University of Nevada, Reno

In Place / Out of Place: Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno, Nevada

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

By
Heather L. Benson

Dr. Kate A. Berry/Dissertation Advisor

May 2022
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the dissertation prepared under our supervision by

HEATHER L. BENSON

entitled

In Place / Out of Place: Punjabi-Sikhs of Reno, Nevada

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Kate A. Berry
Advisor

Paul F. Starrs
Committee Member

Jessie H. Clark
Committee Member

Casey Lynch
Committee Member

Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar
Graduate School Representative

David W. Zeh, Ph.D., Dean
Graduate School

May, 2022
Abstract

Plenty of research has focused on major immigrant destination metropolitan areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008); however, little work has focused on small to mid-sized urban areas and re-emerging immigrant gateways (Singer, 2015). The greater Reno metropolitan area in Nevada, which in the early 21st-century is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation, has re-emerged as an immigrant destination, yet it has been largely overlooked in scholarship. With this work, I fill the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of an understudied, BIPOC transnational group (Punjabi-Sikhs) in a small to mid-sized and previously overlooked re-emerging immigrant gateway (the greater Reno area). This study investigated the socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs and their experiences with geographies of inclusion/exclusion during the early twenty-twenties, a period broadly characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic, a contentious political election, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and a surge in neo-nationalism and anti-Asian sentiment. I argue that the national and international public issues that became ever more apparent in the early twenty-twenties uniquely affected BIPOC and migratory groups in re-emerging immigrant gateways and small to mid-sized urban areas and resulted in new and unexpected socio-spatialities and geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Specifically, this work focuses on how Punjabi-Sikhs experience and navigate these new and complex geographies in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada. To better understand these complex geographies, this research focused on three topics: (1) how the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs have been impacted and navigated, (2) the implications of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic, and (3) how the Punjabi-Sikh body has been Othered in everyday spaces during this tumultuous period. The qualitative phenomenological analysis presented in this dissertation relied on participant observation, semistructured interviews, and focus groups with fifteen Punjabi-Sikh men and women who resided in the greater Reno area. Fieldwork was conducted during the 2020-2021 global pandemic, the 2020 presidential election, and the final
year of Donald J. Trump’s presidency, a presidency widely described as embracing a neonationalistic agenda. When considering the current ever-changing social and political atmosphere, some general trends are evident: a consistent rise in anti-Muslim, anti-minority, and anti-immigrant discourse; increased xenophobic political rhetoric that translates into socio-spatial exclusion; and a lack of worldly knowledge among members of the general public that results in increased negative stereotyping and discrimination against Punjabi-Sikhs and other BIPOC and migratory communities. However, the findings of this research also show that Punjabi-Sikhs are incredibly resilient and have developed sophisticated strategies for navigating adverse social and political landscapes. Thus, this research highlights the strength acquired through resiliency by these communities into creative and effective solutions.

Keywords: socio-spatialities; geographies of inclusion/exclusion; xenophobia; Punjabi-Sikhs; Northern Nevada
Dedication

To my dear friend, Richard Seaman, who brought me into the world of mapping. My life has improved significantly since you befriended me and hired me to work for you all those years ago. Without your mentorship, flexibility, and encouragement, I could not have gotten this far. And to my advisor, Kate Berry, who makes me feel that I can do anything I put my mind to.
Acknowledgments

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my remarkable advisor, Dr. Kate Berry. I appreciate your support and teaching. I am grateful for the kindness, encouragement, and constructive feedback you provided during the difficult times on this writing journey. I appreciate all of the time and energy you dedicated to reading my materials and providing me with thorough critiques. You have not only acted as an academic mentor but as a positive female role model in life as well. You helped me grow tremendously throughout this process. “Thank you” does not even remotely capture the gratitude I feel. To you, I am deeply indebted.

I would also like to thank the rest of my dissertation committee: Dr. Paul Starrs, Dr. Jessie Clark, Dr. Casey Lynch, and Dr. Mikaela Rogozen-Soltar, for your assistance, insightful comments, and hard questions. Thank you for your supportive and valuable feedback, as it helped transform my dissertation in important ways. I have indeed stood on the shoulders of giants.

