

[Re]Archive: South Asian Narratives in Canadian History

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Abstract

This thesis paper documents the process and research into South Asian history through the arts-informed research concept of “A/R/Tography”. It focuses on themes of memory, haunting, and the curriculum by using a collection of digital and analogue artworks exhibited in a virtual catalogue that will serve as an open-source file for Ontario’s high school teachers and students. Furthermore, this thesis raises questions about historical and minority representations within the Canadian context by questioning Canada’s reputation as being a multicultural mosaic. To this end, this exhibition and thesis paper focus on the South Asian perspective within Canadian history and more specifically on Ontario’s Peel District School Board’s vital need to reform its high school history curriculum to include minority and marginalized voices.

Key Words: Canadian History, South Asian Narratives, Education Policy, Archival Research, A/R/Tography, Installation, Video/Multimedia

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was young, my family and I lived in the city of Vaughan, Ontario. We were one of the few families of colour living in a predominantly White community. My parents received letters from neighbours that we “ruined” the neighbourhood. My Grade 1 teacher denied students of colour access to the washrooms. A family friend was taunted and teased for her Vietnamese culture. White Society was painting us as “lazy”, “uneducated”, and “always stealing jobs”. We ended up moving to Brampton; a safe haven for Brown minorities, where, during those 11 years, I never felt aware of my skin colour. Even after 9/11, I felt safe in Brampton. Everyone looked out for each other, especially when hate crimes and attacks against South Asian communities started.

When I was in middle school in the Peel District School Board (PDSB) region, I used to read a book series called *Dear Canada*. It was a historical series that detailed the lives of fictional young girls through historical events in Canada in the form of diary entries, such as the Japanese Internment and the Railway Construction. Even though some of the characters are fictional, the events were factual, and my favourite part of the books were the last few pages where I read about the archival research, including photographs of people and their memories. History came alive and became my favourite subject. So, imagine my disappointment in not hearing about the perspectives of underrepresented communities in the Grade 10 mandatory history class. At the time, I was in a predominately South Asian high school and no such narratives were reflected in my education. Instead, I learned more about minority perspectives of Canadian history through the *Dear Canada* series than I did in the classroom. I find it ironic that Canada prides itself with being labelled a “multicultural mosaic”, yet seeing diverse cultural communities in major

cityscapes, cultural diversity was and is not being reflected in our educational sector where it is needed most.

It is these connections between history, education, and minority voice that I find of great significance. As a result, I have since turned to artmaking and teaching as a way to truly convey my views. This thesis then explores South Asian perspectives on inclusion within Canadian history and why it is critical for Ontario to reform its high school history curriculum in order to make room for minority voices. Thus, as a case study, I will focus on the policies of the Peel District School Board (PDSB) because of my personal knowledge of it as a former high school student within its jurisdiction.

1.1: Research Questions

The objective of this research is to re-examine Ontario's high school history curriculum as it pertains to the narratives and perspectives of South Asian minorities. This research is an examination of major events from the 1900s to 2000s as outlined in the Ontario's Ministry of Education's *The Ontario Curriculum* for Grade 10. More importantly for my research it includes events that are not part of the original curriculum. As such, this has led me to ask the following questions:

- 1) How can my art and research work be incorporated into, or inform, the need for minority representation within the mainstream history syllabus?
- 2) How can art-making complement Ontario's high school history curriculum and promote more inclusivity in representing the country's diverse population and history?
- 3) How can students and the public benefit from learning how history censors information?

And,

- 4) How can my work be used as a tool to assist educational systems facing similar challenges?

I have investigated these questions through a practice-led approach in which I incorporated archival research and the process called “a/r/tography” into my work in order to create installations meant for open-source exploration.

1.2: The Issue

Following these research questions, here is how I see the major problems with history education in regard to South Asian history:

- 1) The current textbook, *Canada: A Nation Unfolding*, has little information regarding South Asian history, only a couple of paragraphs on page 292 with no reference in the Index section.
- 2) Mainstream society assumes South Asians have little to no contributions in historical events.
- 3) Though we are encouraged to practice and celebrate our culture (even having Multicultural Day in schools), ironically, we continue to be ostracized and stigmatized.
- 4) Overall, there is inconsistency in the way minority history is taught.

These are the issues I have encountered during my high school years. I may not have been aware of them at the time, though I definitely came to this realization when I started reflecting back and understanding more about South Asian history, how history was taught, and later comparing these experiences with my peers.

Chapter 2: Guiding Philosophies (Theoretical Framework)

What I learned in researching archival theory is that an archive breathes, dies, and most importantly, holds memories. Oftentimes I catch myself forgetting that an archive holds memories of people; people like myself who went through life with laughter, with pride, and anger. In history writing, it is very easy to censor factual narratives from certain groups of people, because the archive is a human construction and most often by the reigning discursive voice. After speaking to my fellow First Year OCADU student, Melissa Johns, I realized how some theorists have been guiding research and studio practices, which is why I call this chapter, “Guiding Philosophies”.

This section is divided into three areas of research: *Memory and Memorialization*, *Haunting and Location of Culture*, and *Education and Postcolonial Theory*.

2.1: Memory and Memorialization

What does it mean to have memories, or to be given memories from history and to memorialize them? German literature and critical theorist, Andreas Huyssen says, “Historical memory today is not what it used to be. It [...] used to mark the relation of a community or a nation to its past, but the boundary between past and present used to be stronger and more stable than it appears to be today”.¹ Memories can be seen in the countless statues, memorials, gravesites, road names and even in our own educational curriculum where there is a legitimizing of universal cultural knowledge of these events. Furthermore, Huyssen believes that:

¹ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1

[the] clashing and ever more fragmented memory politics of specific social and ethnic groups raise the question of whether forms of collective consensual memory are even still possible today...Media memory alone clearly will not suffice, even though the media occupy ever large chunks of the social and political perception of the world. ²

This led me to investigate the idea of ‘open source’. If I made my archival and historical research open to the public, targeting educators and students, will it help mitigate the memory gap that Huyssen talks about? I believe it can help if done correctly and justly. Earlier, German philosopher and sociologist, Max Horkheimer, had stated that the culture industry is nothing but a business or “the false identity of universal and particular,” which has led to the decay of education that Huyssen confirms.³

More recently, cultural studies and education professor, Catherine Burwell, did a small observation when she showed her class a video remix of Jonathan McIntosh’s *Buffy vs. Edward* (2009). McIntosh combined clips from the TV series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the movie series, *Twilight*, to show the interaction between the two fictional characters, Buffy and Edward.⁴ As a viewer, it was unsettling to watch Edward act almost in a possessive and predatory way towards Buffy, who dismisses his advances. This open-source video is an example that can be easily found on the Internet and has contributed to the larger discussion of consent, copyright laws, gender roles within pop culture, and appropriation. The point is, however, that the use of media in this context allowed for a genuine discussion of societal issues. If this open-source model can be

² Ibid, 17

³ Max Horkheimer et al., “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception”, from *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, 41-72, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 42&67

⁴ Burwell, Catherine, “The Pedagogical Potential of Video Remix”, *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 57 (3), 2013, 210

applied to history education, then can it allow for proper discussion regarding minority representation?

As previously mentioned, memories in the archival form are alive, but how is it possible to keep it alive rather than preserve it as an artifact? When I think of memories, I also think of trauma and emotions associated, such as the ones my family and I experienced. This, however, pales in comparison to the memory studies of feminism theorist, Marianne Hirsch, who proposes the idea of ‘postmemory’. In relation to Holocaust survivors, postmemory, she says:

[Describes] the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right...by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.⁵

Can I create works of postmemory? Huyssen suggests “memory sculptures”. These sculptures, he says, “[Challenge] the viewer to move beyond the material presence of the sculpture in the museum and to enter into dialogue with the temporal and historical dimension implicit in the work...[He argues that] they display an awareness that all memory is recollection [and] re-presentation”.⁶ These sculptures are not meant to be didactic, rather they allow the viewers to come to their own realizations and interpretations. They are not simply sculptures. They present heavily loaded expressions of trauma and violence within a broader historical context.

⁵ Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory”, *Poetics Today*, 29:1, 2008, DOI: 10.1215/03335372-2007-019, 106-107

⁶ Huyssen, 111

I investigated Burwell's idea of video remix as pedagogy by creating a digital-triggered form of postmemory in order to challenge and inform viewers of historical events. I created short videos that combines text, archival images, and sound effects in order to bring attention to these events. I presented an augmented reality installation, using hand-made objects, as a way to create visual cues and triggers for the video. Quite by accident, the installations become 'haunted' by the digital, in which the content mimicked a sense of trauma. Never before did I think an archive could be haunted, but it began to make sense.

2.2: Haunting and Location of Culture

Taking this idea of 'haunting' to mean "remaining in the consciousness; not quickly forgotten", or "the act of a person or thing that haunts; visitation" provided an entry point.⁷ This subchapter addresses haunting within the context of the "location of culture."⁸ Why is cultural history being suppressed and what does it mean for the archive and my research to be haunted, or to evoke haunting?

