of several stories she and her mother have shared over the past many years so she can corroborate dates and other specificities with her own archival record collected over the past several decades and publish the accounts, hopefully in the not-too-distant future. These oral histories, when they circulate, will be of great benefit to many. It has been a privilege to hear some of them. Even more so, it has been a powerful experience to witness the sparks in the eyes of so many young people when I've introduced them to Ayesha and she has shared these stories directly with them in many of the spaces that make up the domain of my work over the past 15 years.

## Kartar Dhillon

Kar was the fourth of eight children. She was born in Simi Valley, California, April 30, 1915. Her father, Bakhshish Singh, had been a farmer in Punjab and a soldier for the British army. Many Punjabis had no choice but to offer their sons as soldiers in exchange for holding onto their farmlands under British occupation. Singh traveled to San Francisco as a merchant marine, settling there in the 1890s. On what would be his last trip to India in 1910, he brought with him his wife, Rattan Kaur, before restrictions of Asian immigration became more rigorously enforced. Both parents were among the founding members of the Ghadar Party. After Kar was born, the family moved to Astoria, Oregon for a number of years, before returning to farming life in California. During that time, her father became a member of the International Workers of the World (IWW), while working for the Hammond Lumber Company (Dhillon, 1996, p. 45). Ayesha, Kar's daughter, notes that because her grandfather was literate in Punjabi and fluent in English (which he taught himself), he was able to read newspapers to other workers (Gill, relational *testimonio*, November 1, 2014). In this way he became an organizer, having created strong social bonds with many of his Punjabi comrades as well as other non-white workers, who joined him in the lumber strikes with the Wobblies (Dhillon, 1996, p. 48).<sup>14</sup> Kar's father died in 1926, followed by her mother in 1936, when Kar was just 17. She married Surat Singh Gill, a fellow Ghadar Party member and a University of California student around that same time. In the 1930s the family moved to Los Angeles, where Kar had hoped to get a university education, but instead struggled to make ends meet working as a waitress and even taking up work as a Hollywood "extra" (Kim, 1999, p. 87).

Kar had actively raised her younger siblings, was herself a member of the Ghadar Party (along with her husband whom she divorced in 1942), and had been a labor activist and journalist/writer throughout her life (having aided Black Panther Kathleen Cleaver, among others, with writing). She worked at many trades: secretarial and pizza house/Indian restaurant waitress jobs (often both at the same time), and defense jobs during the Second World War (as a Boeing factory machinist and Marine Corp driver, the available employment of the time)—all while raising three children, mostly on her own, in San Francisco (Makhijani, 2013, para. 4). In the 1950s, after having spent intermittent periods in Los Angeles and New York, Kar worked in a trade union office in San Francisco and also for the *People's World*, a grassroots daily worker's paper. During this time, she also supported United Farm Workers, political prisoners and striking Pakistani merchant marines in San Francisco (Kim, 1999, p. 87). Both Kar and Ayesha were active in backing the unionizing efforts of farm workers. Kar, according to Ayesha, donated her car (a Rambler) to the workers at a time they needed it more than she. She often cooked Indian meals for the farm workers and also striking sailors and would get the International Longshore and Warehouse Union to support their struggles. "This solidarity with workers [in the U.S. and abroad], she [Kar] showed *all the time*" (Gill, relational *testimonio*, November 1, 2014). Both mother and daughter were also active in explicit struggles against white supremacy. The two talked about protests they joined facing off with the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), one such meeting was actually permitted by the San Francisco school board at Commerce High, a school that Ayesha would later attend (Makhijani, 2013, para. 5). They also participated in actions against police brutality, which included solidarity actions to protect the Oakland Black Panther Party headquarters when it was under assault by police armed with tear gas. "The Black Panthers as

<sup>14</sup> Members of the Industrial Workers of the World, an international labor union founded in 1905 in Chicago, Illinois, were often referred to as Wobblies.

you well know were always under severe attack because they were seen as a real threat to the government.... We had a strong alliance with the Panthers. We figured police were less likely to come and attack if the whole community [was there]. And they didn't attack [those times] so that [strategy] was successful" (Gill, personal communication, March 20, 2013). It was in this home, with these politics, that Ayesha was raised. She was, as she would often say in her own words, "an activist since birth."<sup>15</sup>

## Ayesha Gill

The politics that the Ghadar Party produced are uncompromisingly interracial, internationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. They are seen not only in the lives of Kar's parents, and Kar, but also of course in the life of Kar's daughter, Ayesha, who went on to work with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Free Speech Movement, and the Third World Strike during the 1960s (Makhijani, 2013, para. 5). In our conversations Ayesha recalled key moments in her life that overlapped with critical moments in postwar international struggles against capitalism and racism:

