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Enacting a Latinx Decolonial Politic of Belonging: Latinx Community Workers' Experiences Negotiating Identity and Citizenship in Toronto, Canada

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores how women and non-binary Latinx Community Workers (LCWs) in Toronto, Canada, negotiate their identities, citizenship practices and politics in relation to settler colonialism and decolonization. We demonstrate how LCWs enact a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging, an alternative way of practicing citizenship that strives to simultaneously challenge both Canadian and Latin American settler colonialism. This can be seen when LCWs refuse to be recognized on white settler terms as "proud Canadians," and create community-based learning initiatives that incite conversations among everyday Latinx community members around Canada's settler colonial history and present, Indigenous worldviews, as well as race and settler colonialism in Latin America. We consider how LCWs' enactments of a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging serve as small, incomplete, but crucial steps towards decolonization.*

KEYWORDS Latinx identities; citizenship; belonging; decolonization; settler colonialism

There has been a significant debate unfolding across Indigenous Studies, Race and Ethnic Studies and Settler Colonialism Studies, over how racialized migrants and people of colour are implicated in settler colonialism in the United States and Canada. Central to this debate have been questions around whether people of colour are settlers, as seen in Lawrence and Dua's (2005) contentious critique of the Anti-Racism field. In response, scholars and activists have taken up different stances from rejecting the equation of migration to colonization (Sharma, 2015; Sharma & Wright, 2008), to

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recognizing the uneven power relationships between white settlers, racialized migrants and people of colour, and how settler colonialism can be reinforced in claims to citizenship and belonging (Chatterjee, 2018; Phung, 2011; Saranillio, 2013). Black Studies scholars have made significant interventions into this debate by underscoring the unique experiences of the Black diaspora, and how the legacy of transatlantic slavery and anti-Blackness are integral to the ongoing settler colonial project (Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Walcott, 2014; Wilderson, 2010). There also continue to be calls for analyses that explore how Black, Indigenous and people of colour can work in solidarity for a decolonial future (Dhamoon, 2013; Pulido, 2017; Simpson et al., 2018).

In this paper, we contribute to these debates by exploring how Latinx people are grappling with questions of settler colonialism and decolonization in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. By Latinx, we refer to people across the gender spectrum, including transgender and gender non-binary people, who trace their origins to Latin America – Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. Recently, there has been increasing interest in exploring the unique positionality of Latinx migrants in relation to settler colonialism, as they come from settler colonial contexts in Latin America (Castellanos, 2017; Speed, 2017) and embody different racial identities including Black/Afro-Latinx, Afro-Indigenous, non-Black Indigenous, mestizo (mixed) and white (see Blackwell et al., 2017). While important, this research has predominantly focused on the U.S. context; there is a need to better understand Latinxs' experiences in Canada.

We address this gap by exploring how a diverse network of women and non-binary Black/Afro-Latinx, Indigenous and Brown Latinx Community Workers (LCWs) in Toronto understand and negotiate settler colonialism and decolonization in their everyday life. LCWs work within, across and alongside Latinx-serving non-profit organizations as paid and unpaid staff, counsellors, community educators, youth workers, advocates, volunteers, artists and activists who seek to promote the wellbeing of Latinx and other racialized communities. As such, their perspectives and practices are crucial to understanding how the Latinx diaspora in Toronto can disrupt settler colonialism and work towards decolonization.

Drawing on 38 in-depth interviews with LCWs and over two years of participant observation across Latinx community organizing spaces in Toronto, we demonstrate that LCWs negotiate their identities and relationships to settler colonialism and decolonization by enacting a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging. Cahuas (2020) defines a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging as an alternative way of practicing substantive citizenship that strives to simultaneously challenge *both* Canadian settler colonialism, and Latin American settler colonialism that continues to haunt the Latinx diaspora in Toronto. We build on this concept in two ways. First, we explore how LCWs invoke a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging in the ways they understand and articulate their identities as differently racialized Latinxs who

live in Canada with uneven claims to citizenship and belonging. Second, we examine how LCWs put into practice a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging through a community-based educational initiative called *Tales from the South: Latinx Lives on Turtle Island*. We consider how LCWs' enactments of a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging, as seen through their identity narratives and initiatives like *Tales from the South*, are entangled with settler colonialism, while also serving as crucial, small, albeit incomplete steps towards decolonization.

In the following section, we draw on literature across Race and Ethnic Studies, Settler Colonial Studies, Indigenous Studies, Black Studies, Latin American and Latinx Studies to more deeply unpack the tensions around people of colour's claims to citizenship and belonging within settler colonial contexts, and explicate the unique positionality of Latinx migrants. Next, we provide a historicized description of Latinx politics in Toronto, situate ourselves and explain our methods. We then share an in-depth analysis of how LCWs enact a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging through the ways they construct their identities, make claims to citizenship, and create *Tales from the South*.

