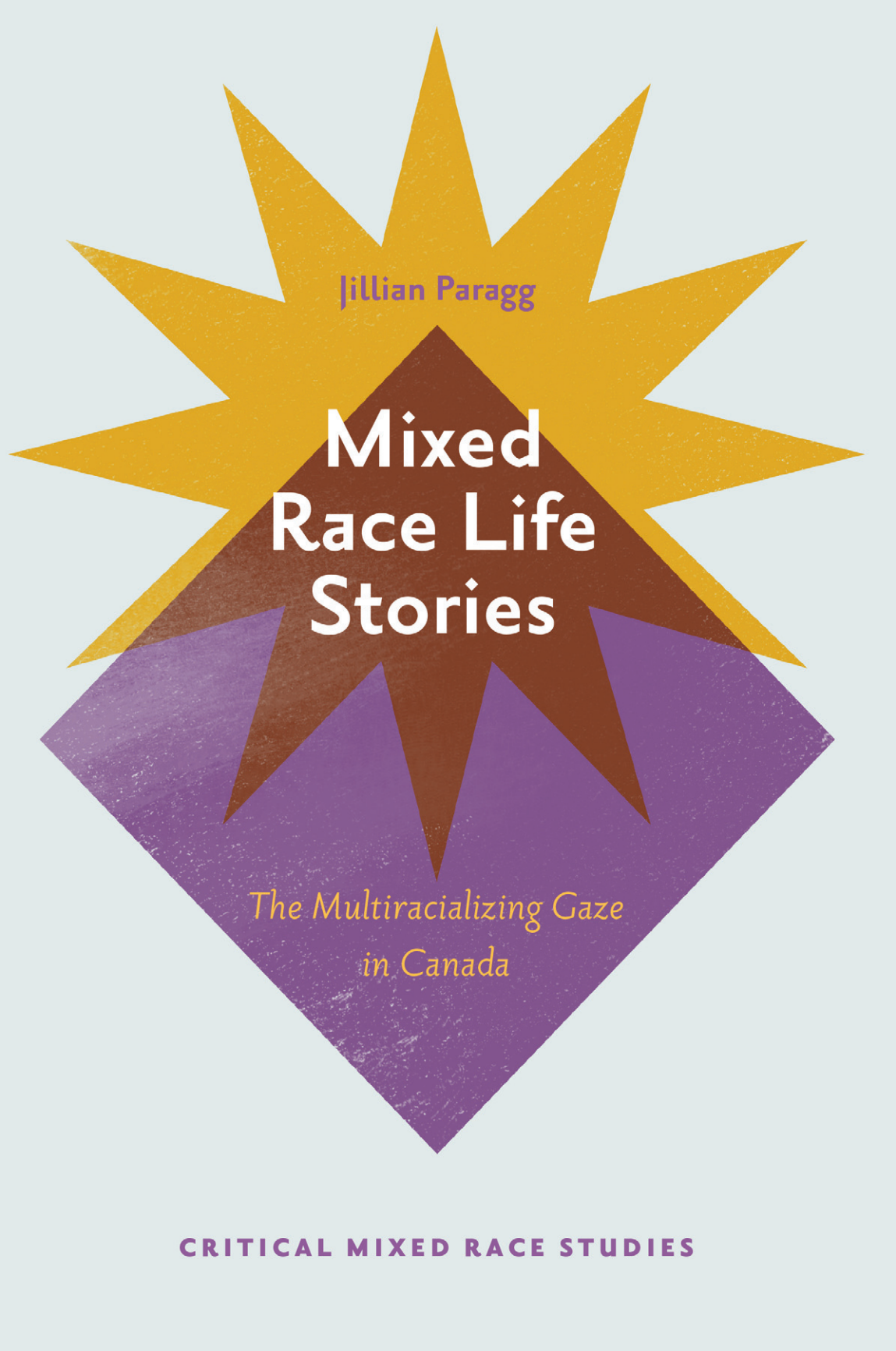
Jillian Paragg
Mixed Race Life Stories
The Multiracializing Gaze in Canada
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Mixed Race Life Stories

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Mixed Race Life Stories: The Multiracializing Gaze in Canada

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

For my Black and brown kin. Keep living joyfully, despite it all.