The archive is haunted by the ghosts of our ancestors, the latter who have left behind memories in various forms—photographs, diary entries, souvenirs—in order for us to remember our ancestors or perhaps uncover hidden truths about their lives. The archive provides us with knowledge of the past, but it can hide us from it as well—the visible and invisible. I consider my work in the context of haunting because I am summoning voices of the unheard, and I am making a platform for their perspectives and their energies to come through. I am a conduit, an 'in between'. According to sociology theorist, Avery Gordon, a "ghost is alive, so to speak. We are

⁷ "Haunting", *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/haunting>

⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1994)

in relation to it and it has designs on us such that we must reckon with it graciously, attempting to offer it a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*".⁹ Gordon is another key figure who further inspired me to think that the archives are haunted and haunting.

Essentially, ghosts and spectres are everywhere. We are unaware of them until we seek them, similar to how I did. As Indigenous studies and education researcher and scholar, Eve Tuck and artist C. Ree states in *A Glossary of Haunting*, "Erasure and defacement concoct ghosts; I don't want to haunt you, but I will".¹⁰ The ghosts of my South Asian/Pacific Islander community are not known but they are everywhere. South Asians have immigrated to Canada since the late 1800s and very little is known of the contributions they have made in Canada. Even though this is not haunting directly, Canadians have forgotten that they, too, suffered during The First and Second World War as well as the Great Depression. We have forgotten that they have felt fear, anger, and injustice; and it was because of their struggles that we enjoy the rights we have now. They did not appear in a direct way, but they exist in the peripheries, such as in the archive. This is how I am arguing the idea of haunting. The South Asian community specifically, and Canada in general, are haunted by those whose narratives and perspectives on Canadian society we have forgotten.

To return to my initial concern of doing justice to the South Asian narrative, I again quote Gordon, who states that I would need to "look for lessons about haunting", she states that "entire societies become haunted by terrible deeds that are systematically occurring [when they] are simultaneously denied by every public organ of governance and communication".¹¹ This is

⁹ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 64

¹⁰ Eve Tuck and C. Ree, "A Glossary of Haunting", from *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 639–658, edited by Stacey Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis, (California: Left Coast Press Inc, 2013), 5

¹¹ *Ibid*, 64

when I began to think about how my work could be utilized as a tool within the educational system, to utilize haunting as a strategy to bring forth narratives and voices from a community that have been erased from history, in other words to bring to consciousness the South Asian narrative.

In Huyssen's chapter from the *Memory and Memorialization*, he cites the example of Colombian artist, Doris Salcedo's *Unland: The Orphan's Tunic*, 1997, which is a chilling "memory sculpture" of a girl whose mother was brutally murdered during the rising violence in Colombia.¹² Salcedo engaged the museum system to educate the public about the ongoing violence in her country by presenting the realities of Colombian society. In her work, we see how cultural history and certain memories were and still are being suppressed.

Critical theorist, Homi Bhabha, whose work on post/coloniality states that the "colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative [...and its] discriminatory effects are visible" and meant to control representation and the narrative.¹³ Tuck and Ree suggest the hero as the settler, seen by mainstream society as the innocent who is being attacked, i.e. criticized by the spectres or the marginalized. Bhabha calls the marginalized the "subaltern" or those outside the hierarchy of power. In reality, it is the spectres/subalterns who are trying to voice their experiences while also seeking retribution or even reconciliation. In this instance, Bhabha says the "subaltern speaks". In my view, however, art can be a critical voice and approach that goes beyond the colonial narrative of the history textbook.

As you read in my text and in my artwork, I show the linkages between memory sculptures and haunting. My sculptures and installations, for instance, try to compel viewers to

¹² Huyssen, Chapter 7

¹³ Bhabha, 107-108

look...*really* look. I try to influence the viewer to be cognizant of what has happened and what they have been ignorant of, which is why I made a series of works instead of one all-encompassing prototype representing all. My hope is that viewers will empathize with this subaltern view of history.¹⁴

Haunting and ‘the location of culture’ is part of my work, though not at the forefront, but viewers should feel it emotionally.

2.3: Education and Postcolonial Theory

The underlying theme of this thesis and my art making is educational reform. My work is meant to be used in classrooms as a way to insert the need for new forms of representation against the colonial narratives within the curriculum itself. This section discusses educational policies, the need to reform them, and how to incorporate post-coloniality within the high school educational system, specifically in the PDSB.

My focus is on Ontario’s educational policies, specifically the current (2018) version of *The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 Canadian and World Studies (Geography, History, Civics (Politics))* and the PDSB’s process for making changes. I have examined their meeting minutes, policies, and by-laws. According to The Ontario Curriculum:

The Ontario equity and inclusive education strategy focus[es] on respecting diversity, promoting inclusive education, and identifying and eliminating discriminatory biases, systemic barriers, and power dynamics that limit the ability of students to learn, grow,

¹⁴ Tuck and Ree, 12

and contribute to society. Antidiscrimination education continues to be an important and integral component of the strategy.¹⁵

After reading through some of their recent meeting minutes, I found that most schools in the PDSB dedicate an entire month to certain ethnic groups. For example, February is Black History Month, November is Hindu Heritage Month, May is Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month. Other schools in the same district do not do this and only one middle school actually changed its curriculum to incorporate minority representation in addition to these monthly dedications.¹⁶

While I believe it is important to dedicate time in recognizing minority achievements and individual people, I strongly believe these kinds of representations within the history curriculum are critically important and should be explored and discussed within the broader context of Canadian history. By solely having a month dedicated to South Asians and other minorities, it implies a segregationist narrative between minority histories versus mainstream textbooks, an idea that Bhabha would say perpetuates the we/them binary.¹⁷

In addition, the fact that one school is currently incorporating minority history into their curriculum while others are not, shows that the PDSB has a lack of consistency when following Ontario's curricular mandate for Equity and Inclusive Learning policy.

Shifting from the postcolonial to the decolonial, literary theorist, Gayatri Spivak has stated that the “declared rupture of ‘decolonization’ has not resulted in the freedom one may

¹⁵ Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 Canadian and World Studies (Geography, History, Civics (Politics))*, (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2018), 48

¹⁶ “Instructional Programs / Curriculum Committee”, (Meeting Minutes, Peel District School Board, H.J.A. Brown Education Centre, Nov 20, 2019), http://www.peelschools.org/trustees/boardagendas/minutes/Documents/191120_Program.pdf

¹⁷ Melinda D. Anderson, “Black History Month in Schools—Retire or Reboot? Now in its 40th year, questions remain about the value of commemorating it in classrooms”, *The Atlantic*, Feb 22, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/02/black-history-monthretire-or-reboot/470124/>

have expected, the historical discourse often boringly repeats the rhythms of colonization with the consolidation of the recognizable”.¹⁸ For this reason, South Asians are an example where minority representation is needed, to rupture the colonial narrative of official history. This approach would allow minority students to identify with other historical figures within the Canadian context by stepping away from the colonial discourse. Huysen and Burwell offer examples of ways to disrupt the colonial narratives of Canadian history.

Overall, it is important to note that while I am not advocating for a separate discursive practice, but for one that Bhabha would say changes and modifies society to be used alongside or within the existing Canadian narrative history.

¹⁸ Gayatri C. Spivak, “Post-Structuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value”, in Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan (eds) *Literary Theory Today*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 202

Chapter 3: Methodology

‘Arts-informed research’ is “generally interested in improving our understanding of schooling and how the arts can reveal important insights about learning and teaching”.¹⁹ The work I make *informs* what I am researching, which is curricular reform. This section is a discussion of the methods I used in making and researching my work, thus, based on the idea of *A/R/Tography* and *Archival Research*, they are organized into such subsections.

3.1: A/R/Tography

A/R/Tography stands for (a)rtmaking, (r)esearching, and (t)eaching. Australian artist, art theorist, and educator, Graeme Sullivan, states that, “Arts-informed researchers, [Artographers], and the like, have a similar interest in schools, community and culture, but their focus is on developing the practitioner-researcher who is capable of imaginative and insightful inquiry”.²⁰ As will be demonstrated, I view my work as ‘process a/r/tography’, in much the same way as artist and researcher, Rita Irwin states hers as an “assemblage of objects, ideas, and structures that move in dynamic motion performing waves of intensities that create new understandings”.²¹ As a process, A/R/Tography transforms information and the relationships between research and theory in order to inform and educate the public on educational issues.

My approach involves creating installations using Augmented Reality (AR) pieces in order to convey research on South Asian narratives. AR is used to engage viewers in a particular realm of research that is currently not being used in the classroom. AR has “[t]he capacity to overlay

¹⁹ Graeme Sullivan, “Research Acts in Art Practice”, *Studies in Art and Education*, 48:1, 19-35, DOI: 10.1080/00393541.2006.11650497, 2006, 20-21

²⁰ *Ibid*, 20-21

²¹ Rita L. Irwin, *Becoming A/r/tography*, *Studies in Art Education*, 54:3, 198-215, DOI: 10.1080/00393541.2013.11518894, 2013, 199

rich media onto the real world for viewing through web-enabled devices such as phones and tablet devices means that information can be made available to students at the exact time and place of need”.²² As such, the concept and practical use of ‘open-source’ is very important to me as it would allow schools to freely use my work as an educational tool without funding restraints. In addition, I believe my aesthetic approach would allow viewers to engage with history at a more tactile and digital level.

My research draws upon the textbook called *Canada: A Nation Unfolding* (2004 edition), to examine how and why historical events overlook South Asian narratives. I have used the archive (see: *Archival Research*) to find information about South Asians throughout history since the 1900s. Additionally, I have investigated the meeting minutes from the PDSB to gauge the consistency/inconsistency of teachers trying to implement minority history within their curriculum. Through this inquiry and archival research, I further engaged with the data to create new works to enlighten my targeted audience of these missing and censored narratives.