Interrogating Claims to Citizenship and Belonging in White Settler Colonial Contexts and Exploring the Unique Case of Latinx Migrants

Wolfe (2006) defines settler colonialism as an ongoing violent process based in a logic of elimination and desire for territory where settlers seek to remove, occupy, dominate and ultimately replace the Indigenous population. Similarly, Lawrence and Dua (2005) explain that settler states aim to "disappear Indigenous people *as* peoples" (p. 123, emphasis in original) and relegate them to the past, in order to take their place. They argue that anti-racist scholarship has not seriously foregrounded the realities of ongoing colonization that Indigenous people experience in settler states, and call non-Indigenous people of colour, scholars and activists to understand how they *are* indeed settlers, who participate in, or are complicit in the dispossession of Indigenous people.

In response, critical race scholars have taken up Lawrence and Dua's (2005) critique in different ways. Sharma and Wright (2008) reject the notion that people of colour are settlers and argue that migration should not be equated to colonization, as many times it is the only recourse oppressed and colonized people have to survive. Sharma (2015) revisits this argument by calling for a rejection of "particularistic" and "essentialist" modes of understanding ourselves, and suggests recognizing our shared humanity and interconnectivity, while still maintaining that mobility is not colonization. Other critical race scholars have turned to foregrounding settler colonialism in their analyses, while also engaging with underlying power differences between white settlers, racialized migrants and people of colour (see

Dhamoon, 2013; Jafri, 2012; Phung, 2011; Saranillio, 2013). For example, even as racialized migrants face racism and marginalization, and are excluded from full citizenship within settler contexts, they can still be complicit in settler colonialism in the ways they seek recognition, inclusion and stake claims to belonging as citizens (Dhamoon, 2013; Phung, 2011; Saranillio, 2013). Phung (2011) and Saranillio (2013) argue that when Asian migrants present themselves as good, respectable and hard-working people who deserve to live in Canada and the U.S. because of their role in building the nation, they engage in a self-indigenizing narrative that is similar to, but not the same as white settlers' justifications for occupying Indigenous land. This reifies racist notions that settlers have an earned right to land because of their industriousness, and that Indigenous people lack this right because they do not productively use the land for profit and are "unfit for modern times" (Saranillio, 2013, p. 289; See also Phung, 2011).

Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd (2011) captures this complex positioning of racialized migrants and people of colour in the term "arrivant." Similarly, Chatterjee (2018) calls for a rethinking of "immigrant settlerhood" and an understanding of settler colonialism that accounts for how racialized labour is constitutive of settler political economy. Chatterjee explains how the exploitation of migrant labour and the dispossession of Indigenous people are deeply interconnected processes that allow settler colonial states to thrive. She argues that by trying to separate these issues we risk losing sight of the main power structure that needs to be dismantled – settler colonial nationalism.

Black Studies scholars have made profound contributions in theorizing settlerhood and settler colonialism by foregrounding the making of the human, and demonstrating how transatlantic slavery and settler colonialism are mutually constitutive and must be addressed simultaneously (Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Walcott, 2014; Wilderson, 2010). Lethabo-King (2016, 2019) presents "conquest" as a conceptual frame that recognizes how coloniality in the Americas is premised on the dehumanization of Black and Indigenous people, so that the conquistador-settler can make himself the rightful, dominant Human. Lethabo-King echoes Walcott's (2014) assertion that in a post-Columbus world, being Human is founded in anti-Blackness that excludes Black people from full citizenship and belonging in place. They both powerfully call attention to the ways Black people in the Americas have had a markedly different relationship to Indigenous people and settler colonialism, one that cannot be equated with white settlers or non-Black migrants. Furthermore, Lethabo-King brings into view how relations of conquest shift and continue into the present, requiring new terms to better understand how Black and different racialized groups are entangled with settler colonialism, slavery and slavery's afterlives.

So how do migrants from Latin America and their descendants fit into theorizations of settler colonialism or conquest? Migrants from Latin America come from settler colonial contexts themselves (Castellanos, 2017;

Speed, 2017), where white conquistador-settlers subjugated Indigenous and Black populations through enslavement, genocide, dispossession, sexual violence, imposed heterosexualism and other forms of oppression (Lugones, 2007; Quijano, 2007). Central to settler colonialism across many Latin American nation-states was the imposition of mestizaje (miscegenation or racial mixing), an ideology and practice that Wynter (1995) historically traces to a system of knowledge that cast Africans as idolators, which emerged from the Portuguese landing in what is now known as Senegal in 1441. Wynter describes how this notion of idolator was mapped onto the New World and reworked to place Indigenous and Black people on the lowest rungs of the racial hierarchy in the Americas. Wynter writes that "differing degrees of mixtures were designated as *more human* the more they bred in the European and bred out *Indio* and *Negro*" (p. 36).

Mestizaje continues to fundamentally shape racial hierarchy in many states across Latin America, where whiteness is privileged above all and mestizos occupy a fraught intermediary position that propagates the myth that assimilation is complete (Hooker, 2017; Saldaña-Portillo, 2016). Urrieta (2012) explains how, when claimed, mestizaje seems to offer Black and Indigenous people and even darker-skin mestizos a path to climb the racial, social-economic ladder. In many Latin American countries, this is commonly referred to as, "mejorando la raza" (improving the race) whereby Black, Indigenous and darker-skin mestizos are pressured to "mix" with lighter-skin people and "deculturalize" by not passing down Indigenous languages and traditions in order to circumvent the oppression one faces when claiming Indigeneity (Urrieta, 2012).