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About the Author

Jillian Paragg, **PhD**, is an independent qualitative researcher based in Treaty 4 Territory (Regina, Canada), who specializes in race, identity, immigration and social inequality in the Canadian context.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Encountering the Multiracializing Gaze

Introduction

When my mother was pregnant with my older sister in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, in the early 1980s, a woman acquainted with my (white) mother and my (brown) father asked my mother if the baby was going to 'come out with zebra stripes'. My family and I continue to laugh at the absurdity of this comment 40 years later – as if it were a complete mystery how babies born to parents from different racial groups 'come out!' But the question also signaled the operation of something much larger: how notions about race and racial imaginaries are constantly being produced and reproduced, and how mixed race bodies serve as a particular site through which this (re)production occurs. Similar moments were echoed in the narratives of the 21 mixed race people whose life stories are the core of this book. Respondents' earliest memories as children involved a 'baptism by fire' regarding the operation of dominant racial imaginaries. How others read and attempt to fix race on their bodies disrupts the external racial gaze's (Bannerji, 2000; Fanon, 2008) hegemonic imaginary of the supposed monoracial or discrete raced body. But through that disruption, hegemonic imaginaries of interracial mixing (i.e. that the mixed race body is the 'result' of the coming together of two singular raced bodies – a kind of 'zebra stripe' imaginary) are also (re)produced. I use the term (re)produced to refer to how race is always already in production, drawing on Haritaworn (2009, 2012). Race is constantly producing itself through bodies, or even the very idea of bodies, as race is always already being produced in the social. Even before my sister's birth, dominant racial imaginaries of discrete racial categories were being produced on and through her (imagined) body.

This interaction captures a key entry point from which to consider the operation of race discourse and mixed race in Canada. Firstly, it demonstrates how kin relations are central to the 'interracial popular imaginary' (Dorow & Swiffen, 2009, p. 569) in which discourses about racial mixing circulate.[1] This imaginary

[1]While no comprehensive study of mixed race discourses in Canada has been completed, I conducted a review of mixed race discourses in print media, which I discuss in Chapter 2.

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produces a notion of linear origins 'coming together' in the mixed race body, which relies on the assumed correspondence of race, biology and blood.

The interaction, secondly, demonstrates a hegemonic racial imaginary where race categories are discrete, mutually exclusive and socially and physically essentialist (Gatson, 2003). The interracial popular imaginary is one that underpins and is further reinforced by official multiculturalism in Canada, in that Canadian multicultural discourse (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002) demands and expects a discrete narrative based in the 'origin' of the people – especially non-white racialized people – who are seen to form its multicultural mosaic (e.g. 'you were *there*, then you came *here*'). Such an imaginary builds on the zebra stripe imagery, in that racial categories are positioned as discrete/immutable. This influences subjects to narrate their identities, and the identities of others, in a linear and non-complex manner − even if their lived experiences are bound up in multiplicity.

Thirdly, the interaction points to the operation of what I call the multiracializing gaze. This concept combines Haritaworn's (2012) work on multiracialization – the processes by which race gets produced and reproduced on and through mixed race bodies – with well-established scholarship on the external racial gaze (Bannerji, 2000; Fanon, 2008). The racial gaze does its fixing work through questions like 'what are you?' and in the process produces bodies as 'multiracial', imagined to be formed through the coming together of two people from two discrete racial groups (Haritaworn, 2009). This process 'multiracializes' (Haritaworn, 2012) by socially naming or calling bodies into being as mixed race. In turn, this book seeks to explicate how the gaze reproduces bodies as mixed race through multiracialization, and the affective impact that it has on lived experiences. I ultimately suggest that conceptualizing multiracialized affect can be a way to move towards articulating an affective politics of mixed race.