The teaching component comes in various forms. For example, the digital module of my AR uses informational videos with sound components, where most of the videos provide information about the events, which I found to have some glitches in the information all due to inadequate research findings. I examined how Burwell utilizes Johnathan McIntosh’s video in a way it allowed for a discussion on topics such as copyright laws and consent culture.²³ In addition to the videos, I held one panel in the summer of 2019 where I discussed my research and its importance in education. This included having conversations with the audience. For the actual

²² Matt Bower, Cathie Howe, Nerida McCredie, Austin Robinson & David Grover, Augmented Reality in education – cases, places and potentials, *Educational Media International*, 51:1, 1-15, DOI: 10.1080/09523987.2014.889400, 2014, 1

²³ Burwell, 210

exhibition, unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to do another discussion panel; however, I have livestreamed my “reception” where I talked about my works (see: *The Exhibition*). I discovered that by taking the role of facilitator, it was a strategy that has allowed me to educate the public on various issues surrounding education, Canada’s “multicultural mosaic” reputation, immigration, and race, while also encourage discussions and further curiosity and analysis of historical contexts.

3.2: Archival Research

Archival research has been a primary tool in finding textual and visual information on South Asian history. It has been said that, “[a]rchival studies is one of the most rapidly expanding, interdisciplinary and multi-methodological areas of research”.²⁴ Thus, being able to critically analyze the archive to make visible the isolated archival sphere can allow for discussions of perspectives in postcolonial education, as well as to incite inquiry into parallel narratives such as minority perspectives of Canadian history.

My archival sources include the *Library and Archives Canada*, the *Canadian War Museum*, *Canadian Soldiers Sikhs*, and the *Toronto Star*, to find open access information, documents, and photographs of South Asians throughout the twentieth century. Added to this is my family’s personal photography and video archive as well as inherited memorabilia that I used to examine the migration of Indo-Fijians (my family included) beginning in the 1980s.

These methodologies have aided me in framing the artmaking process. In the following section, I turn to discussing my studio work and historical events that form the basis for each work.

²⁴ Kelvin L. White, and Anne J. Gilliland. "Promoting Reflexivity and Inclusivity in Archival Education, Research, and Practice." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 80, no. 3, 2010, DOI:10.1086/652874, 231

Chapter 4: Studio Work

I made AR and/or analogue pieces for the following: Pre-First World War (figs. 1-3), First World War (figs. 4-8), The Great Depression (figs. 9-10), The Second World War (figs. 11-13), Voting Rights of 1947 (fig. 14), The Cold War (figs. 15-16), The Fijian Migration (My Family) (figs. 17-18), and Present-Day issues (figs. 19-22). The timeline for all these works, which follows the usual timeframe taught in high schools, begins in the summer of 1914 until the present day. As such, these events each have separate sections.

4.1: Pre-First World War

Since the early 20th century, South Asian men have been immigrating to Canada in search of jobs and better opportunities. After finding success, they would send word of their results back to the Subcontinent (now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh) that eventually led to increased migration to Canada. This, however, garnered negative attention from Euro-Canadians, resulting in Prime Minister Robert Borden (1911-1920) imposing stricter (impossible) immigration policies, such as enacting a head tax fee of \$200 after a continuous journey from the ship's country of origin.²⁵

The Context

One of these unfortunate stories is the following. In the spring to the summer of 1914, a group of 375 passengers boarded the *Komagata Maru* and sailed from British Hong Kong to Coal Harbour, British Columbia. When they arrived at the port, they were met by local authorities who refused to let them off the ship.²⁶ According to Hugh Johnston:

²⁵ Hugh Johnston, "Komagata Maru", *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/article/komagata-maru>

²⁶ Ibid

A long confrontation ensued with the passengers resisting immigration department efforts to make them leave voluntarily. These efforts included limiting their communications with the outside world, blocking their attempts to take their case to a Canadian court, refusing to supply the ship with food and water except when conditions became desperate; and, at one point after a continuing standoff, attempting to take control of the ship by force with a police boarding party.²⁷

After a month on board, the passengers and crew were eventually brought to the British Columbia Court of Appeal after which only 7 passengers were granted entry into Canada, while the rest were deported back to India.²⁸ “This case went ahead very quickly, but ended with a judgment in favour of the Canadian government and against the passengers. The court found no principle in [the] Canadian or British law that gave the passengers a right of entry”.²⁹ This became known as the *Komagata Maru Incident*. After stopping at Hong Kong and Japan to let off some passengers, the ship finally arrived at the Indian port, Budge Budge on September 29, 1914, the eve of the First World War. More than 20 passengers were either injured or killed by British Indian authorities for resisting arrest and trying to flee to Kolkata.³⁰ This became known as the *Budge Budge Riot*.

Because of the heavy media censorship at the time, the incident was not properly documented, thus information about the Budge Budge riot did not reach the attention of the

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid; Note: they garnered support and help from Indians who worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway and remained in Canada as citizens

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

citizens of the subcontinent, Canada, and the British Empire. It was not until after the revolution for independence (1857-1947) did the story come to light.³¹

The Work

In work called *The Incident* (fig. 1), augmented reality was used for the first time. I used an application called EyeJack, which is an open-source software that allowed me to easily generate AR works via a QR Code in three steps. The piece comprises a reused bronze plaque (fig. 2) I made a while ago (as I no longer have the means to do foundry works) of a relief of the ship. The AR video showcases information about the Komagata Maru incident using text, archival imagery and sound effects (fig. 3).

I found this to be a successful way of attracting the public's attention to discuss what happened to the passengers and why this is not taught in schools (similar to how Catherine Burwell grabbed the attention of high school students via McIntosh's video remix). AR is similar in concept to Snapchat where the software alters the appearance and surrounding of the viewer with fun filters, thus, I utilize AR to alter (or in this case reveal) the reality behind these pieces. I chose AR because people are becoming increasingly aware and more well versed in technology and software.

4.2: The First World War

The Context

On August 4, 1914, (a month before the Budge Budge Riot) Prime Minister Robert Borden announced that Britain declared war on Germany at which point Canada automatically

³¹ Ibid

entered the war.³² During the initial recruiting process, many South Asians and other minorities were barred from recruiting due to the country's racist attitude, arguing that the First World War was a "White Man's War".³³ This did not stop South Asian Sikhs, however, from enlisting. Looking at photographs and documents of these men show that they did what was necessary to pass-off as White. Some shaved their beards, took off their turbans or even went as far as changing their names to something more European sounding (for example, Harnom Singh became Harry Robson). "By the end of the war, several hundred Asian Canadians had served overseas in the Canadian army".³⁴ The war ended on November 11, 1918, when Germany signed for an armistice.³⁵

In recent years, a movement sparked interest in the reclamation of minority history was due to the discovery of Pte. Buckam Singh's war medal in a London (England) pawnshop by contemporary historian Sandeep Brar.³⁶ Through his research, we now know that there were ten names of South Asian men who contributed to the war effort. Though there is very little information about them, their presence and their spectres are present with us, demanding our recognition. They include:

- Pte. John Baboo (1888-1948); wounded right leg at Vimy Ridge, died of natural causes;

³² Garfield Newman, *Canada: A Nation Unfolding*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 2000), 75

³³ *Ibid*, 88

³⁴ *Ibid*, 89

³⁵ It should be noted that neither White women nor people of colour had the right to vote during this time.

³⁶ Shilpa Daithota Bhat, "e-Diaspora, the Great War and Sikh military migration to Canada: Commemorating Buckam Singh", *Sikh Formations*, 2019, DOI: 10.1080/17448727.2019.1609173

- Pte. Sunta Gougersingh (1881-1915); killed in action in trenches near Kemmel, Belgium;
- Pte. Bukam Singh (1893-1919); wounded scalp and leg, died of tuberculosis;
- Pte. Hari Singh (1882-1953); medically unfit, death unknown;
- Pte. Harnom Singh (1888-?); wounded, death unknown;
- Pte. John Singh (1880-1971); died of natural causes;
- Pte. Lashman Singh (1885-1918); killed in action;
- Pte. Ram Singh (1888-?); defaulter, death unknown;
- Pte. Sewa Singh (1890-1957); death unknown; and
- Pte. Waryam Singh (1883-?); wounded shoulder, trench fever, pneumonia, death unknown.

The Work

Similar to *The Incident*, *The Forgotten Fallen* (fig. 4) uses a similar approach by drawing upon Andreas Huyssen's concept of memory sculptures and individualized memories within a bigger event.

Plaques are cast in re-used aluminum with numbers on them (fig. 5). Each set of numbers corresponds to a service number of a South Asian soldier listed above. The AR video showcases information about them such as date, place of birth, medical information, and where they served (fig. 6).

By including information about the deceased soldiers and narrating their stories, humanizes the aluminum plaques. The soldiers were more than just a number, they were real people who fought with fear and bravery, and some, unfortunately, were killed in action. Like the many Canadian soldiers, we see every year in commercials and in school assemblies, these Indian

soldiers should be remembered. The poppy we wear represents the common phrase during Remembrance Day, 'Lest We Forget', yet we have forgotten that minorities who served to protect the land and the people as well.