When migrants from Latin America arrive to the U.S. or Canada, they bring these understandings of race and racial hierarchy, but also confront reworked understandings of race and mestizaje as newly categorized Latinxs (Blackwell et al., 2017). For example, Chicanx scholars and activists have long reclaimed mestizaje as an identity that celebrates Indigeneity and lays claim to belonging in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands (Hooker, 2017; Pulido, 2017). Yet, as Alberto (2017) and Saldaña-Portillo (2017) demonstrate, such efforts to recover an Indigenous past by mestizos conflicts with the kind of Indigeneity that Indigenous and Black/Afro-Indigenous people from Latin America assert, which places them as speaking, living subjects in the present. Therefore, people that become categorized as Latinx, including mestizo, Indigenous, Chicanx, Afro-Indigenous, Black/Afro-Latinx, hold different relationships to, and ways of negotiating, settler colonialism in Latin America and the U.S.

So, how can differently racialized Latinx migrants enact an alternative politic, or way of being in place as citizens or residents of a settler-colonial state that challenges the legitimacy of that very state? How can Latinxs make claims to rights and belonging without reproducing settler colonial logics? And in what ways can Latinxs grapple with their complicity and work towards decolonization? Although there are no simple answers to these

questions, Indigenous, Black and anti-racist scholars have proposed compelling starting points.

Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonization is not a metaphor, but a material reality that Indigenous people are working towards that requires the repatriation of land and a recognition of their unique relationships to land. They warn against trying to reconcile settler guilt by making "moves to innocence" like equating social justice and decolonization struggles, and instead propose an "ethic of incommensurability" that recognizes how decolonization distinctly requires a complete transformation of settler systems. Hunt and Holmes (2015) elaborate that decolonization involves non-Indigenous people building relationships with and supporting the struggles of Indigenous people, from participating in blockades and protests, to engaging in an everyday decolonial queer politic. This politic works to understand race, sexuality and gender as mutually constituted, and involves exposing and challenging how Canada is a white settler nation that continues to dispossess Indigenous people (Hunt & Holmes, 2015).

In a recent exchange between Simpson, Walcott and Coulthard (Simpson et al., 2018), Simpson asserted how decolonization requires not only Indigenous resurgence, but connecting with radical Black movements and communities of colour to "create constellations of co-resistance" (p. 81). As Lethabo-King (2016, 2019) and Wynter (1995) demonstrate, the making of the Human is central to the project of conquest, and thus must be engaged with in order to work towards another world. Or as Walcott (2014) explains, a decolonial project will not be possible if movements do not engage with the "deathly production of anti-Blackness" (p. 93), and the possibilities of Black ontology that demonstrate different ways of being human that do not reproduce the violence of the post-Columbus Human.

Audra Simpson's (2014) "politics of refusal," also illuminates possibilities for alternative, decolonial forms of being and citizenship. Simpson demonstrates how Mohawks in Kahnawà:ke refuse incorporation as U.S. or Canadian citizens, and assert their sovereignty as members of Indigenous nations in their everyday lives. Yet, there are moments when Mohawks must call on Canadian or U.S. citizenship as a "citizenship of convenience" in order to cross borders even though their "feeling citizenship" – how they live their life, the relationships they're embedded in – is Mohawk (Simpson, 2014, p. 171-173). Simpson argues for a politics of refusal that "rejects state-driven forms of recognition and sociability" (p. 16), and opts for alternative ways of being understood premised on one's authority as Mohawk, Indigenous or Haudenosaunee.

While Latinx people do not have the same relationships to U.S. or Canadian states as Mohawks or other Indigenous nations, and thus do not have recourse to be legally recognized as something other than citizens from their nations of origin or as Canadians (albeit not-fully), Simpson's (2014) politics of refusal is still instructive. A politics of refusal interrogates the very foundations of white settler authority, the legitimacy of the state and the

benefits of being recognized as a citizen. It also shares characteristics with Dhamoon's (2013) politics of disruption, "a persistent and intentional questioning of the forces of power that produce, reproduce and stabilize calcified meanings and structures of difference" (p. 24) of the settler state and its subjects.

Cahuas' (2020) Latinx decolonial politic of belonging aligns with (but is not the same as) Simpson's (2014) politics of refusal because it is an alternative way diasporic Latinxs can practice citizenship that strives to simultaneously challenge *both* Canadian *and* Latin American settler colonialism. In Cahuas' study, she demonstrates how Latinx identities and cultural celebrations can be mobilized towards different political ends that can reinforce or disrupt settler colonialism, anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness. She points to a need to better understand how Latinxs in Canada construct their identities and negotiate their relationships to settler colonialism and decolonization in their everyday narratives and practices.