We had the Third World Liberation Front in the 60s on campus and we had the Free Speech Movement. The papers didn't talk much about the Third World movement on campus. [But since] I was very involved in the Free Speech Movement and the Third World Strike I could compare how we were treated. The difference was that the Free Speech Movement was mostly white participants and the Third World Strike was people of color, and the police, even though they greatly mistreated people in the Free Speech Movement too (by dragging them down stairs and so forth) ... they didn't feel free to just go after them and hit them on the head, the way that they did with the Third World Strike people. Two of our leaders ended up in the hospital with concussions because of this, two that I know of, [probably] more. So our tactics in the Third World Strike [were different]. Instead of standing and having a march, when the cops came, we ran! We didn't feel like having concussions [chuckles] and then we would regroup. And we would do things that were disruptive rather than sticking around to be thrown in jail or have our heads hit. So it was very interesting just to see the differences.<sup>16</sup>

Ayesha would often share how lucky she was to be born into a Ghadarite family. Though her grandparents died before she was born, the spirit of the Ghadar legacy was unbroken as it traveled uncompromisingly through her mother and uncle Budh. Over the years, she would share numerous stories, from joining the American Youth for Democracy at the young age of 12, to co-organizing the first graduate student teacher union in the country at the University of California, Berkeley, to visiting Angela Davis in prison as a delegate to the Central Labor Council in Alameda.<sup>17</sup> Ayesha earned degrees in physics and Slavic languages, and a PhD in genetics.

<sup>15</sup> Kartar Dhillon passed away on June 15, 2008 at the age of 93. Her memorial was held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley in California. Three songs were recited, the "Internationale," hymn of the international working class, written by Eugene Pottier; "I dreamed I saw Joe Hill Last Night," adapted from Alfred Hayes poem into a folk song by Earl Robinson; and "Side by Side," by Gus Kahn and Harry M Woods. These three songs were chosen because they expressed Kar's politics of anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, and feminist anti-racism while faithfully committed to the struggles of workers and to the simple values of solidarity, trust, and love for comrades, for family, for another world.

<sup>16</sup> This story was also documented in an intergenerational dialogue with South Asian youth activists on July 26, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Remembering dates and years was a bit fuzzy for Ayesha Gill at times.

All while researching, teaching, and writing in those fields, she never stopped organizing. In the years we've known each other, beyond our direct collaborations, I've seen her at Occupy actions and a 100,000 strong general strike in Oakland in 2011, rallies and marches protesting the threat of closure of the City College of San Francisco in 2013, Stop Urban Shield demonstrations in 2014, and if her hips had not given out a few years ago, there is no doubt she would have continued, in solidarity actions with the Movement for Black Lives and the Standing Rock Sioux, and undoubtedly joining the massive uprisings against police brutality and unrelenting racial injustices that are sweeping the nation today.<sup>18</sup>

As women of South Asian descent, Kar and Ayesha's participation in American freedom struggles after the waning of Ghadar reveal the crosscutting relationship of their politics, yet we never hear about working-class South Asian women engaged in movement work in deep and meaningful ways over this time period. In fact, until recent years, almost all the histories that reference Ghadar were written by cis-gendered men.<sup>19</sup>

South Asian radicalism couched in a diasporic context that produces two locals—one of residency and one of ancestral homeland—mediated by a shared set of political and material conditions informs the subjectivities of many South Asians in the United States, then and today. Essentially, South Asians first arrived in the United States through a process of displacement sparked by the British occupation of Punjab. The material conditions of that struggle set against another set of racialized and gendered material struggles around land and labor in the United States fomented a revolution in exile, through the Ghadar movement, which was rooted in critiques of colonialism that extended through racial capitalism.

Kar's parents, Bakhshish Singh and Rattan Kaur's sealed commitment to the Ghadar Party's unflinching determination to defeat colonialism in India (and later, its anti-capitalism commitment through solidarity with labor), Kar's support of Pakistani merchant marines and United Farm Workers, Ayesha's participation in CORE and the Third World Strike, and both Kar and Ayesha's involvement in fights against the KKK and their steadfast support of the Black Panther Party constellate a genealogy of resistance characterized through a convergence of *anti's*—anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, anti-patriarchy, and anti-racism. An emergent internationalist solidarity politics arose out of the anti-imperialism movements of the time, such as Ghadar and Black Power. By international solidarity, I am referring to the relationships forged between people in struggle across national boundaries. International solidarity through intersecting struggles and issues is critical in changing the terrain of political and social change (Davis, 2016). Visibility and pressure from groups outside national boundaries can be an important source of publicity and knowledge—signaling to the world and those in power that the community under siege is not alone (Waterman & Cox, 2014, p. 1). Cross-group struggles against world imperialism has provided a charged context from which international solidarities have been forged. Imperialism has been built upon the historical understructure of European colonialism and the subjection and pillage of Indigenous communities in Africa, Asia,