The question of mixed race experiences in what is now called Canada is not well documented, and I am interested in contributing to its understanding. Here I examine the lived experience of the gaze on mixed race bodies, drawing on life story interviews conducted with adults of mixed race in three Canadian urban contexts. Between the fall of 2013 and the spring of 2014, I conducted life story interviews with 21 adults of mixed race (aged 37–59) in Toronto, Ontario, and in two cities in the province of Alberta: Edmonton and Calgary. The research focused on respondents' experiences as mixed race across their life course within what I term as the multicultural era. This refers to the time period that spans from the circulation of the Two Founding Nations (English and French) discourse in the 1960s and the advent of official Canadian multicultural policy (within a bilingual framework) in 1971, through to the upswing in non-white migration that began in the 1970s, and into today's increasingly diverse – and, according to some, post-racial – society. Respondents' narratives, including their stories of learning about race, navigating social discourses and experiencing the gaze, extend our understanding of the operation of the racial gaze and show the particular ways that the multiracializing gaze works in the context of official multiculturalism in Canada.

I next provide a discussion of global mixed race literature and the Canadian context, including situating this project within Critical Mixed Race Studies (CMRS). I then briefly outline the study context, including how race and mixed race are framed in the Canadian census, and how this signals the operation of race discourse in Canada. I next move to a discussion of the study's method and methodology, and lastly introduce my orientating concept of ready identity narratives, which is core to mixed race experiences in Canada.

Global Mixed Race Literatures and the Canadian Context

> The distinct development of forms of processes of racialisation in the US and the UK have led to different kinds of political struggle for recognition for those who name themselves in the different sites as variously multiracial, mixed race, biracial, having multiple heritage and so on. The struggles over the names also point to the different histories of race making, and it would seem misguided to attempt to transport models from one site to another. It is more important to consider the extremely complex and contingent discursive sites and practices that produce 'race' and 'mixed race' in their many forms. Specificity does not mean that we might not see points of similarity and patterns of congruence, but the need to understand the particulars of what forms racialised hierarchies is what matters most to the project of dismantling them.
>
> (Ali, 2012, p. 178)

How mixed race gets taken up across contexts signals how processes of racialization are operating in those contexts, or 'race making' as Ali puts it. Looking at the proliferation of comparative global mixed race literature over the past decade (Edwards et al., 2012; Fozdar & McGavin, 2017; King-O'Riain, 2014) is one way to situate the Canadian context in relation to global processes of racialization. I next identify some key elements of the significance of the Canadian context in relation to racialization emerging from the comparative global mixed race literature to highlight how hegemonic and transformative discourses elsewhere have impacted the Canadian context, as well as what is unique and specific to the Canadian context. The Canadian context is described in even more detail later in this introductory chapter and in Chapter 2.

British Colonial Entanglements: Canada and Other White Settler Colonial States

One key element of the Canadian context in relation to global processes of race, power and the state is white settler colonialism. In her work, Odumoso (2020) asks how do we come to understand colonial entanglements: in what ways do

places that were colonized through the same 'parent' or 'entity' intersect. How can they speak to each other to undo these colonial sites, not in a manner that dissects or cuts up in the ways that the colonial project did and does, but rather in a way that *undoes* the hold of colonial power and its structures?

As a settler colonial state formed through British and French (in certain regions) entities, Canada shares some similarities with other white settler colonial nation-states stemming from British entities (which make up in part what is now referred to by the British as 'the Commonwealth'), namely Australia and Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014). For example, like Canada, Australia and New Zealand have majority white settler colonizer populations, newer non-white immigrant populations (due to historically race-based and racist immigration policies) and a history of policies that attempted to assimilate Indigenous peoples, including Indian Residential Schools and the Sixties Scoop in Canada and the Stolen Generations in Australia (Fozdar & McGavin, 2017). Additionally, despite the impact of these colonial state processes and structures, sovereign Indigenous nations across these lands continue to resist the legacies and ongoing impact of colonial policies, and persist in the face of ongoing settler colonialism. Fozdar and McGavin state the following of the Australian and New Zealand contexts:

> Mixed off-spring are taken to symbolise the openness of the white settler to diverse others … while both are in fact guests on land appropriated from others. On the other hand, Indigenous peoples with mixed heritages often face challenges to their 'authenticity' which require continuous negotiation both in their everyday lives and in relation to authorities attempting to deny them access to Indigenous rights. (2017, p. 8)

British/Commonwealth settler colonial states also share similarities in their immigration policies. For example, despite a history of diverse migration to Canada and Australia prior to the late 1800s, Australia and Canada both discouraged non-European (i.e. non-white) immigration through policy until the 1950s and 1960s, producing a dominant national racial imaginary of whiteness (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014; Mahtani et al., 2014). Additionally, immigration policies that restricted Chinese immigration were put in place in both the New Zealand and Canadian contexts in the late 1800s (Li, 2003; Rocha, 2017). Similarly, changes to these kinds of policies across the Canadian, Australian and New Zealand contexts also started to occur in the 1950s and 1960s due to labour force demands (Fozdar & Meyer, 2017; Fozdar & Perkins, 2014; Li, 2003). With changes to exclusionary immigration policies, the rate of non-white immigration began to increase in the 1960s and 1970s across all three contexts. In the Australian context, the notion of multiculturalism also became ensconced in official policy in the 1970s due to increasingly diverse (non-white) migration and recognition of the economic contributions of migrants (Fozdar & Meyer, 2017; Fozdar & Perkins, 2014). In the context of New Zealand, with changes to immigration policy came changes to the demographic makeup of the population,

and the New Zealand national narrative moved to one of a multicultural society within a bicultural national framework (Rocha, 2017, p. 228). There, biculturalism in official policy 'is between the two groups unique to New Zealand, Maori and Pakeha (White New Zealanders)' (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014, p. 131).

Similar shifts to those that occurred in Australia and New Zealand occurred in the Canadian context, but with some key differences: in the 1970s there was a shift from a bicultural framework – two founding nations of English and French – to a multicultural framework in the Canadian state's policies and national imaginary (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002). However, both biculturalism and multiculturalism lack a recognition of Indigenous nations, constituting Indigenous erasure and dispossession. The Canadian settler colonial state also represents itself, through policy, as multicultural in a globalized world (King-O'Riain, 2014). While official multicultural policy works to make ideological space for the belonging of non-white non-Indigenous peoples, it also signals a glossing over of the state as settler colonial (Bannerji, 2000), and sits in uncomfortable relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. In the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian contexts there have also been similar critiques of multicultural policy as only taking up surface level diversity, for example through a foods and festivals approach (Fozdar & Meyer, 2017; Fozdar & Perkins, 2014; Mahtani, 2002a). Despite this, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are all touted as contexts of super diversity within each of their own nation state discourses, through non-white migrants joining white settler societies and Indigenous populations in each of those places (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014; King-O'Riain, 2014).

Despite this emphasis on so-called superdiversity, across the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian nation-state contexts, ethnicity – as opposed to race – is often the focus of official policies (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014). For example, racial identity is not a question that is explicitly included on the census – and Canada has gone so far as to invent its own term, visible minority, which avoids explicit mention of race in official policies, to refer to racialized non-white non-Indigenous people. Canadian census category options are comprised of a mish-mash of racial, ethnic and national terminologies (more on this later in the chapter). In turn, the term ethnic gets used as a signifier for cultural and racial differences across these contexts (Fozdar & Meyer, 2017). Simultaneous to this ethnic focus, a white/non-white binary circulates within race discourses in these contexts, but in slightly different ways. Australia's discourses of Indigenous identity are based on phenotype and the circulation of a Black-white racial dichotomy, a binary discourse of Blackfellas (Indigenous) and Whitefellas (settlers) (Fozdar & McGavin, 2017). This is compared to the Canadian context where a white/non-white binary is also set up as the dominant settler racial imaginary, but in the Canadian context the binary is between white settlers and multicultural Others, with a tendency to exclude Indigenous peoples (Bannerji, 2000). However, there have also been recent shifts to the settler Canadian racial imaginary, perpetuated by Indigenous movements like Idle No More, Land Back, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the genocidal violence of the Indian Residential School system finally penetrating settler