In this paper, we address this gap by focusing on the experiences and practices of a diverse network of women and non-binary Black/Afro-Latinx, Indigenous and Brown Latinx Community Workers (LCWs), and a collaborative project between PODER (a Latinx feminist non-profit) and the Working Women Community Center (WWCC) called *Tales from the South*. By taking this approach, we seek to enrich conversations around migrant politics, citizenship and settler colonialism, by providing a grounded analysis of how one community within the larger Latinx diaspora in Toronto is contending with these questions in their political organizing. In the following section, we share a brief overview on the Latinx diaspora in Toronto.

Latinx Toronto

Toronto is located in southern Ontario on the traditional territories of the Mississuagas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. It is commonly known as Canada's largest and most diverse city with a population of 2.79 million, where more than half of residents identify as a visible minority and nearly half were born outside Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). Toronto is also a settler colonial city that was formed in 1793 and incorporated in 1834 through Indigenous dispossession, and was a site of Black enslavement (Freeman, 2010; Maynard, 2017). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully engage with this legacy of racial-colonial violence, it is important to contextualize the arrival of migrants from Latin America within this fraught landscape, where Black and Indigenous people continue to live, make place and struggle for freedom.

Latin American migration to Canada began in the late 1960s with Ecuadorian and Peruvian migrants leaving political and economic instability (Mata, 1985). During the 1970s, political exiles from Chile, Argentina and

Uruguay followed, fleeing right-wing dictatorships. In the 1980s, Central Americans mainly from El Salvador and Guatemala arrived as refugees, escaping state-sponsored violence and civil war (Mata, 1985). With the signing of NAFTA in the 1990s and increased instability across Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela, there has been increased migration from these countries. It is also important to note that over the last 30 years, Canadian immigration policy has steadily become more exclusionary, giving preference to "skilled workers," university-educated professionals and wealthy investors (Veronis, 2010). This makes the Latinx population in Canada and Toronto highly diverse, as people not only trace their origins to over 30 countries, but they also have drastically different reasons for migration and experiences of resettlement that are deeply classed and racialized. These differences significantly shape the different kinds of politics Latinx migrants enact once in Canada (see Landolt & Goldring, 2009).

Currently, the Latinx population in Canada numbers 674,640, and the majority live in Toronto and its surrounding areas, representing almost three percent of the city's population (Statistics Canada, 2016). Latinxs contend with numerous challenges from discrimination, over-representation in low-wage jobs, higher rates of youth not completing high school, and residence in predominantly in low-income, racialized neighborhods in the northwest of the city (Lindsay, 2007). While still a relatively small population and under-represented in formal municipal politics (Veronis, 2010), Latinxs are influential in shaping leftist politics in Toronto by working across multiple migrant justice, labour, queer, feminist, anti-violence, Indigenous and Black social movements and organizations. However, as Landolt and Goldring (2009) demonstrate, not all Latinxs agree politically, even those that may consider themselves on the left. For example, early Latinx feminist organizing in Toronto was largely dominated by class-conscious women from the Southern cone who took important stands against gender-based violence, but have been critiqued for excluding queer, racialized, Black, Indigenous and trans Latinx women and youth (Landolt & Goldring, 2009; Lobo-Molnar, 2012; San Martin, 1998).

Over the last five years there has been a critical turn in Latinx feminist organizing that strives to foreground intersectional feminism and decolonization (Cahuas, 2019). This can be seen in the changing politics of MUJER, the only Latinx feminist incoporated non-profit organization in Toronto; it was established in 2003 to support the wellbeing of Latin American women and girls. In fall 2014 MUJER was not able to secure grant funding; volunteer board members decided to use this as an opportunity to shift the organization's mandate to better support structurally disadvantaged community members and provide opportunities for Black, Indigenous, queer and trans Latinx women and youth to join the organization. In October 2015, for the first time in MUJER's history, the newly elected board included non-binary people, and the majority identified as queer Latinx people of colour. MUJER also began to engage Latinx communities around decolonization in

solidarity with Black and Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, for example by attending the Strawberry Ceremony to demand justice for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people, and participating in the Black Lives Matter-Toronto shut down of Allen Road to protest the murders of Andrew Loku and Jermaine Carby by police in 2015. In 2016 MUJER launched *Decolonizing Latinx Feminisms*, a free, six-week course open to women and non-binary community members that created a much-needed space for learning about women of colour feminisms, decolonization and social justice. This course laid a critical foundation for conversations about settler colonialism, Indigeneity and Blackness among Latinx feminists, community worker-activists and everyday community members. In 2018 MUJER voted to change its name to PODER: Afro y Abya Yala Fuerza Feminista, to disrupt the binary of the singular "woman" and be more reflective of its membership and organizational mandate that "works to create spaces that center trans, queer, Afro-Latinx and Indigenous individuals in the greater Latinx community" (PODER, n.d.).