My sincere thanks go out to the Geography Department at UNR for believing in me and extending my graduate teaching assistantship well beyond the initially allotted timeframe. Your financial and academic support was essential to this project’s completion. Without your backing, and the backing of my many outstanding professors, I could not have developed into the well-rounded geographer I am today.

I would also like to acknowledge the grants and scholarships received from organizations such as the Mackay School of Earth Science and Engineering, Viola Vestal Coulter Graduate Scholarship, John Joseph Crowley Endowed Scholarship, Christopher Exline Scholarship, Opal F. Adams Scholarship, Graduate Student Association, American Association of Geographers, Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, and the California Geographical Society. Your contributions, however large or small, made this project possible.

To my magnificent husband, Jeremy Benson, for providing me with unfailing support. You kept me sane and were a pillar of strength in my moments of immense stress and self-doubt.
Your sacrifices, acts of service, and patience are not invisible to me. You helped me through the
day-to-day process, holding my hand, helping me manage my stress and anxiety, for which I am
eternally grateful. This accomplishment would not have been achievable without you. Thank you.

Last but not least, I am deeply thankful to the many Punjabi-Sikh community members in
both California and Nevada who volunteered to share their thoughts, stories, and photographs,
provided clarity and insight into the Punjabi-Sikh world, and reviewed the findings of this
dissertation. I appreciate and admire the work each of you does, standing up for social justice in
your own unique ways. Your enthusiasm and support for my research truly meant the world to
me. I hope I have successfully narrated your stories and have not disappointed you.
# Table of Contents

Title Page  
Committee Approval Page  
Abstract ........................................................................... i  
Dedication ........................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgments ................................................................... iv  
Table of Contents ................................................................... vi  

## Chapter 1  
**Project Overview** .......................................................... 1  
**Methodology** .................................................................... 6  
The Biggest Little City in the World ......................................... 15  
**Organization** ..................................................................... 29

## Chapter 2  
**Punjabi-Sikh History and Identity** ........................................ 31  
**Overview of Sikhi** ............................................................ 31  
Migration and Significant Events that have Shaped Contemporary Punjabi-Sikh Identity ................................................................. 35  
Independence and Partition ..................................................... 36  
1984 Genocide ........................................................................ 38  
History of Punjabi-Sikh Immigration and Discrimination in the United States ................................................................. 42  
September 11th and Mistaken Identity ......................................... 54  
Recent Events (2015-Present) ................................................... 61  
**Intersectional Punjabi-Sikhism** ........................................... 67  
**Summary** ........................................................................... 70

## Chapter 3  
"I Feel Out of Place There": Punjabi-Sikh Socio-Spatialities in Reno, Nevada ...................................................... 72  
**Socio-Spatial Inclusion and Exclusion** ................................ 75  
**Methodology** ...................................................................... 76  
**Socio-Spatial Exclusion: “I Feel Out of Place There”** .......... 78  
**Socio-Spatial Inclusion: “Just Think Local”** ........................... 83  
**Conclusion** ........................................................................ 89

## Chapter 4  
Pandemic Implications: Punjabi-Sikh Transnational Spaces and Long-Distance Nationalism ..................................................... 92  
**Transnationalism and Transnational Spaces** ....................... 95  
**Virtual Thirdspace and Long-Distance Nationalism** ............. 98  
Punjabi-Sikhs in the Greater Reno Area ..................................... 101  
**Methodology** ..................................................................... 107  
**Loss of Transnational Spaces During COVID-19** ............... 108  
**Space Transformations** ...................................................... 114  
**Conclusion** ........................................................................ 126

## Chapter 5
Embodied Otherness: Lived Experiences of Xenophobic Discourses in Reno........130
The Visible Sikh in a Post-9/11 and Neonationalist World.................................134
Methodology........................................................................................................137
Intersectional Dimensions of Othering...............................................................139
Connection to Geopolitical Events.................................................................148
Conclusion.........................................................................................................154

Chapter 6
Conclusion........................................................................................................156
Summary of Findings..........................................................................................157
Lessons Learned from Punjabi-Sikhs in the Greater Reno Area......................164
Limitations........................................................................................................170
Suggestions for Future Research and Community Action..............................173

Appendices
 Appendix A. Instagram Participant Recruitment Materials...............................177
 Appendix B. Interview Questions........................................................................179
 Appendix C. Focus Group Questions.................................................................182