Besides the AR installation, I created an analogue installation called *The Missing Fonds* series (figs. 7 & 8), featuring a banker's box. Alongside are white gloves and magnifying glasses. Copies of archival photographs on matte boards, an envelope containing research a codex of all recorded items, are the type of items found in the box. All archival materials are labelled with an "MWWI-#" series (standings for Missing in the First World War). It is a metonym for the archival practices and my experience dealing with recording objects and documents in a vault.

This piece is a tangible way for viewers to understand the missing narratives in Canadian history. It encourages viewers to explore and be curious about history and delve further into missing narratives within Canadian history.

4.3: The Great Depression

The Context

After the war, soldiers who returned home to family took up jobs to support their post-war lives. During the 1920s, South Asians became financially stable through labour in the lumber industry.³⁷ By the late 1920s, the stock market became a new way to make "easy money" through investments.³⁸ People would invest in stocks from notable companies such as *Ford Canada* and the *CPR*, in hopes of potentially earning money. However, on October 29, 1929, (Black Tuesday) people felt nervous about the idea of their stocks declining, so they all decided to convert their

³⁷ Norman Buchignani, "South Asian Canadians", *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, published May 12, 2010; edited May 04, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/south-asians>

³⁸ Newman, 152

stocks into real money.³⁹ This resulted in fewer buyers, not enough money for payouts, increasing bank loans, and banks not prepared for said payouts. The stock market crashed and so did the national economy.

Unemployment was an all-time high during the Great Depression. For South Asians and other minorities, discrimination intensified while immigration halted. South Asians mitigated the situation through extensive mutual-aid funding such as vouchers.⁴⁰ In 1934, Prime Minister R. B. Bennett (1870-1947) passed the Bank of Canada Act and in 1935 established the Bank of Canada to regulate monetary policies while the federal government assumed responsibility for the welfare of the unemployed.⁴¹ Unfortunately, there is little information reflected in my work about South Asians during this time.

The Work

When coming up for the concept of this piece, I took into consideration there was meagre information or any archival images that existed of South Asians during this time. This gave me inspiration, however, to think about ‘data moshing’ or ‘video glitching’ to convey how a file becomes an error or when there is no data. For the object trigger, I decided to create a ration book with food vouchers that were used by the citizens during this time (figs. 9 &10).

I fixed the book to the wall to make the AR easier to trigger. The AR is a video glitch of barely any information about South Asians during the Great Depression (fig. 11). This approach allowed for the bridging of both digital (AR and video) and analogue (bookbinding) practices.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Newman, 165 and Buchignani

⁴¹ James Struthers, "The Great Depression in Canada", *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, Historica Canada, published July 11, 2013; edited September 10, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/great-depression>

4.4: The Second World War

The Context

Due to the efforts of South Asians and other minorities in mitigating the Great Depression, places such as Vancouver (notoriously anti-Asian) became increasingly tolerant of the marginalized communities. However, in 1939, Canada once again took up arms to fight alongside Britain; but unlike the First World War, Canada now “allowed for the active participation of visible minorities and women in the Canadian armed forces”.⁴² The Second World War was no longer viewed as a “White Man’s War”. Racial segregation within the military diminished and all soldiers were treated equally, as tolerance for minorities and opportunities increased for them to be in various battalions. I have since found three South Asian men who fought in the Second World War:

- Sgt. Ronald Charles Murray (1909-1942); killed in action in France
- Rfn. James Singh (1920-1944); killed in action
- FO. Stephen George Cochrane Sherman (1923-1944); presumed dead

The Work

With this information, I decided to create medal-like clay objects (fig. 12). Similar to the concept of the aluminum plaques for First World War soldiers, I added their service numbers to the clay medals and attached ribbons with the colours corresponding to the Second World War navy, army and air forces. The AR is a video comprising of their records, similar to the concept of the First World War AR (fig. 13). I also created another *Missing Fonds* box (fig. 14) with the code series “*MWWII-#*” that allows viewers to experience both the digital and the tactile versions.

⁴² Newman, 226

4.5: Voting Rights

The Context

On September 20, 1917, only White Canadian women were given the right to vote, a fact not mentioned in contemporary textbooks or in classrooms. People of colour were denied this right until 30 years later! More incredulously, First Nations people gained their right only in 1960! “After World War Two, much of the community’s time and energy was focused on gaining the franchise. They had waited long enough... [They] had a parade with banners stating that [they] wanted [the right] to vote”.⁴³ After heavy protesting, support and outcry, South Asians and people of colour (with the exception of Indigenous women) were given the right to vote in 1947.⁴⁴ While British India started shifting towards independence, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (1921-1926, 1926-1930, 1935-1948) allowed for large numbers of Indian immigrants to enter Canada via a quota system.⁴⁵

The Work

For my installation, I decided to create an AR of a white poster that reads ‘Women Gained the Right to Vote in 1917’, a common phrase used in classroom (fig. 15). The trigger showcases the same poster but corrected in red to indicate that only White women gain the right to vote as well as a news clipping of Mahinder S. Beadall, who was one of the first South Asians to cast this historic vote (fig. 16) as well as a newspaper clipping of the first vote for Indigenous people. By doing this side-by-side, it portrays the disconnect between what is taught in schools versus how it really happened.

⁴³ Sarjeet Singh Jagpal, *Becoming Canadians: Pioneer Sikhs In Their Own Words*, (Vancouver: Harbour Publishing, 1994), 134

⁴⁴ Buchignani

⁴⁵ Ibid

4.6: The Cold War

From 1947-1991, tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union increased due to their opposing ideologies (Communism versus Democracy),⁴⁶ a period often referred to as the *Cold War*. Instead of fighting this war with weapons, this war was fought through the spread of propaganda depicting the nation's superiority over the opposing nation. No actions were taken by the citizens themselves, however, they did feel an intense sense of fear and nervousness. Not much information is found about South Asians during this time, but if we are to speculate, they, too, would have felt frightened about what could happen if the Cold War intensified to a point of war.

The Work

For my installation, I decided upon a mural. Something I have not done before. The mural is a mehndi design comprising of floral and paisley motifs which is an homage to the flower power era of the 1960s. It is done in freehand with a paint marker (fig. 17).

The AR for this piece is similar in concept to the Great Depression video, which uses video glitches to convey a lack of information or photographic evidence (fig. 18). This piece questions whether or not this part of history happened and if South Asians actually were a part of this history. It also points out the lack of representation by media outlets when covering the fearful citizens of this time.

4.7: The Indo-Fijian Migration (My Family)

The Context

At one point while researching, I was asked: "where or how am I in this?". My answer was that my identity and my family's and ancestors' immigration history are what makes me part

⁴⁶ Newman, 269

of this research. Even though I was born in Canada (coincidentally on Canada Day), I have often felt that I am not viewed as Canadian due to my brown skin and Indian-like features (brown eyes, dark brown hair, and vaguely smelling like masala). Furthermore, no one took my parents seriously due to their Fijian accents, but slowly they garnered respect in their respective workplaces.

My family originates from the Fiji Islands, but my ancestors before them (great-great-grandparents) are from India. We were known derogatorily as ‘coolies’, formally as indentured labourers/servants, colloquially as ‘girmityas’. In the 19th century, the British Empire abolished slavery by emancipating more than 800,000 slaves in the British colonies.⁴⁷ In its place, Britain decided to enforce indentured servitude and sent over 60,000 Indians to Fiji from 1834-1917, ‘promising’ them good-paying work and nice working conditions in exchange for 5 years of working in the sugar and fruit plantations.⁴⁸

Instead of what was promised, my ancestors, along with countless others, were subjected to terrible abuse from their British supervisors, and experienced terrible working conditions, high suicide rates, and low wages. During this time, the girmityas/coolies would take some of their wages and buy gold or brass and turn it into coin pendants called the ‘mohur’,⁴⁹ which to this day, is worn as a symbol of pride, while at the same time becomes a solid, tangible reminder of the trauma our ancestors went through for a better life.

⁴⁷ Natasha L. Henry, “Slavery Abolition Act”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Slavery-Abolition-Act>

⁴⁸ Rajendra Prasad, “Banished and excluded: the Girmityas of Fiji”, *Himal South Asian*, 2015, <https://www.himalmag.com/girmit-fiji/>

⁴⁹ Sarita Boodhoo, “The Guirni Necklace: A Tangible Cultural Heritage”, *The Mauritius Times*, 2017, <http://www.mauritiustimes.com/mt/sarita-boodhoo-88/>

In 1987 and 1989, Lieutenant-Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka of Fiji staged a coup d'état.⁵⁰ According to my father, this was a scary time as riots ensued between Indigenous Fijians and the Indian Fijians. The disenfranchisement of the latter made them fear they no longer belonged on the islands.⁵¹ Riots resulted. A couple of my relatives became refugees to Canada. Thousands of Indo-Fijians fled to avoid racial tensions and coups.⁵² My father joined my relatives later as a sponsored citizen. My parents married in 1991 and soon after my mother immigrated on a spousal visa in 1993.

Since the 1980s, Indo-Fijians have been migrating to Canada, either fleeing from the coups (Fiji had 4 coups) or to seek better opportunities, as the Fijian economy itself had been in a decline until the 2010s. "The expectation is that those who migrate will assist those who remain behind,"⁵³ which is what father did for his family and my mother's family. His brother, also refugee to Canada (later became a citizen) helped bring his entire family to Canada.