Both authors, Madelaine and Alexandra, have been deeply involved in these discussions as Latinx Community Workers (LCWs) themselves. Madelaine was a MUJER Board Member from 2014 to 2016 and had previously been involved in numerous Latinx community-based organizations and initiatives across the city since 2006. Alexandra has participated in MUJER programs and events for several years and has worked with the Working Women Community Center (WWCC) for the last four years on initiatives to better support Latinx children, youth and families navigate the public school system. Our experiences as Latinas working in community led us to our research interests in different ways.

Witnessing the kinds of challenges Latinx women and non-binary people face working across a neoliberalized non-profit sector, from sexism, racism and precarious working conditions, Madelaine focused her doctoral research project on LCWs in Toronto. The first half of the findings shared in this paper were collected as part of this larger project carried out between 2015-2018, involving 38 in-depth interviews with LCWs and participant observation in key Latinx political organizing spaces. The LCWs interviewed all identified as racialized, people of colour and a fifth of them identified as explicitly either Black/Afro-Latinx or Indigenous or both; participants were mainly between the ages of 25 to 34. While almost all participants had some form of post-secondary education, the vast majority came from working-class migrant backgrounds and were struggling economically as precarious workers (Cahuas, 2019).

Alexandra focused her doctoral research on a mentoring program for Latinx children and youth at WWCC, and has been motivated to push critical conversations around race, settler colonialism and decolonization into everyday conversations among Latinx families, tías (aunts) and abuelas (grandmothers). Alexandra teamed up with Nira Elgueta, another LCW at WWCC and PODER, to develop *Tales from the South* – a free, eight-week

program that would inform participants about Canada's settler colonial history and present, and support them in unpacking Latin American settler colonialism. The second half of the findings shared in this paper were collected as part of Alexandra's work with Nira, WWCC and PODER in the summer of 2018, which involved gathering multiple written and spoken reflections from 15 participants at the end of each session, conducting follow-up phone calls and engaging in participant observation. This information provides a partial glimpse into how everyday Latinx community members are grappling with questions of race, settler colonialism and their own identities as migrants. The section below synthesizes our key findings and uses people's own words where possible to present information.

Findings

LCWs Enact a Latinx Decolonial Politic of Belonging by Refusing Identity and Citizenship on White Settler Terms

To be "Canadian" or refuse? When Madelaine asked LCWs how they identified, many laughed at the enormity of the question and listed identities from ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, place of birth, residence, migration experience, class and political beliefs. What almost none of them did was claim Canadian identity. When probed as to whether they would call themselves "Canadian" it was clear that there was a palpable aversion to the term. The vast majority of LCWs outwardly refused claiming Canadian identity for two reccurring reasons. First, LCWs did not *feel* Canadian even if they were born, grew up in, or spent most of their life in Canada, because of the ongoing exclusion they faced as racialized, gendered, working-class people in Canadian society. LCWs especially pointed to the overwhelming whiteness of Canadian society as what prevented them from feeling they could ever fully belong as "real Canadians." Second, LCWs explained their refusal of Canadian identity as stemming from Canada's ongoing violent settler colonial practices (e.g., dispossession of Indigenous people, harmful resource extraction). By claiming Canadian identity, they felt they would be re-inscribing a nationalistic pride that was premised on the genocide of Indigenous people and oppression of people of colour, which was contradictory to their values and political aspirations as LCWs who were trying to challenge intersecting power systems through organizing with Latinx communities and various anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-colonial social movements. Many LCWs also hesitated to proudly claim any Latin American nationalistic identity, recognizing that Latin American states also function as settler states. These negotiations can be seen in Ines' narrative below:

> I have a Canadian passport and obviously if I'm at a border, if somebody asks me are you Canadian? I would probably say I'm Canadian. That's the only time I would identify as Canadian. I don't identify as Canadian because it's just Latina, I feel like it really reflects my, like spirit...but like I don't share anything ... I don't even know what Canadian culture is, but I don't identify with it, if it's hockey or if it's, I don't know, the maple leaf… I also, you know, obviously don't agree with the way in which the state has treated Aboriginal people, and this is also the same reason why I don't identify as Peruvian, because I don't think that the Peruvian state has ever really addressed the needs or... experience of Aboriginal people in Peru… if anything, continues to exploit them, remove them from their area, support international mining companies and does not address... the environmental impacts and human rights violations that a lot of these corporations have on Aboriginal people.

Ines refuses to claim any national identity that is premised in colonial violence, but also acknowledges how her identity is still entangled with Canada as a passport holding citizen. Ines is compelled to say that she *is* Canadian when travelling so she can access the privilege of crossing borders internationally, even though that is not how she *feels*. Ines opts to identify as Latina, because it "reflects [her] spirit," and later elaborates that she is Latina and Indigenous (Quechua). Almost all LCWs used terms like Latina or Latinx to describe themselves, while also complicating this identity by explaining its intersection with racial identities like Black/Afro-Latinx, Indigenous and mestiza/x. This is part of an effort by LCWs to assert their ways of understanding themselves, while also challenging how settler colonial states like Canada try to assimilate difference through national identities and imposed ethnic labels like "Hispanic," which privilege European Spanish identity and erase Black and Indigenous identities (see Cahuas, 2020).