References........................................................................................................184
List of Tables
   Table 1. Demographic Description of Participants……………………………………….9
List of Figures

Figure 1. The Northern Nevada Sikh Society ..................................................... 105
Figure 2. Reno Sikh Temple destroyed by arson in May 2010 ............................. 106
Figure 3. The Reno Sikh Temple at the current 2nd Street location .................. 106
Figure 4. Sign displayed in support of farmers at Punjabi-owned restaurant ...... 121
Figure 5. Reno farmer solidarity car rally event flyer ....................................... 123
Figure 6. Community leaders at the solidarity car rally ................................... 124
Figure 7. Child showing support for farmers through the sunroof of a truck beneath the Reno Arch ................................................................. 124
Figure 8. Peaceful protest at the Reno Arch event flyer ................................... 125
Figure 9. Peaceful protestors at the Reno Arch ................................................. 125
Figure 10. Media coverage of the peaceful protest at the Reno Arch ................. 126
Chapter One

Project Overview

When I embarked on fieldwork at the beginning of 2020, I had an entirely different idea of what this project would be. I had planned to organize in-person interviews and focus groups and conduct participant observation at public events and religious services to examine Punjabi-Sikh socio-spatialities and geographies of inclusion/exclusion in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada. However, the lives of people around the globe came to a screeching halt early in the year, when the COVID-19 virus forced most to stay at home and avoid physical interaction to prevent its spread. This human isolation rendered my research plan irrelevant as many of my goals and questions concerning social gathering spaces were no longer applicable. My life and my participants' lives were drastically altered as we all had to adapt to this new normal.

The pandemic was not the only issue that disrupted lives and plagued the nation. The list of external stressors in the early twenty-twenties was overwhelming. We witnessed record-breaking levels of natural disasters, many hitting with a force more devastating than in previous years; after several high-profile police shootings, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests took place across the country and reignited discussions about systemic racism, inequality, and police reform; the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a historic economic downturn leaving millions unemployed; and thanks to a lifeless sports season, politics once again became America’s pastime (Dickinson, 2020). While American politics have always tended to be somewhat contentious, the 2020 election proved fraught and everlasting. The entire process was further complicated by social media and the debate over its responsibility in spreading false information.

Some would attribute a portion of the destruction to former President Donald J. Trump even beyond 2020, believing that his four-year tenure eroded democracy and trust in institutions. Far-right groups were emboldened and encouraged by Donald Trump through his use of inflammatory and divisive rhetoric on social media platforms, such as Twitter, and many of these
individuals were radicalized and brought into the political landscape (Thompson, 2021).

Encouraging news about vaccines and their economic influence and a different face in the White House generated excitement for some, but not for everyone in our increasingly polarized nation. Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center illustrated the progressively stark disagreement between political parties on the economy, racial justice, climate change, law enforcement, international engagement, and a long list of other issues. The 2020 presidential election and global pandemic further highlighted these deep-seated divides (Dimock & Wike, 2020).

In addition, mass shootings and gun violence rose steadily in 2020, ending as the deadliest year in history, and 2021 continued that trend (Gun Violence Archive, 2021). Included in the long list of gun violence victims were several members of the Punjabi-Sikh community: Amarjeet Johal, Jaswinder Kaur, Jaswinder Singh, and Amrjit Sekhon were killed during a mass shooting at an Indiana FedEx facility, and train operator, Taptejdeep Singh, was killed in a mass shooting at a rail yard in San José, California, to name just a few instances of violence. These recent shootings came amid a surge in neonationalism and anti-Asian sentiment resulting from the COVID-19 global pandemic and impassioned political atmosphere. Experts cite systemic issues as causes and widespread perceptions that police departments have stepped back from their responsibilities in response to racial justice protests (Bates, 2020). Incidents in which Punjabi-Sikhs were targeted renewed concerns about violence that Punjabi-Sikhs have faced for years (Zhou, 2021), notably since September 11th, 2001 (hereafter 9/11), when they were targeted and mistaken for Muslims, and after the mass shooting by a White supremacist at a gurdwara (Sikh temple) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in 2012 (Bahr & Ives, 2021).