The Work

For this installation entitled *Mohur* (fig. 19), I made casts of resin coins by using my Nani's (maternal grandmother) mohur to make a mould out of rubber silicone and then cast with resin. I used white sewing thread to hang on a series of thin nails. The end result makes the coins appear nearly invisible. Their translucency symbolizes the haunting and trauma my ancestors endured during indentureship and the fact that they were passed down meant that trauma, too, was passed down. This rings back to Huyssen's concept of memory sculptures for groups or individual people. In this case, I am bringing forth the memory of my ancestors.

⁵⁰ "Fiji Profile-Timeline", *BBC News*, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-14919688>

⁵¹ Brij V. Lal, "Fiji Islands: From Immigration to Emigration", *Migration Policy Institute*, 2003, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/fiji-islands-immigration-emigration>

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

4.8: Present Day Issues

The Context

In the 1990s, a more tolerant attitude towards minorities and support for a multicultural/mosaic ideologies came more easily to Canadians, which I believe was because it was during a time of prosperity.⁵⁴ However, there have been times when the notion of multiculturalism has come under attack, making immigrants feel that despite the country's reputation, they were still expected to assimilate and thus become an 'ideal' Canadian.

Regardless of what year it is, South Asians continue to experience racism. Even my family and I dealt with it in the early 2000s in Vaughan, immediately after 9/11, at the border, in schools, from neighbours, and even through the subtlety of the passing gaze.

Recently, the province of Quebec passed Bill no. 21, which "provides that the laicity of the State [be] based on four principles: the separation of State and religions, the religious neutrality of the State, the equality of all citizens, and freedom of conscience and freedom of religion".⁵⁵ However, in the same breath, it states that "The bill proposes to prohibit certain persons from wearing religious symbols while exercising their functions".⁵⁶ This part has become really contentious as many consider it a Human Rights violation, but for some reason, the Quebec Assembly continues to justify it by stating that the laicity of the state is more important than religious head garments.⁵⁷

The Work

⁵⁴ Newman, 401

⁵⁵ National Assembly of Quebec, "Bill 21: An Act respecting the laicity of the State", *Quebec Official Publisher*, 2019, 2

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 2

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 8

I have made a variety of works regarding contemporary issues surrounding race and religion. For one of the three installations, I decided to do another mehndi mural with various patterning. Again, this is improvised and freehanded (fig. 20). I also created an AR component to the piece, one which depicts anti-Asian propaganda throughout history and overlaid with a home video of my 13th birthday (fig. 21).

The reason I use mehndi designs is to showcase a connection to my culture while the video shows the times when South Asians were not welcomed in the country. All the while, a video overlay showcases a simpler time in my life when I did not feel so alone as a South Asian (living in Brampton during this time). A dialogue of coming to terms with my identity as a Canadian-born Indo-Fijian is created between the two.

In addition to the mural, I created a video piece that critiqued Bill no. 21 (fig. 22), which shows me silently tying a turban while looking straight into the camera. My expression is that I will not back down. My facial defiance towards the Bill is evident. While I personally do not wear a turban, my relatives on my mother's side do wear one with pride.

Another piece, titled *I am a Worm, You are a Flower* (fig. 23) is a small (physically) video piece where I dance to Bollywood music. This is an adaptation of Pipilotti Rist's *Selfless in the Bath of Lava* (1994). It was installed in a very unlikely place in which viewers were only able to see it if they followed the sound of the music. This piece discusses the topic of minorities who felt that they had to hide their culture in order to fit in, but in private, they feel more comfortable being their cultural selves. At one point in my life, I did not publicly share much about my culture in fear that I would not be seen as a 'normal Canadian' (whatever that may be). I was more comfortable being myself at home, in private, and with my family. This piece is presented to the viewer who peeks into a keyhole and thereby uncover my secrets. The viewers may feel

uncomfortable at seeing a piece that would somehow invade my privacy. It is the same uncomfortable feeling that I get when I speak Hindi in public or when I decide to dress up with my cultural clothes or even dancing to Bollywood music.

Overall, the works I made showcase a range of how I want to convey information on the missing narratives within Canadian history and the ways to educate the public. A lot of what I have made was through trial and error and careful planning, but most importantly, using my intuition, especially with the mural pieces.

Chapter 5 The Exhibition

The title of this exhibition *[Re]Archive: South Asian Narratives in Canadian History* is direct, with no vague philosophical titles. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, OCADU's Open Space Gallery no longer serves as the venue for my thesis exhibition. Instead, I presented a 'virtual exhibition', AR-based catalogue that allowed for complete and open access to this exhibition from anywhere (fig 24).

The catalogue includes the cover with the title of the exhibition, the “didactic” which introduces the exhibition. It also includes instructions on how to activate the AR pieces. The catalogue's body has one side with information about the piece, the history and the QR code for the AR, while the other side has the image of the installations that will serve as the trigger for the AR pieces. This was then distributed in email form through the OCADU's Grad Blog for the public to see as well as in the OCADU Repository (Appendix A) where it will reside permanently.

The “opening reception” is in the form of an Instagram Live Story (livestream) as a way of being lighthearted during these horrific times (fig. 25) My experience with livestream was initially nerve-wracking. I've never done a livestream and I felt very uncomfortable talking in front of the camera. However, I felt more comfortable answering questions. A lot of the questions were about process and future plans.

The reviews of the virtual exhibition catalogue were mixed. For some, I was told that the catalogue was a good idea considering the circumstances. For others (including the defence committee), they felt that the QR code is outdated and the process to trigger the AR became too repetitive. I agree with this review. I plan on continuing my research by pursuing a Ph.D. and improve on this prototype into something less repetitive and more engaging.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The research I have conducted, and the works created point to a structural erasure in secondary school history education that needs to shift and become more inclusive of minority perspectives. Even though this thesis focuses on the South Asian narrative, it is not meant to forget other minority groups, as minorities have fought, died, protested and celebrated alongside other Canadians throughout history. They all deserve just as much recognition. For South Asians, sadly, the only recognition is a pitiful two-paragraph mention in the textbook in a section titled *Discrimination: Asian Canadians*.

By pushing for minority histories to be integrated into the current curriculum, we must consent to the discussion on important topics such as racism, immigration, memorialization, memories, and haunting. By instilling minority histories, and eradicating the notion that, “We have no history” (quotations meant to be read in mocking voice), would lead to greater tolerance.

Through the process of a/r/tography and archival research, I can see how art, including my own can be used within the textbooks as a way of inserting South Asian and other histories, while AR can be used as an attractive way to entice students.

The overall progress of shifting the paradigm of Canadian education is still very slow to change. It is my hope that the current policies that demand Indigenous history be taught as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be inclusive of minority histories as well. Currently, the new guidelines (according to the Ministry of Education) for teaching Indigenous history is to include contributions of Indigenous peoples and acknowledge and explain the attitude against them as well. However, I feel that bigger discussions on the relationship of settler colonialism to the history of migration and immigration is also needed. It seems like a small step, but it is huge gain in terms of what education could mean for young Canadians.