Asserting one's Blackness was a key way Black/Afro-descendant LCWs would refuse claiming Canadian or Hispanic identity. One Afro-Latina LCW, Eva, went even as far as saying she would not pursue getting formal Canadian citizenship and would remain with a Permanent Resident status, rather than pledge allegiance to a Queen or God she does not believe in:

> Madelaine: Do you identify as a Canadian?
>
> Eva: No (laughs). Legally I'm not Canadian, I'm just a resident and I do that intentionally and I don't want to swear for a Queen or a God so I just keep it as a resident. I just don't identify with Canadian culture at the same time I question myself because what is Canadian culture, what is Canadian?... I identify as a Torontonian as a Latin American, Black Caribbean woman, mixed-race and human being over everything.

Eva does not want to obtain recognition from a settler colonial state and monarchy even if that means her lack of formal citizenship would prevent her from being able to vote. What is also telling is that Eva identifies herself not by her country of origin, but as a Torontonian, Latin American, Black

Caribbean woman and "human being over everything." This powerfully signals how Black people in the Americas are continuously struggling against being cast as less human and unbelonging, while also demonstrating alternative ways of being human in place that are not premised on domination (Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Walcott, 2014).

It is also important to note here that because of the racial heterogeneity of LCWs there was no consensus on whether they understood themselves as settlers. Many Brown mestizas did outrightly say they were settlers; other Indigenous and/or Black LCWs more often used terms like Indigenous migrant, uninvited guest or Byrd's (2011) arrivant. Collectively, LCWs are trying to create new terms and language to more accurately reflect their experiences and foreground Black and Indigenous identities. Frida, a Brown, self-identified mestiza LCW, says this is an ever-shifting, complicated process as she admits, "I know a lot of people have problems with the word mestiza as well," pointing to how mestizaje is rooted in a violent history, but has been reappropriated by Chicanx activists and scholars to reaffirm Indigeneity (Alberto, 2017; Hooker, 2017).

While there is no easy resolution to these discussions on Latinx identities, the findings presented here demonstrate that LCWs construct their identities in ways that are entangled with settler colonialism in Latin America and Canada. This can be seen when LCWs like Ines and Eva refuse to identify as Canadian in their everyday lives, but at the border are compelled to claim Canadian citizenship or proof of residency in order to cross. This kind of refusal, while different from Simpson's (2014) politics of refusal, demonstrates how refusal can be mobilized in a limited way by racialized migrants and people of colour who do not have recourse to other forms of legal recognition. This kind of Latinx refusal challenges what Chatterjee calls "settler colonial nationalism," as well as the self-indigenizing narratives Phung (2011) and Saranillio (2013) critique, which reinforce migrant complicity in settler colonialism. Instead, this form of Latinx refusal aligns with Dhamoon's (2013) politics of disruption that seeks to question the legitimacy of the settler state and other oppressive power systems. LCWs refuse to be recognized as assimilated Canadian subjects, but use it as Simpson (2014) says, as a "citizenship of convenience" (p. 172-173) in order to cross borders and reside within national borders.

Nevertheless, refusing to outwardly claim Canadian citizenship could be seen as a way of distancing oneself from the Canadian state, which could reproduce what Tuck and Yang (2012) call "a move to innocence." However, because LCWs refuse Canadian identity as part of a larger refusal of Canadian racial-colonial violence, they can also be seen as enacting what Hunt and Holmes (2015) call a decolonial queer politic. Furthermore, because LCWs seek to challenge ongoing settler colonialism in Canada and Latin America, which is premised on anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness, we read their refusals as a way of enacting a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging (Cahuas, 2020). This can clearly be seen with Ines' refusal to define herself

on white settler terms as neither Canadian or Hispanic or even Peruvian, and asserting herself as Latina and Indigenous (Quechua). Furthermore, Eva's refusal to swear to a Queen or God in order to formally gain Canadian citizenship, and her insistence on being recognized as "human being over everything" speaks to how dismantling anti-Blackness and remaking the human are crucial to an expansive decolonial project (Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Walcott, 2014; Wynter, 1995). Ines, Eva and other Black and Indigenous LCWs complicate Brown and white mestizo Latinx categories, and show how Latinxs have different ways of negotiating citizenship and identity in Canada and other settler nations.

Through a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging, LCWs grapple with the contradictions that come with living on occupied Indigenous lands as differently racialized people with different relationships to settler colonialism in Canada and Latin America. Next, we explore how LCWs put into practice a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging through a community-based learning initiative called *Tales from the South*.

LCWs Enact a Latinx Decolonial Politic of Belonging through Community-Based Learning

Tales from the South is a collaborative initiative between PODER and the Working Women Community Center (WWCC), which seeks to educate Latinx community members about settler colonialism in Canada and Latin America. This program was launched in the aftermath of the 2015 *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's* (TRCC) final report documenting unspeakable violence committed against Indigenous children in residential schools. The Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada made grant funding available to non-profit organizations to engage communities around the Calls to Action presented in the TRCC report that aimed to start a process of reconciliation between the Canadian state, the public and Indigenous people – a process that has been widely critiqued by Indigenous scholars and activists (see Simpson, 2014). *Tales from the South* was funded through this Ministry, and as such we see this program as an example of how LCWs are trying to engage in conversations around identity, race and settler colonialism within everyday community spaces in ways that challenge, but are still entangled with, the settler colonial state.