discourse and media, through the ongoing uncovering of children's unmarked graves across the country (Nichols, 2015; Simpson et al., 2018). A discourse of cultural Others is also at work in the Australian and New Zealand contexts, and groups caught in the discourse may take on cultural homogeneity or strategic essentialism in order to access material resources designated for specific ethnic groups within official multicultural policies (Bannerji, 2000; Fozdar & Meyer, 2017; Fozdar & Perkins, 2014). However, this approach may also lead to the reinforcement of discrete categories and position identities that traverse those boundaries as problematic.

Overall, within these contexts, ideas about singular and discrete categories of race dominate, which both reinforce and are reinforced by multicultural policies, along with slippages between race, culture, ethnicity and nationality. Discrete framings in turn impact how whiteness operates differently in these contexts, given its various relationships to colonialism and colonial formation (Paragg, 2017; Rocha, 2017). For example, 'New Zealander' can be seen as a national identification that provides non-racial identification, but has racial undertones (Rocha, 2017), and as I have argued elsewhere 'Canadian' as a national identification is tied to whiteness (Paragg, 2015), reinforced by multicultural policy positioning non-white and non-Indigenous racialized people as 'multicultural Others' outside of the nation (Bannerji, 2000). Yet mixed race people in the Australian, New Zealand and Canadian contexts are also often positioned in the dominant racial imaginary as a sign of both emerging multiculturalism and/or the success of multiculturalism, while simultaneously being denied belonging to the nation (Fozdar & McGavin, 2017; King-O'Riain, 2014; Paragg, 2015). As Rocha found in her study of Chinese and European mixed race identities in New Zealand:

> Being mixed brought together nationality, heritage and experience in a variety of ways, and highlighted the nuances and overlaps between them. A mixed identity was often described as in-between and something new, a coming together of different cultures and identities. (2017, p. 235)

However, in her study, Rocha also found that mixed race people identified as 'New Zealanders first' (2017, p. 236), despite the presumption that the identification of 'New Zealander' (similar to 'Australian') is white (Fozdar & Perkins, 2014). Not always being accepted as New Zealanders (despite their own identification as such) and having various responses to the questions they face from others about their identities (e.g. 'what are you?') was similar to my findings that mixed race people in Canada expressed a sense of being 'Canadian-first', which persisted, despite participants' understanding that 'Canadian means white'. Participants, therefore, strategically deployed the identity 'Canadian' in questioning interactions that they had with others (Paragg, 2015), signaling the possibility of taking up national identifiers in transformative ways. Mitchell's (2020) concept of hemispheric race-making provides another lens through which to view the significance of the Canadian context in relation to global racialization.

Hemispheric Race-Making and the Black Atlantic

Mitchell's (2020) work takes a comparative global mixed race lens, creating a fuller picture of the operation of hegemonic and transformative discourses of race, racisms and resistances in the Americas. She identifies this process of hemispheric race-making through representations of female mixed race figures in media across the US and Brazilian contexts. Hemispheric race-making occurs through slavery, colonization and the particularities of the operation of these structures in the Americas – what has also been called a 'Settler-Savage-Slave' framework (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Hemispheric race-making builds on the Transatlantic circulations of anti-Blackness and the power of the Black[2] Atlantic diaspora in shaping Black culture (Gilroy, 1993), including work that has highlighted how Black mixed race people's crossing of racial boundaries is constructed within the US, UK and Canadian contexts (McNeil, 2010).

While Mitchell focuses on the United States and Brazil in her discussion – arguing that both contexts are undergirded by white supremacy, the control of Black populations and the containment of Blackness while couched in myths of racial democracy – hemispheric race-making and Transatlantic circulations of anti-Blackness also operate in the Canadian context. Racial slavery existed in the Canadian context – although focused in the domestic sphere rather than through plantation systems (Nelson, 2018) – entrenching anti-Black racism and the operation of a Black/white binary in race discourse. However, in the Canadian context, the Black/white binary is encompassed within and expands to a white/non-white binary (Bannerji, 2000), figured by what I refer to as racialized ethnicities. While Canada is a settler-colonial nation-state rooted in white supremacy, anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity, multiculturalism is also entrenched within the nation's imaginary (Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). And, as Mahtani et al. (2014) point out, claiming a mixed race identity in the Canadian context does not draw on racial–national sentiments to reproduce the Canadian national identity. However, this is the case in Brazil, where 'mixedness' and 'Brazilianness' are intertwined (Mitchell, 2020).