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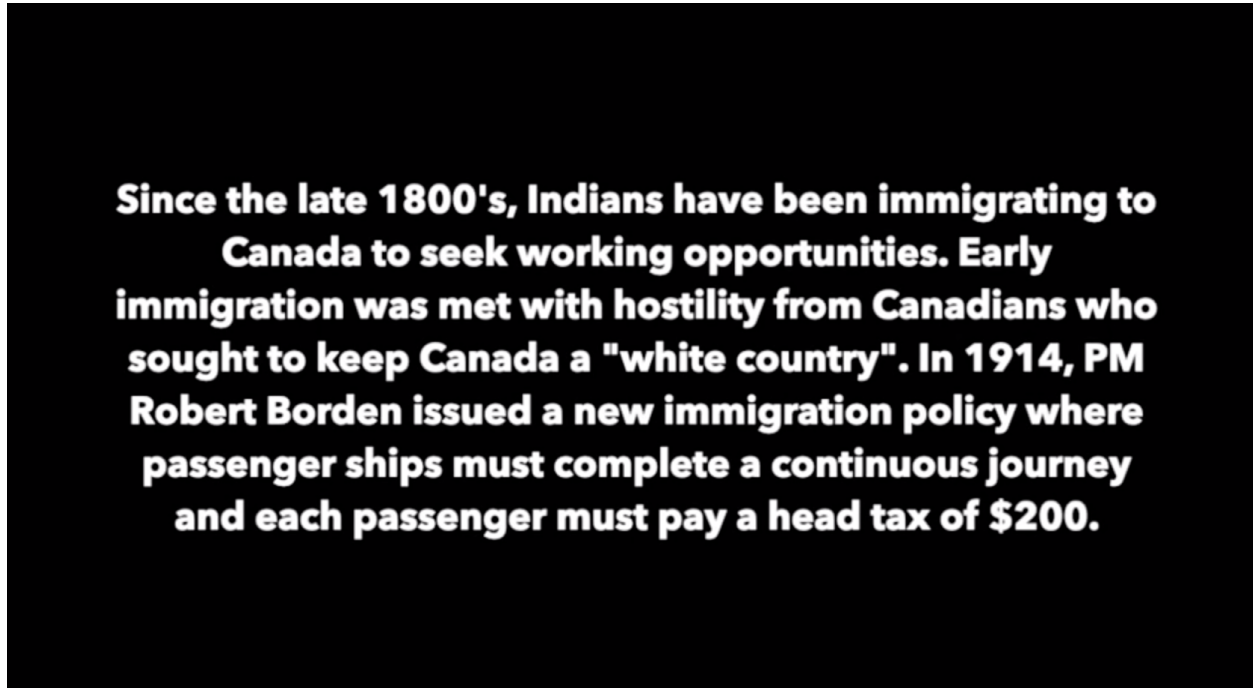
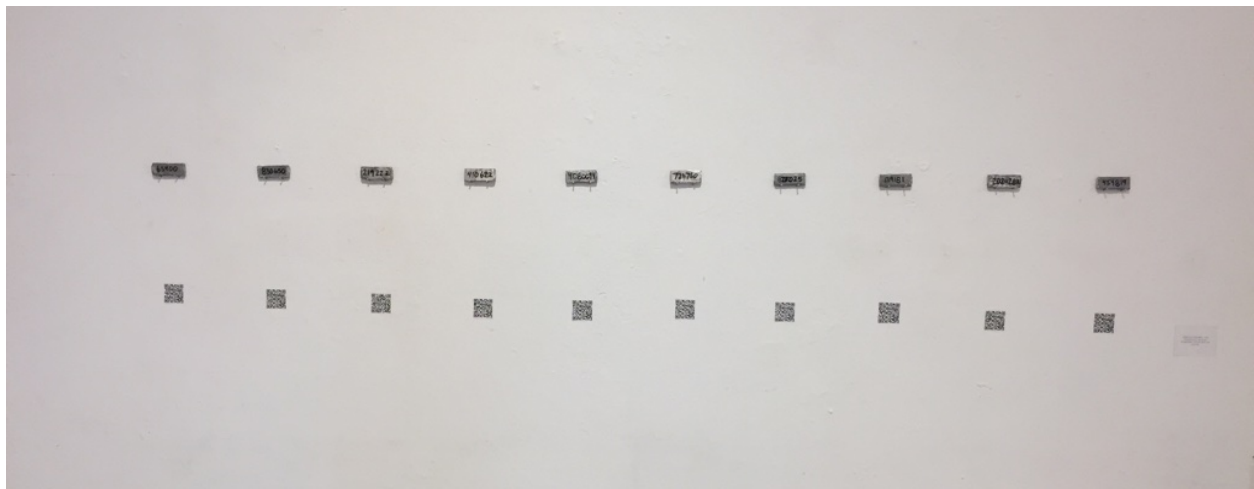
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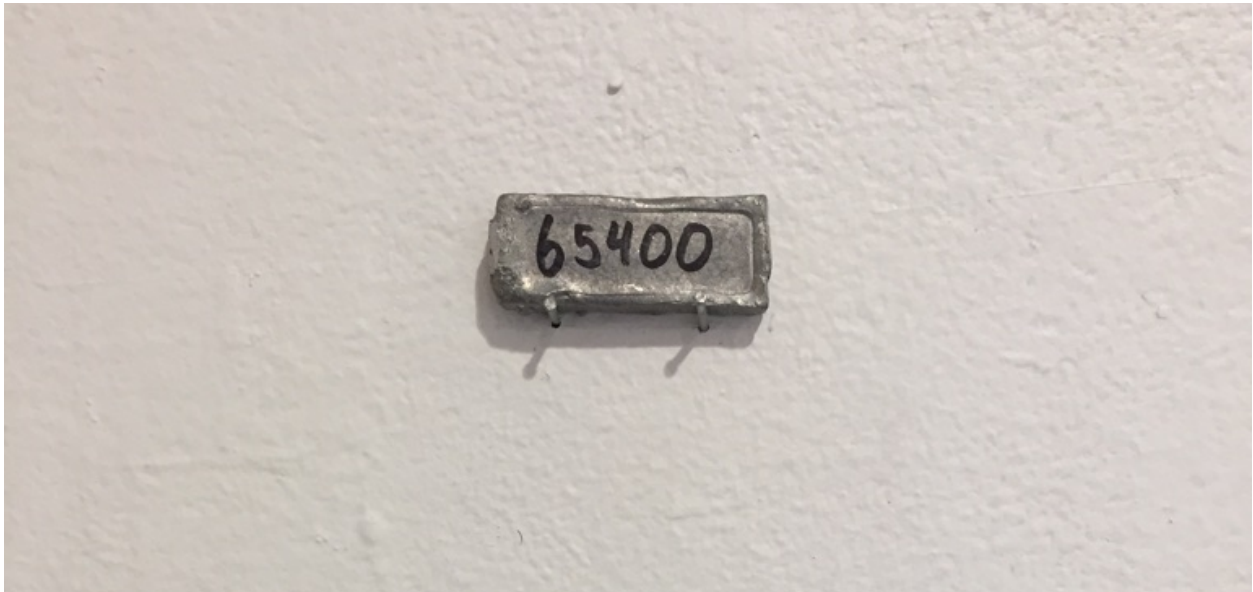


Figure 6: Still from AR Video of Sunta Gougersingh, page 26

Joined the 24th Battalion Quebec Regiment and embarked to France in September, 1915. Unfortunately, he was killed in action in the trenches near Kemmel. He was demobilized on October 19, 1915 and was buried in La Laiterie Military Cemetery in Belgium. He received medals of honour after his death.

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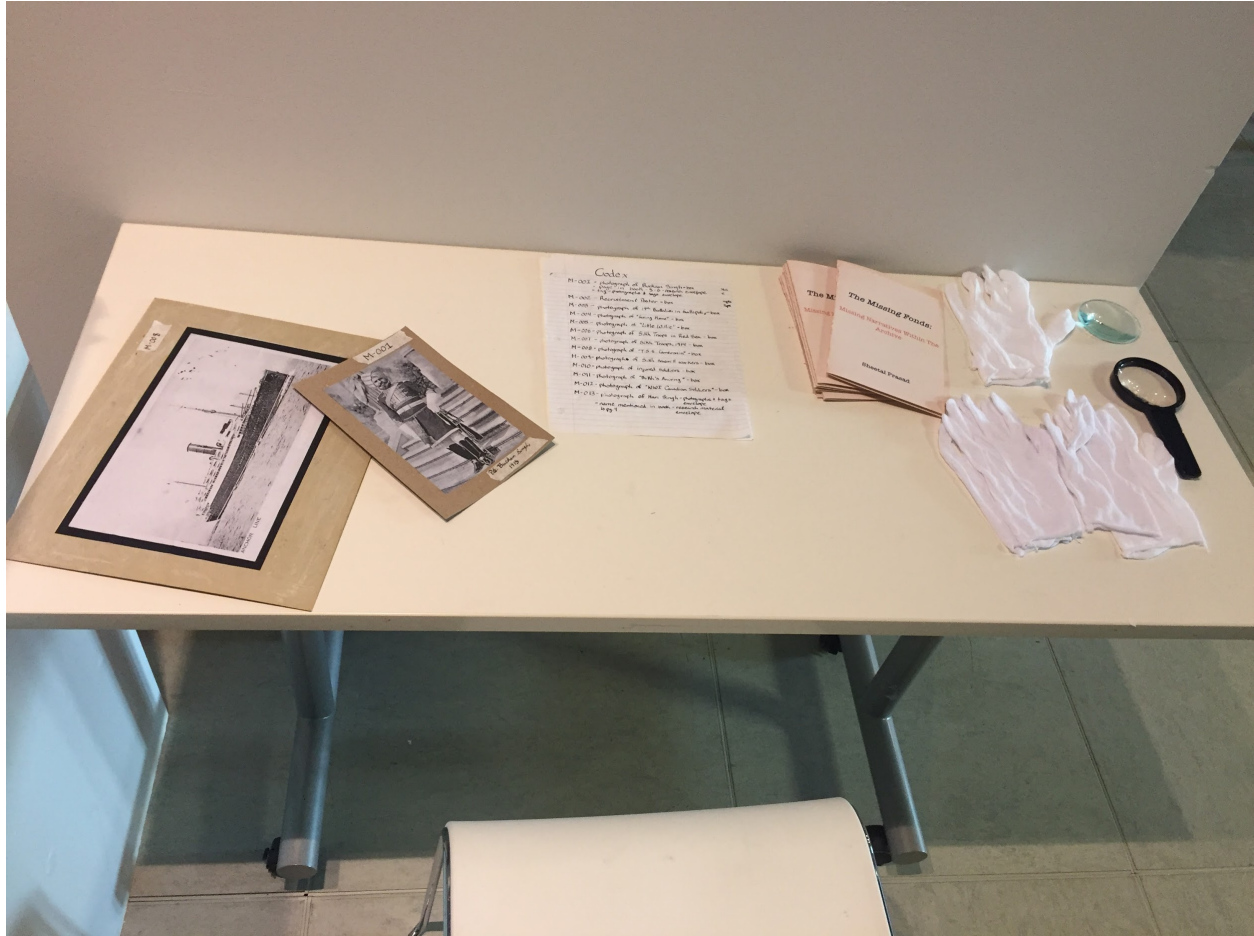