Those shootings were not the only events that affected the community at the center of my study, events in the Indian homeland presented other concerns. In late 2020, all eyes turned toward India as farmers in the homeland battled with Prime Minister Modi’s government over changes to agricultural laws, resulting in the largest protest in history and displays of incredible
solidarity across many countries, communities, and sectors worldwide. Rather than observing cultural events and religious services, as I had initially planned, my examination now included satellite demonstrations of solidarity with India's farmers and new displays of long-distance nationalism. Thus, the period in which I conducted fieldwork presented challenges unlike those faced by qualitative researchers in previous years, and it stands to reason that my project unavoidably changed with the events of the nation and world.

The convergence of anti-Black, anti-Asian, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant policies and attitudes has only grown stronger in contemporary America, and this became even more apparent with the newfound challenges of life in the early twenty-twenties. The recent surge in divisive anti-Asian sentiment as a result of the pandemic, anti-immigrant and anti-Black attitudes as a consequence of the increasingly toxic and polarized political atmosphere, and the devastating hate violence targeting South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, are products of a long history of political rhetoric and policies steeped in racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. Consequently, the public issues of the early twenty-twenties caused the nation to become more socially and spatially divided than ever before, particularly with regard to the lives and experiences of BIPOC and migrant communities.

Plenty of research has focused on major immigrant destination metropolitan areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008), like New York and San Francisco, yet little work has focused on re-emerging immigrant gateways (Singer, 2015). Re-emerging gateways are metropolitan areas that attracted immigrants in significant numbers in the late 19th and early 20th-centuries but experienced low levels of immigration mid-century. However, at the tail end of the 20th-century and into the 21st-century, these metropolitan areas saw fast immigration growth, thus re-emerging as sizable immigrant gateways (Singer, 2015). The greater Reno urban area in Nevada, which in the early 21st-century is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation (American Community Survey, 2019), has re-emerged as an immigrant destination, yet it has
been largely overlooked in the immigrant gateways scholarship. With this work, I fill the gap in
the literature by exploring the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of an understudied,
transnational group (Punjabi-Sikhs) in a previously overlooked re-emerging immigrant
destination (the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada). I argue that the national and international
public issues that became ever more apparent in the early twenty-twenties uniquely affected
BIPOC and migratory groups in re-emerging immigrant gateways and small to mid-sized urban
areas and resulted in new and unexpected socio-spatialities and geographies of inclusion and
exclusion. Specifically, this work focuses on how Punjabi-Sikhs experience and navigate these
new and complex geographies during this contemporary era of social and political upheaval.

While there exists literature citing increased rates of violence against Punjabi-Sikhs since
the fallout of 9/11, this group remains largely understudied. Relatively little is known about their
lived experiences in re-emerging immigrant gateways during this contemporary period of unique
external stressors. Given the absence of English language literature focusing on Punjabi-Sikhs
during this current period, the purpose of this study was to investigate their experiences in a
geographic context. To do so, I address three questions: (1) How have the lived experiences and
socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs been impacted and navigated?, (2) What are the implications
of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic?, and (3) How has the Punjabi-Sikh
body been Othered in everyday spaces during this tumultuous period? The examples discussed in
the coming chapters illustrate these complex geographies in the particular socio-political setting
of the greater Reno metropolitan area.

Statement of Purpose

This qualitative phenomenological study investigated the socio-spatialities of Punjabi-
Sikh adults in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada (encompassing the communities of
Reno, Sparks, and Carson City), a small to mid-sized urban area and re-emerging immigrant
gateway, and their experiences with geographies of inclusion/exclusion during this contemporary period of social and political upheaval.

**Researcher Background**

My academic experience as a human-cultural geographer with expertise in geographies of inclusion/exclusion, ethnic geography of the American West, spaces of religious identity, and transnationalism and diaspora studies made me well suited to conduct this research on Punjabi-Sikhs in Northern Nevada. My familiarity with the Punjabi-Sikh community in the Western United States dates back to 2014 when I conducted prior research on ethnic foodways in California’s Central Valley (Benson & Helzer, 2017). My preexisting and good-standing relationships with Central Valley Punjabi-Sikhs were crucial for establishing connections and recruiting research participants in the greater Reno area. My interactions with previous participants combined with the knowledge gained from graduate studies (including reading the literature and attending academic conferences and seminars) informed my approach.