The program ran for eight weeks over the summer of 2018, and was facilitated by two well-known and trusted LCWs: Maria Montejo (Deer clan) who is a member of the Jakaltec/Popti (Mayan) community from the Xajla territory of Guatemala, and Janet Romero-Leiva, queer feminist Latinx visual artist and writer. Maria, Janet, Alexandra and Nira collectively worked to build the structure of the program, which covered topics like Indigenous Worldviews and Nationhood, Settler Colonialism, Spirituality and Healing. Fifteen participants were recruited by WWCC and PODER who were largely

immigrants to Canada from nine Latin American countries. The participants for this program were different from the LCWs whose narratives were discussed in the previous section, and the majority were middle-aged mothers with ages ranging from 18 to 80 years of age; almost all were Brown, Latina or mestiza, immigrant working-class women.

During the first three sessions, Maria introduced participants to Indigenous worldviews and nationhood, explaining how Indigenous people have unique relationships to land, which have been undermined by settler colonialism in Canada. She encouraged participants to consider how their own worldviews have been shaped by larger social systems and reflect on their role in Canada as Latinx migrants. One of the questions asked was, "how are we complicit in the displacement of people, through our own displacement?" Participants immediately drew on their schooling experiences in Latin America as having deeply shaped their worldviews, particularly their understanding of colonization and race. Participants made connections between how Indigenous people were erased from their curriculum in Latin America, with the ways the Canadian government erases the realities of Indigenous nationhood and ongoing occupation. Participants also shared how their families firmly held onto mestizaje as a way to "mejorar la raza" (improve the race) by aligning themselves with whiteness while disparaging Blackness, Indigeneity and any dark-skinned features. One participant, Tanya, divulged that she knew she was Indigenous (Purepecha), but was not encouraged by her family to identify or connect with any Purepecha knowledge or traditions. Tanya said because of her light skin it was easier for her to pass as white or mestiza, and that this was what her family and Mexican society believed was desirable, so that is why she had not identified as Indigenous.

In the later three sessions, Maria shared Mayan cosmology tenets as a way to encourage participants to delve deeper into thinking about social transformation, wellbeing, spirituality and healing from their own positionalities. She invited a local Grandmother/Kokum and deeply respected knowledge keeper, Alita Sauve, to lead the sixth session involving a water ceremony. Alexandra recalls how this was an especially powerful and emotionally charged moment where participants cried and expressed gratitude to have had this experience. After, Tanya said that she could now "reclaim" her Indigeneity and not feel ashamed to pass on Purepecha traditions to her children.

The last two sessions were run by Janet who facilitated writing workshops around the theme of memories. This led to the creation of two blankets with pieces of the women's writing, which were given to the Native Canadian Center of Toronto (NCCT) by participants who visited with Indigenous community organizers, as a first step towards building relationships of solidarity. Based on participants' final reflections, there was a collective desire to learn more about Indigenous history, and support ongoing Indigenous struggles as a different way to seek belonging in Canada. As Carolina writes:

> By knowing more, learning and understanding about the different original cultures not only allows us to strengthen our own sense of belonging … but it also motivates us to create collective bridges between one culture and another, to find more and more points of agreement and collaboration. (Translated from Spanish by the authors)

When Carolina explains how by learning about Indigenous peoples in Canada, she strengthens her own sense of belonging and seeks to create a collective bridge between cultures, she can be understood as turning away from state forms of recognition, as called for by Hunt and Holmes (2015) and Dhamoon (2013). However, this eagerness to find points of commonality and create bridges between Latinx and Indigenous people could also fail to heed Tuck and Yang's (2012) "ethic of incommensurability" and enact the kind of decolonization they define as the restoration of Indigenous land.

Furthermore, participants were predominantly non-Black, non-Indigenous mestizas who would qualify as racialized women in the Canadian context, but could pass as white or mestiza in Latin America. This limited the kinds of experiences that could be shared among participants, and risks re-centering mestiza perspectives. There is a need to more deeply interrogate how Latinx community spaces can better foreground the voices of Black and Indigenous people in order to avoid reproducing mestizo dominance as seen in Latin America (Saldaña-Portillo, 2016; Urrieta, 2012), and in the U.S. with the Chicano movement (Alberto, 2017; Hooker, 2017; Pulido, 2017). For example, when Tanya shares she is Purepecha, but has been distanced from those cultural traditions because of the persistence of mestizaje, and now feels emboldened to reconnect to her Purepecha identity, is she a mestiza who is reclaiming a lost Indigeneity or is she a "deculturalized" Purepecha person because of the very workings of settler colonialism, as argued by Urrieta (2012)?