Situating the Project Within CMRS

Academic scholarship on mixed race is itself also implicated in circulating discourses on race. One key division within mixed race scholarship is around how some scholars in the mixed race literature uncritically reproduce neo-liberal post-race discourse. CMRS scholars are those who take up and engage with anti-racist frameworks. CMRS scholars delineate themselves from other mixed race literature, such as the psychosocial mixed race identity literature, which may reproduce post-race discourse both implicitly and explicitly. Here I outline key issues that CMRS grapples with, and position my project as part of the CMRS literature.

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[2]I capitalize Black when discussing Black as a racial category and when naming Black identity, to honour Black identity and Blackness, and to counter white supremacist framings of Black identity and Blackness.

While mixed race literature as a whole in the Canadian context is still at a nascent stage − see Mahtani (2014), Mahtani et al. (2014), McNeil (2010), Paragg (2014, 2015, 2017) − in the United States and the United Kingdom, the emergence of work on mixed race identity can be traced from the first half of the twentieth century. However, often this early work was focused on the psychopathology that it was assumed people of mixed race experience. For example, Ifekwunigwe (2004) has posited three ages in the mixed race scholarship within social science disciplines: the age of pathology throughout most of the twentieth century; a movement to an age of celebration in the 1990s and the emergence of an age of critique in the late 1990s and 2000s.[3–5] While Ifekwunigwe's (2004) framework is useful for thinking about the historical context of scholarship out of which the current moment has emerged, it is also important to complicate this historicization. The plotting of ages sets up a linear temporal treatment of mixed race scholarship that does not necessarily provide a way to consider how the threads of 'earlier' ages persist and continue to circulate and be grappled with. For example, within mixed race scholarship, celebratory discourses often sit beside the pathologized: these discourses remain extant and are in conversation with each other. What has emerged in the Canadian context is work that developed against the backdrop of US/UK literature.

Mixed race literature is a product of its time, and its foci have shifted across the decades. Further, within the body of mixed race literature exist a number of tensions and debates. For example, CMRS scholars – and most pointedly in the Canadian context – have called for further interrogation of the division between anti-racist scholarship and anti-colonial scholarship (Mahtani, 2014).[6] CMRS literature also problematizes the emphasis in popular media and academic literature on individual mixed race voices narrating their own experiences. It is argued that through this medium, individual experiences, as opposed to structural patterns of inequality, become the focus. Critics point out that the focus on individual identity rights has failed to consider how power and race are operating (Mahtani, 2001, 2014; Nakashima, 1996; Parker & Song, 2001), and they argue that mixed race celebratory discourses and the so-called US multiracial movement are a neo-liberal anti-Black movements (DaCosta, 2007; Elam, 2011; Sexton, 2008).

My project draws and builds on several key concepts from the CMRS literature. These include a focus on the 'what are you?' question (Farjardo-Anstine,

[3]In literature within the age of pathology not fitting into a particular racial group was said to result in a psychopathology for the person of mixed race, as a result of being socially, emotionally and psychologically confused due to transgressing discrete racial categories.
[4]In literature within the age of celebration people of mixed race − in larger numbers than ever before − enter the scholarship themselves, and take up 'actor-centred' frameworks that revolve around the fluidity and non-fixity of their personal identities, which is entwined with the emergence of the so-called multiracial movement in the United States.
[5]This age of literature is critical of the multiracial movement and its post-race tendencies.
[6]The separation of literature signals a larger division in scholarship in the Canadian context between decolonial scholarship and anti-racist scholarship, and the need to decolonize anti-racism (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).