Irrespective of my long-standing connections with the Punjabi-Sikh community, it is important to note my White, non-insider status as a researcher. As an outsider of the Sikh faith and Punjabi identity, my unfamiliarity with the Punjabi language and inability to read the text of the *Guru Granth Sahib* (the holy book of *Sikhi*, commonly referred to as “Sikhism” in Western societies) somewhat hindered my absolute understanding of the Punjabi-Sikh world. To counter my outsider status, I made a concerted effort to familiarize myself with the Punjabi-Sikh community by conducting frequent participant observation and maintaining good working relationships with my informants who served as Punjabi translators when necessary.

Furthermore, in place of learning *Sikhi* through its words and sounds, I employed what Singh Vanderbeek (2019) terms the “visualscape” as the first step toward recognizing the Punjabi-Sikh spaces explored in this research. The visualscape encapsulates the visual iconography of a people, the sense of cultural cohesion shared by these images, and the varying
depths of collectively-defined meaning people derive from such. This concept applies well to Sikhi because of the surprising visual consistency of its institutional practice throughout the world, whether looking at the throne upon which the Guru Granth Sahib sits or the Punjabi suits the women in congregation wear (Singh VanderBeek, 2019). The ability to identify the Punjabi-Sikh visualscape was crucial to my understanding and analysis of Punjabi-Sikh socio-spatialities and geographies of inclusion/exclusion in the greater Reno area.

Methodology

In this section, I provide an overview of qualitative research. Specifically, I focus on the phenomenological design that frames this study and the rationale for why this particular research design was chosen. Next, a thorough description of the qualitative research techniques used to gather and analyze participant data is presented. This includes a discussion of participant selection and recruitment, interview questions and procedures, data analysis, and how data accuracy was validated. This section concludes by addressing the ethical considerations of this study: informed consent, confidentiality, and data management. Following this section on methodology, I provide a description of the setting in which this study took place.

Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research focuses on participants’ perceptions and experiences and how they make sense of their lives. This line of inquiry aspires to understand the experiences of individuals. Moreover, it aims to illustrate how the meanings of people’s experiences guide their subjective realities (McLeod, 2001). This method is concerned with process rather than outcome, providing descriptive rather than predictive results (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a compelling reason to conduct qualitative research is when the investigation aims to learn how events are interpreted. Qualitative inquiry is not only interested in physical events but also in how the participants in the study make sense of them, and how their understandings influence their behavior (Maxwell, 1996). Thus, this
type of inquiry focuses on the lived experiences of individuals and how they make meaning of them and their surroundings (Maxwell, 1996; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

There are several reasons I chose to employ a qualitative research design rather than a quantitative method. In addition to learning how events are interpreted, a crucial motive for conducting qualitative research is investigating new subjects or issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which is less possible to accomplish through quantitative analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Given the scarcity of research conducted on the Punjabi-Sikh community, particularly in a geographic context in modern re-emerging immigrant gateways, utilizing a qualitative method was beneficial; it allowed for the most comprehensive evaluation and understanding of a previously unexamined social subject (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Additionally, while there is some literature citing increased rates of violence against Punjabi-Sikhs since the fallout of 9/11, relatively little is known about how this group experiences and navigates geographies of inclusion/exclusion during this contemporary period of intense external stressors. Qualitative research in situations such as these can guide the development of theories when “partial or inadequate theories exist... or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 40).

**Phenomenological Design**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) outline five qualitative approaches to inquiry: narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnographic, and case study. Phenomenology was used to guide this dissertation. The term phenomenology refers to an epistemology that does not characterize the “what” of the objects of philosophical research as a subject matter, but rather the “how” of that research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Heidegger, 1927). This type of design aims to seek out and understand the subjects ’meaning of phenomena (Patton, 2002; Mertens, 2015). The specific purpose of phenomenology is to describe the commonalities and differences among subjects in how they experience particular phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell &
Creswell, 2018). It is assumed that there will be some shared and overlapping elements within each individual’s experience of that same phenomena. Ultimately, each individual experience is reduced to describe a universal essence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Phenomenological geography asks how people use the everyday spaces and environments in which they live and dwell. It focuses on everyday practices, human agency, movement, place, and social and environmental ethics (Relph, 1970; Tuan, 1971; Buttimer, 1976; Entrikin, 1976). The aim of this study was to identify common experiences among Punjabi-Sikh adults as they interacted with and navigated geographic inclusion/exclusion in their daily lives in the particular setting of the greater Reno area. As such, phenomenology was determined to be an appropriate approach because this research sought to understand the lived experiences of a small number of people (Rossman & Rallis, 2017) who identified as Punjabi-Sikh and understand social worlds from insiders' perspectives.