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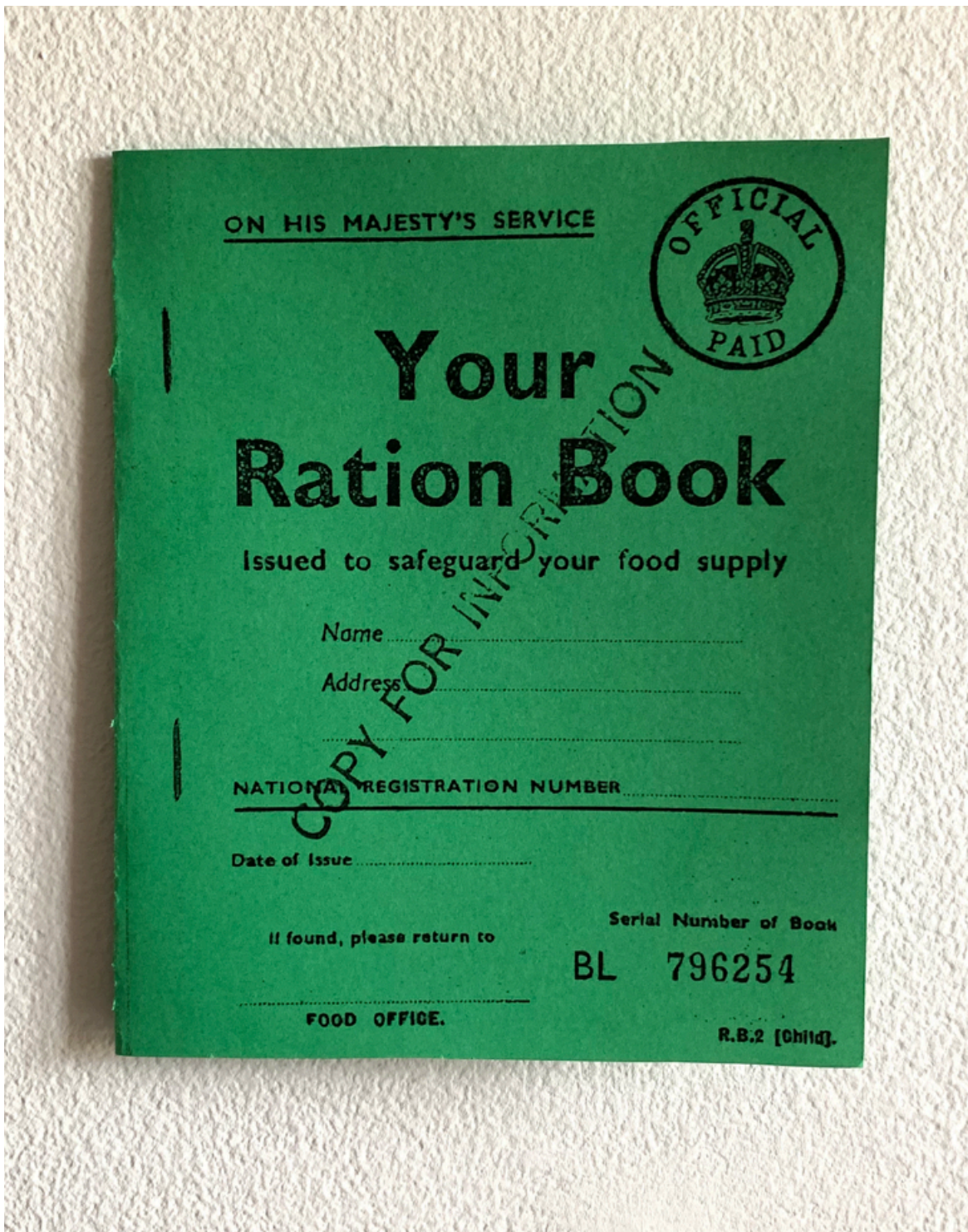


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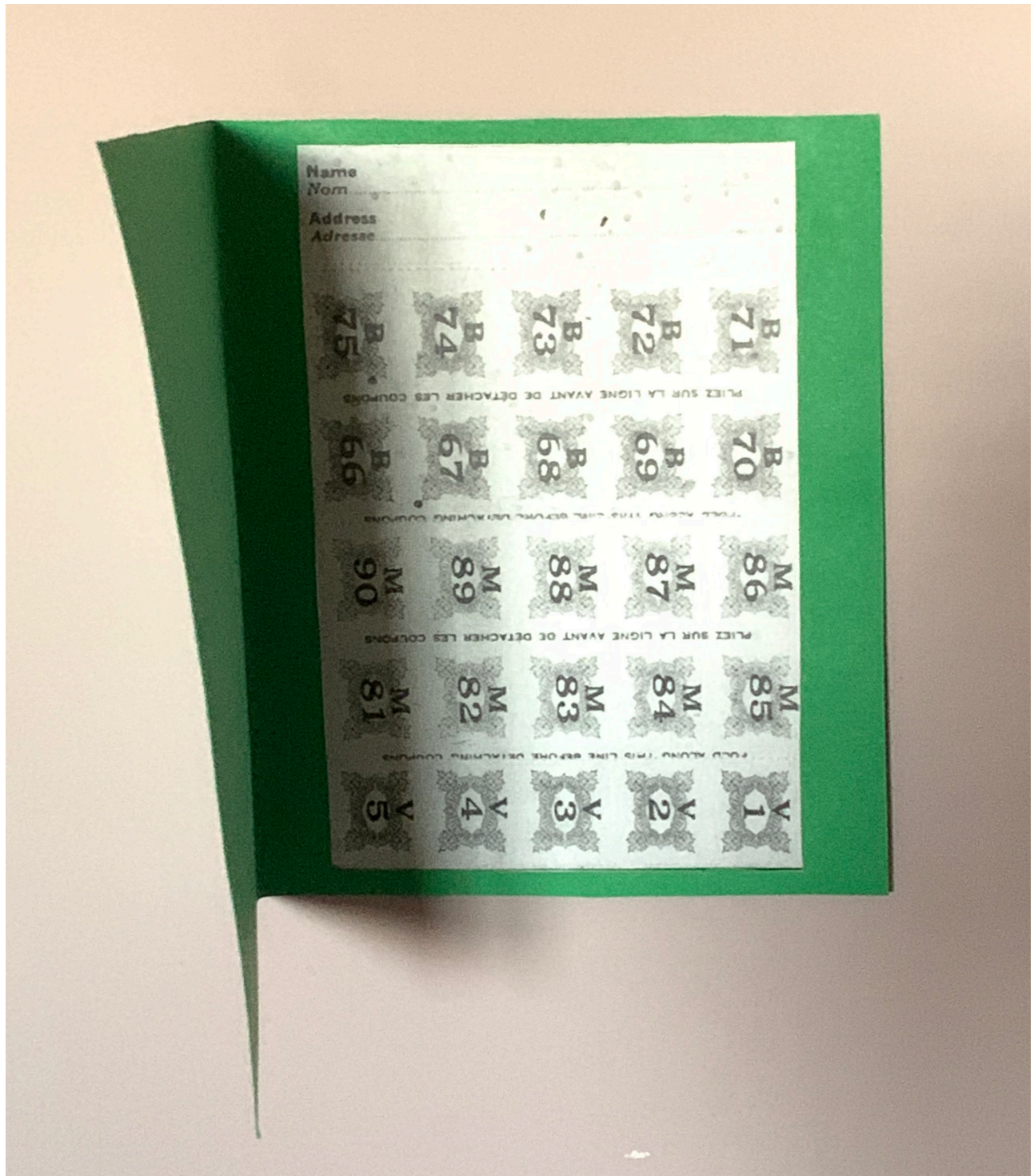


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Service Number: A19108
Enlistment Date: 1939-09-04
Address at time of enlistment - Locality: London
Address at time of enlistment - Province: ON
Address at time of enlistment - Country: CA
Reference: RG 24
Volume: 26686
Extra Information: Son of Capt. Charles John Murray, and Florence De-Longe Murray; husband of Norah Murray, of London, Ontario - Dieppe casualty
Item Number: 26263

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**Women Gained
the Right
to Vote
in 1917**