<sup>18</sup> Urban Shield (sponsored by several federal agencies, foremost the Department of Homeland Security) is the world's largest surveillance technology and weapons exhibition that offered a range of militarized training exercises for police and first responders (Urban Shield, 2014). The Stop Urban Shield! Coalition was successful in leading protests that forced the Urban Shield trade show and training out of Oakland in 2018, yet the struggle to ensure the city of Oakland withdraw its participation completely continues as community fights for divestment in militarized policing and investment in education, health, and housing as a more effective pathway to community safety (Stop Urban Shield, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> "Cis" as a prefix describes identification with gender associated with sex assigned at birth and is used to mark unmarked privilege.

Australia, and the Americas by European forces, such as England, France, and Spain, resulting in far-reaching dispossession (Dixon, 2014). This process of domination, of Global North over Global South, has been carried forward through economic, political, and cultural mechanisms, aided often by military force. This power dynamic of Global North over Global South domination is maintained today through capitalist and neoliberal social relations of finance and trade with cooperation from media, popular culture, policing, and the military (Dixon, 2014, p. 75). The economic devastation and military action of colonialism that forced migration from the Global South in the early 1800s were encountered in other forms once migrants reached new locales, as the story of Ghadar details, yielding a century of struggle that continues into the present. Yet, up until 2005, I myself, as a woman of South Asian descent, knew nothing about the Ghadar Party.

## Echoes of Ghadar

My own uncovering of the history of the Ghadar Party set me on a long-and-winding trajectory that fortified dedicated commitments to liberation work through activism, organizing, and teaching. And as important as all the twists and turns were in shaping and informing my work—with its astonishing discovery and exceptional relational moments—it was also a very laborious hunt. I had to search high and low, following a pathway that did not originate from my familial home or sites of education, yet somehow brought me *home*. I did not grow up in a particularly politicized family, nor did I have a particularly accessible social justice education growing up. That first time, meeting Kar, I remember telling her how I had wished I had been born into a revolutionary family like she had—and before I could go further, she stopped me in my tracks, pulled me toward her in an embrace and said she was adopting me, and that was that. Even though I was pretty sure she was just saying this so I wouldn't get distracted by how late in life (relatively speaking) I was discovering a bloodline of resistance through two generations of radical South Asian women, I vowed from that day on to adopt others into this rebel lineage by making Ghadar history more accessible—through political education via arts, activism/organizing, and teaching ethnic studies.

As the 100th anniversary of the Ghadar Party approached in 2013, the echoes of Ghadar finally began to resound a bit louder through revolutionary soundscapes carried forward by various collectives and solidarity initiatives, many of which I had the privilege to be involved with in the Bay Area. In fact, the desire to pass forward Ghadar politics to younger generations of South Asians was a prime motivation in becoming a core organizer for a local South Asian youth activist project, Bay Area Solidarity Summer (or BASS, which launched in 2011; BASS, 2015). Here, I would get to co-build a South Asian radical history workshop, launch teach-in's on Black and Brown solidarity (including facilitating an intergenerational dialogue with mentors and friends, including Ghadar descendant Ayesha Gill and Black Panther Party leader Ericka Huggins, and support historian activist friends Anirvan Chatterjee and Bharnali Ghosh as they curated the first radical South Asian American walking tour featuring Ghadar history in Berkeley, California. I even carried these histories across communities to workshops and organizing projects with Black and Chicano/a youth I worked with at United Roots, a youth center I co-founded and co-ran from 2009 to 2013 in Oakland. These moments led to countless other collectively organized Ghadar-inspired efforts, including art exhibits, poetry readings, public talks, theatrical dance performances—all aimed at making Ghadar history easily accessible. We even got Berkeley City Council to adopt a resolution in 2014 declaring November 1st as Ghadar Day.