These are difficult questions and ones we cannot simply answer, as we are not the arbiters of Indigeneity or Purepecha identity. What we do aim to highlight is how learning about and challenging settler colonialism in Canada through a community-based setting brings up important tensions among Latinx people and their identities, which remain unsettled and unresolved as Latin American settler colonialism continues to haunt the diaspora. At the same time, we want to recognize what was significant about *Tales from the South*, which is that it was the first time almost all the participants were given the space to learn about settler colonialism in Canada and critically reflect on how Latin American settler colonialism had shaped their identities and worldviews. By creating an initiative that strives to simultaneously open up conversations about both Canadian and Latin American settler colonialism, LCWs – Alexandra, Nira, Maria and Janet – enacted a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging (Cahuas, 2020).

LCWs guided everyday community members through a process of unpacking stories of migration, displacement and relationships to land and place, in a way that foregrounded Indigenous worldviews and struggles.

However, more work is needed by Latinxs to simultaneously foreground the persistence of anti-Blackness and the possibilities of Black ontologies when grappling with questions of settler colonialism and decolonization, as Black decolonial scholars articulate (Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Walcott, 2014). Perhaps, Carolina's reflection on finding a stronger sense of belonging by learning about Indigenous histories and presents, and wanting to find more "points of agreement and collaboration" can provide an opening here for advancing "constellations of co-resistance," that take seriously Indigenous relationships to land, Indigenous resurgence, Black freedom and liberation for all (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 81). Overall, *Tales from the South* is an incomplete project that opened up a space for learning and dialoguing among Latinxs about our identities and fraught relationships to land and place in Canada and Latin America, which can set the groundwork for working in solidarity with Indigenous and Black social movements across the Americas.

Conclusions

This paper explored how Latinx people in Toronto, Canada are grappling with questions of settler colonialism and decolonization. We specifically looked at how a network of differently racialized Latinx Community Workers (LCWs) negotiate their roles and relationships to settler colonialism. LCWs refuse to be recognized on white settler terms as "proud Canadians," and opt to identify as Latinx, while complicating this identity with particular racial identities like Black/Afro-Latinx, and Indigenous. LCWs do this because by proudly claiming "being Canadian," they would be aligning themselves with a white settler state that not only excludes them from being full citizens, but also continues to enact violence against Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities. LCWs also refuse to identify by Latin American nationality or as Hispanics, as a way to reject the anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness underlying Latin American nation-building and the term Hispanic. In this way, LCWs enact a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging, as they construct identities and alternative claims to citizenship that simultaneously challenge both Canadian and Latin American settler colonialism. At the same time, LCWs also practice a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging in the ways they engage in community organizing, as seen through the initiative, *Tales from the South,* which created a space where Latinxs could learn about Canadian settler colonialism and interrogate notions of race they inherited from Latin America.

Together the findings illustrated in this paper contribute to literature exploring racialized people's relationships to settler colonialism and decolonization, by looking to the unique and multi-faceted experiences of the Latinx diaspora in Canada. First, this paper contributes to previous analyses that have focused on how racialized migrants reproduce settler colonial logics (Dhamoon, 2013; Phung, 2011; Saranillio, 2013), by providing a grounded

example of how a group of Latinxs are trying to enact an alternative way of claiming belonging and citizenship in Canada that challenges the white settler state. Second, this paper builds on previous studies on Latinx identities that have been largely focused on the U.S. context and Chicanx claims to Indigeneity (Blackwell et al., 2017; Pulido, 2017; Saldaña-Portillo, 2016), by engaging with the voices of differently racialized, Black/Afro-Latinx, Brown/mestiza/x, Indigenous Latinx women and non-binary people who reside in Canada. By taking this approach and grappling with racial differences among Latinxs, this paper signals the need to reassert that racialized migrant groups are not cohesive or homogenous, and in fact, within the Latinx diaspora, people have radically different experiences of, and relationships to, settler colonialism in the Americas. The voices of Black/Afro-Latinx and Indigenous Latinxs complicate a Brown, mestizo, Latinx identity and call for more nuanced ways of thinking about and working towards decolonization that account for anti-Indigeneity, anti-Blackness and migration simultaneously. This is precisely what a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging strives to do, as it provokes a rethinking of what identity, citizenship, belonging and politics could look like for differently racialized Latinxs.

At the same time, a Latinx decolonial politic of belonging is not an endpoint. It is a beginning to seriously engaging, and bridging conversations across Black, Indigenous, Latin American and Latinx ontologies, epistemologies and movements, as Black and Indigenous scholar-activists have been doing (see Lethabo-King, 2016, 2019; Simpson et al., 2018). There is still more work to be done to better understand how LCWs and everyday Latinx community members in Toronto will strengthen their relationships with Indigenous and Black struggles both within and outside Latinx communities. Since *Tales from the South* ended in 2018, women who participated have continued to build relationships with Indigenous women at the NCCT by visiting, sharing stories and creating art together. Today, LCWs continue to negotiate their relationships to settler colonialism and find ways to gather to work towards a decolonial future.

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