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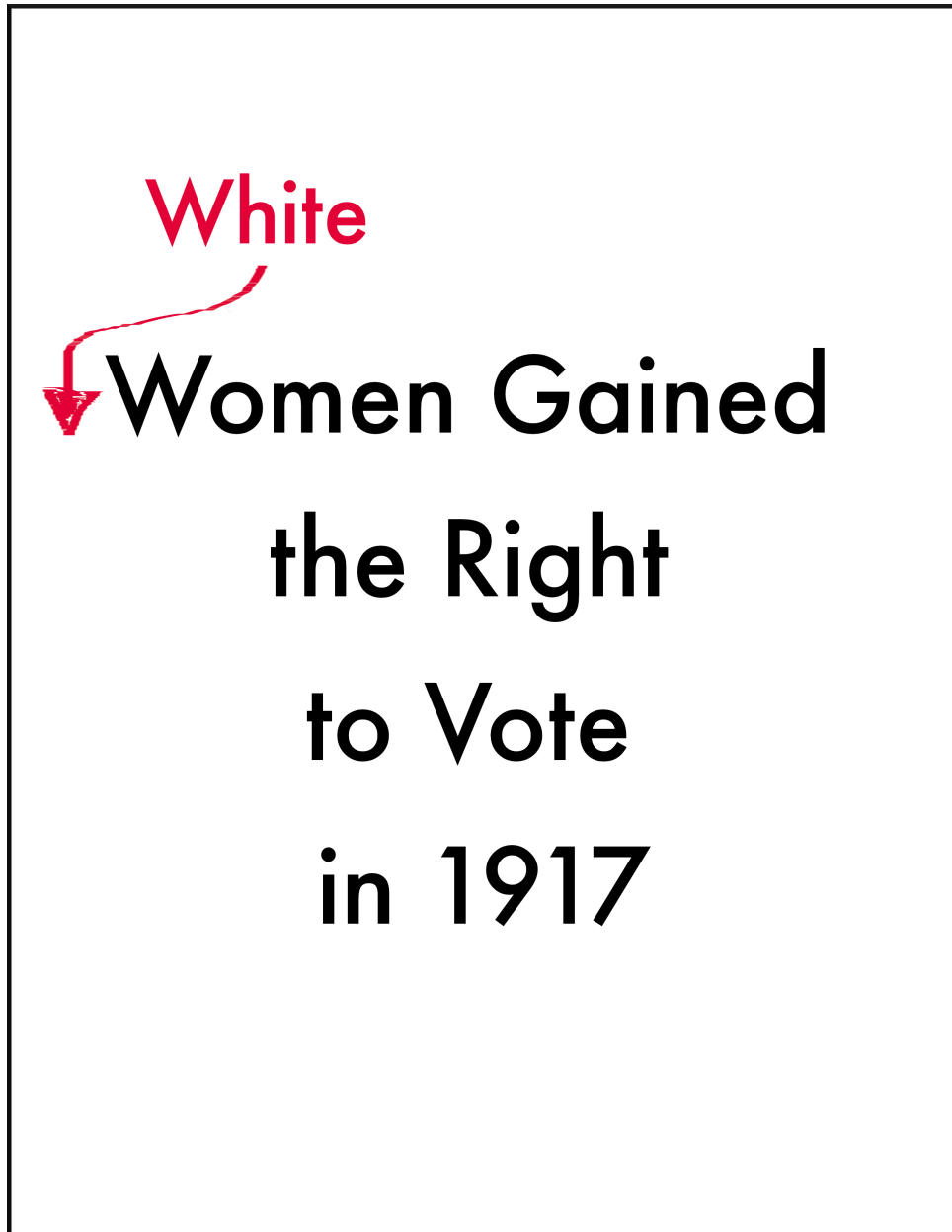


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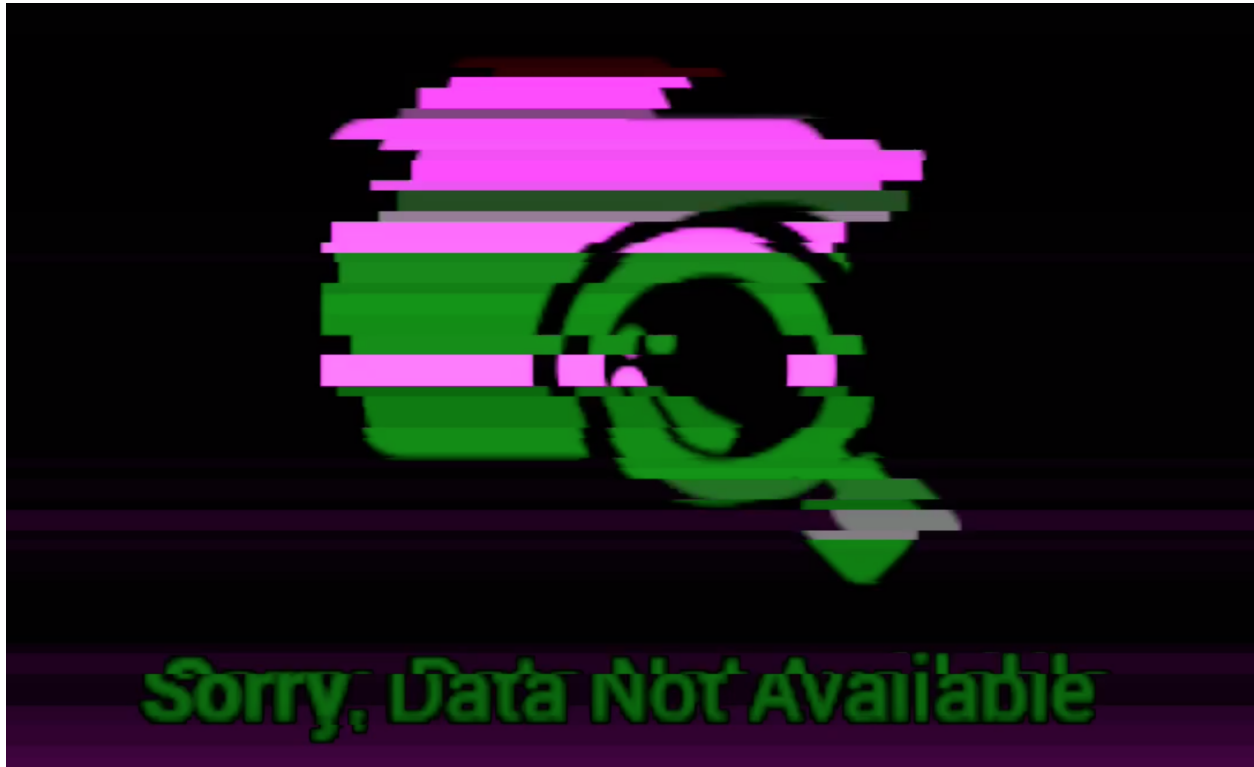


Figure 19: *Mohur*, 2019, Resin Installation, page 33



Figure 20: *HENNA*, 2019, Mural with AR, page 35



Figure 21: *Welcome?*, 2019, Video Glitch, page 35



Figure 22: *Bill no. 21*, 2019, Video (Still), page 35



Figure 23: *I am a Worm, You are a Flower*, 2018, Video Installation (Still), page 35



Figure 24: Catalogue, page 37

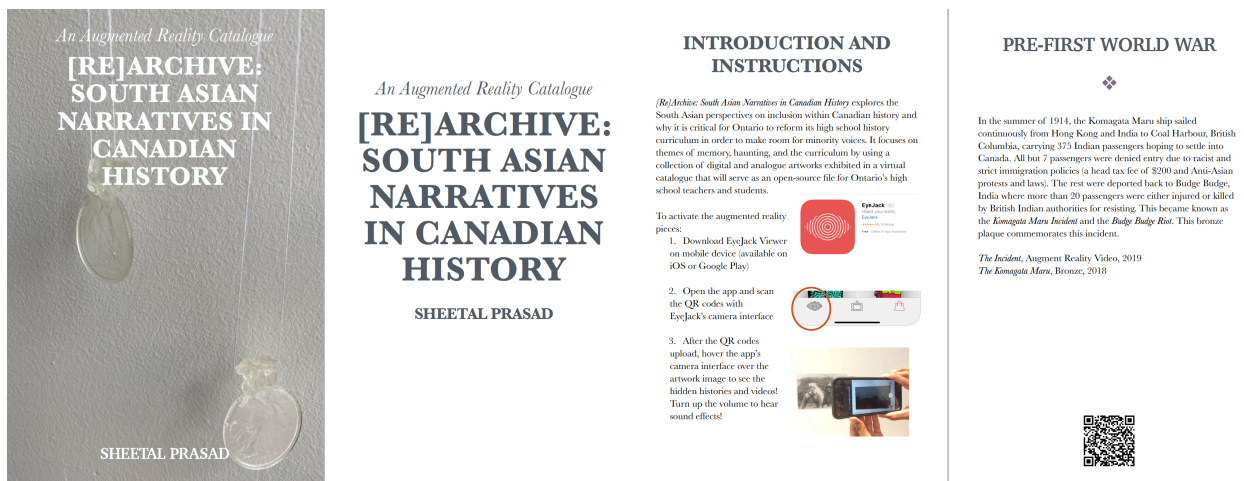
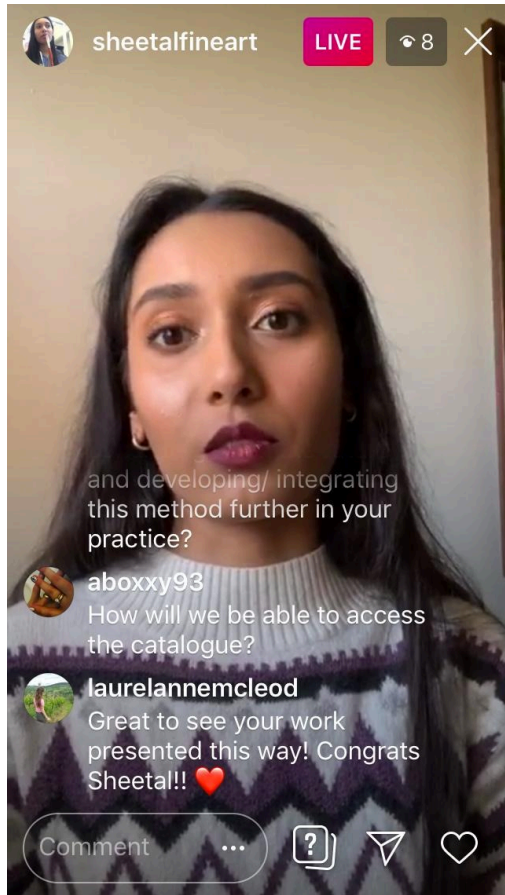


Figure 25: Livestream (Still), page 37



Appendix A: Additional Materials

Additional digital files uploaded to the Open Research Repository include:

[Re]Archive: South Asian Narratives in Canadian History, an augmented reality catalogue that includes images and videos of my work, 2020

File Name: Prasad_Sheetal_[Re]Archive_Catalogue

File Type: PDF