But the true radical spirit of Ghadar, in my opinion, was most visible at a weekend-long Ghadar Convergence hosted by South Asian Solidarity Initiative (SASI) in New York City in

October 2013.<sup>20</sup> The organizers understood that drawing on the legacy of Ghadar would be useful in understanding and engaging present-day struggle. The militant radicalism of Ghadar as anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist was claimed in ongoing fights against neocolonialism and neoliberalism.<sup>21</sup> During its time, the Ghadar Party engaged in questions still relevant today—labor and immigrant rights, racial equality, racist discrimination against workers, heightened xenophobia, and militarization. As the weekend progressed, numerous activists expanded on these commitments and their connections to the complex forms of interlinked oppressions and resistances of South Asians across the world and, more broadly, with marginalized communities in the United States. Whether articulated through discussions of the fisherpeople and development struggles in rural Sri Lanka imparted by Herman Kumara or the garment factory struggles in Bangladesh shared by Kalpona Akhter, or the *Dalit*, *Adivasi*, displaced peoples, peasant fights against state and corporate land grabs in India that Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt imparted, or the formation of Pakistani progressive student movements Alia Amirali passionately relayed—a consistency remained; these struggles were all waged against capital.<sup>22</sup>

Community struggles refracted through interrelated efforts across trans/queer, Black, Latino/a, Chicano/a, and South Asian communities in the United States were made visible throughout the weekend by way of the work of several community groups. Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM) Executive Director (then, Legal and Policy Director) Fahd Ahmed spoke of the South Asian struggles forged against police excess post-9/11. Rafael Samanez, co-founder and executive director of *Vamos Unidos*, sketched out ways in which economic neoliberalism and the advances of capital were forcing families to walk across borders, as in Mexico to the United States, relegating migrants to precarious labor, such as street vending.<sup>23</sup> Organizing Committee member of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) Biju Mathew shared a few anti-capitalist success stories in the taxi worker struggles against lease caps and the initiation of health care funds generated through existing ride fare

<sup>20</sup>The notion of putting together a Ghadar convergence, per Sangay Mishra, was to create space for transnational dialogue with people involved in diverse organizing across South Asia and local communities of struggle. Mishra conveyed that mobilizations against the war in Afghanistan put a lot of South Asian activists in contact with other communities invested in antiwar work in New York. Out of that organizing emerged a recognition for the need to convene dialogues across struggles, but Mishra noted, “we were not very sure about our bandwidth to pull something of that kind off and then there was awareness of the centenary of Ghadar given Maia’s [Ramnath] book and the framework the book created” and from there the convergence became anchored into the idea of engaging this radical silenced history to “deploy it in a way that could be more contemporary, political... and reach beyond the radical spaces already aware of that history” (personal communication, July 21, 2014). According to Paul Routledge (2003), a convergence space is one that facilitates a “coalition of interests” and is where “collective visions” might articulate themselves in the company of shared struggles. “By participating in spaces of convergence, activists from participant movements embody their particular places of political, cultural, economic and ecological experience with common concerns, which lead to expanded spatiotemporal horizons of action” (Routledge, 2003, p. 345).

<sup>21</sup>In discussing neoliberalism one must avoid construction into a monolithic category but rather recognize it as a reorganization of capitalism. But it is helpful to note neoliberal economics has generally resulted in greater land enclosures, lower wages, and higher profits throughout South Asia, in service to freer capital mobility (McCartney, 2005, pp. 237–243).

<sup>22</sup>*Dalit* is a term that translates from Sanskrit into English as “broken,” “oppressed,” “crushed” and is claimed politically by communities that have been problematically referred to as “untouchables” or “Harijans” (children of Vishnu) in India. Dalits make up one-quarter of India’s 1.2 billion population (approximately 250 million; Ambedkar [1936] 2014). *Adivasi* is the term most commonly used to refer to diverse indigenous minority communities in India (Bhengra, Bijoy, and Luithui 1999).

<sup>23</sup>Since 2003, membership-based social justice community organization, *Vamos Unidos*, has been working to secure stability for low-income Latina/o street vendors by mobilizing to increase street vendor rights, decrease arrests and confiscations, and advocate for “green carts” (Dunn, 2014, pp. 142–149).

surcharges (Mathew, 2005).<sup>24</sup> Discussions of how these location-specific struggles against (neoliberal) capitalism in the United States intersected with global initiatives to organize labor as a shared project of dismantling racist, heterosexist, ableist institutions were taken up with an emphasis on the need to create more direct pathways to new truly democratic institutions. The convergence raised a series of questions of what solidarity might require of us now and how a “convergence” space might facilitate impactful networked organizing and the development of new aspirational politics and horizons that would keep the spirit of Ghadar alive as we imagine political futures differently.<sup>25</sup>

Linking together colonialism, capitalism, and racism is one of the most important lessons of Ghadar Party history. In fact, looking back at the rise, growth, and struggles of the Ghadar Party reveals the way racism and colonialism/capitalism worked together to effectively maintain white supremacy in both the United States and British India.<sup>26</sup> Casting their revolutionary glance toward dismantling the British Empire, while located in the middle of America’s early and enduring racist immigration policies, the intrepid organizers of Ghadar taught us that racial colonialism/capitalism does not exist in isolation, but rather works in tandem with one another, across continents and empires. In our times, notions of freedom and justice have grown to include gender-expansive and caste struggles, the climate crisis, militarization of the police, and so on. Though not all these frames of struggle were a part of the political vocabulary of 100 years, we can walk in solidarity with Ghadar’s commitments by engaging these struggles in the present. By connecting the dots between the hired ex-cops armed with guns borrowed by the militia to surround the Komagata Maru over 100 years ago to struggles against militarized policing today or the Ghadar Party’s fierce battle against global white supremacy via immigrant racism, brute colonialism, and savage capitalism to ongoing fights against present-day neoliberal capitalism and white supremacy—we become witness to a long arc of suffering and resistance to that suffering, as Kar and Ayesha’s lives testified.

I write this conclusion amidst the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and brute racism, which has exposed capitalism, as an extension of (settler) colonialism for what it really is. The violence that is holding our current system together and producing vast inequalities has greatly failed people and planet. Uprisings are sweeping the world, their greatest force springing from the United States, and in their midst vast groups of people across many differences are starting to seriously talk about reimagining an economy not based on the exploitation of living systems and unequally racialized, gendered peoples. Popular consciousness is finally beginning to shift, after centuries of struggle. Whether we will fully move into a just recovery or head toward collapse is yet to be seen. But in this dark hour, the spirit of Ghadar—of revolution and rebellion—moves us toward the dreams of feminist abolitionists where an interdependence of community care as guiding principle lights a pathway forward should we be bold enough to walk it.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> NYTWA has worked for decades organizing and advocating for taxi workers, the majority of whom are immigrants. These drivers belong to a sector of workers that traditional unions usually don’t organize because as “independent contractors” they are not protected by most labor and employment laws (Mathew, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Ayesha Gill joined me for this convergence and also gave a keynote address. She attested to the fact that the commitment of Ghadar was rightfully honored at the convergence and left feeling so enlivened.

<sup>26</sup> Please see Chapter 5 in this anthology for a brief history of the xenophobia and immigrant racism experienced by South Asians that contributed to the formation of the Ghadar Party.

<sup>27</sup> There are critical gaps in the literature about the ways in which gender has shaped women/queer participation in nationalist movements like the Ghadar Party. In future work, I plan to build on my former work (Makhijani 2013) reflecting more deeply on how the notion of the archive as living requires the feminist scholar to actively participate in historical knowledge production and how this process might be further advanced by engaged the work of radical Black/queer and abolition feminists (See: Carruthers 2018; Collins, 2000; Combahee River Collective 1977; Crenshaw 2007; Davis 2016, and so on.)

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## #Asians4BlackLives

Simmy Makhijani

Asians 4 Black Lives developed as a rapid-response affinity solidarity group in December 2014 in Oakland, California (Asians 4 Black Lives, 2015). The group emerged as part of ongoing organizing against racism and police brutality that resurged after the 2014 police killing of unarmed Black teenager, Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Under the hashtag #Asians4BlackLives, long-time community members and activists who loosely and strategically identified as “Asian” joined a multiracial call to action by local Black leadership to shut down the headquarters of the Oakland Police Department (OPD) in defense of Black lives on Monday, December 15, 2014. Initially, #Asians4BlackLives was meant to act as an interim hashtag for the shutdown of OPD direct action. “It wasn’t necessarily intended as a moment of naming. We needed a large enough banner to cover the hands and chains of the locked-in Asian comrades, as to not distract media from the main focus of the action—Black folks taking up space and being in their power. However, the hashtag stuck” (Fu et al., 2019). The group intentionally convened after that and began to draw up a set of guiding principles and protocols. (See [a4bl.wordpress.com/who-we-are/](http://a4bl.wordpress.com/who-we-are/).)

In that moment of crisis, most of those in the group were already active in multiple organizing formations where they held relationships with Black organizers, so it was easy to spring into rapid response around Black-led calls to action. But as the group continued to participate in ongoing mobilization calls, such as the January 15, 2015 shutdown of the Oakland Federal Building with the Third World Resistance Coalition, more people who identified in some way as Asian reached out wanting to engage strategically in solidarity organizing with Black liberation and beyond. Though the group elected to continue as a direct-action solidarity affinity group and not become a base-building group (while continuing to organize in rapid-response moments), Asians 4 Black Lives has invested in building deeper relationships around commitments to transformative justice with a pastiche of grassroots organizing groups, all the while inspiring resonant autonomous formations across the United States.

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