**Participants**

In order to partake in the study, participants were required to meet the following criteria:

1. The participant was at least 18 years old.
2. The participant self-identified as a Punjabi-Sikh.
3. The participant resided in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada.

Because the results of the 2020 United States Census have not yet been released, it is difficult to determine the number of Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. According to the most recent U.S. Census, Washoe County, Nevada, has a total population of 449,723 and 1.5-2.4 percent of the population speaks the Punjabi language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). However, local religious leaders estimate the Punjabi-Sikh population in the greater Reno area to be between 300 and 500. Participants were added to this study until data saturation was achieved, which occurred after interviewing fifteen participants. Given that no new themes arose in the data, and due to time constraints, this study incorporated a sample size of fifteen. Participants
ranged in age from 19 to 69, with an average age of 39 years. Regardless of whether or not they actively practiced the tenets of the faith, all fifteen participants described themselves as Punjabi-Sikh. No restriction was placed on their level of religiosity or familiarity with Sikh doctrines. Eight of the fifteen participants were first-generation migrants, four were Nevada-born, and three arrived in Nevada before the age of sixteen. Additional information about the participants is provided in the table below.

Table 1. Demographic Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Occupation Industry</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Native / Migrant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manpreet</td>
<td>Education, Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harnoor</td>
<td>Education, Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramneek</td>
<td>Education, Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sajeev</td>
<td>Education, Student</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amar</td>
<td>Retail, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gurtij</td>
<td>Retail, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>Retail, Homemaker</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sukhbir</td>
<td>Food, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amarjot</td>
<td>Retail, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navtej</td>
<td>Retail, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajdeep</td>
<td>Retail, Small Business</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tejpal</td>
<td>Hospitality, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jagpreet</td>
<td>Hospitality, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmeet</td>
<td>Hospitality, Small Business</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avneet</td>
<td>Food, Hospitality</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Migrant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Recruitment

The snowball sampling method was utilized to select individuals for this study. Snowball sampling or chain-referral sampling is a sample of convenience. In this manner, existing subjects provided referrals to recruit samples required for this research study (National Science Foundation, 2021). Participants were also recruited from multiple sources independent of each other and wherever participation could be solicited following COVID-19 restrictions. First, I
attempted to utilize a few previous contacts within the Punjabi-Sikh community in the Central Valley, CA, and Reno, NV. A couple of these individuals who supported the research passed along recruitment suggestions and the contact information of Punjabi-Sikh acquaintances, friends, and family members. Second, I visited both gurdwaras and numerous businesses in the region where Punjabis congregated. Third, after completing their interview, participants often expressed a desire, of their own volition, to help recruit volunteers by distributing information about the study through their Punjabi-Sikh networks. Finally, participants were recruited via social media (Instagram) (Appendix A).

Measures

Data collection instruments utilized in this research were participant observation, focus groups, and semi-structured individual interviews. Focus groups and interviews consisted of several predetermined, open-ended questions that intended to capture the rich details of the participants ‘experiences (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Because the overall intention of this research was to understand participant perspectives, in-depth interviews were the method best able to acquire this type of data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) note that this approach allows for a depth of dialogue that “moves beyond surface talk to a rich discussion of thoughts and feelings” (p. 76).

Questions for the interview guide were generated through collaboration with the dissertation committee. First, I developed a focus of inquiry, establishing the phenomena to be examined. Next, a roundtable discussion was conducted with the dissertation committee to record topics or concepts to be explored in order to understand the phenomena of interest. From there, similar ideas were grouped into categories, which established the line of investigation for the development of the questions (Appendix B and C). In addition to the data collected around the participants ‘experiences, the following demographic variables were obtained: (1) age, (2) occupation, (3) gender, and (4) native or migrant status (Table 1).
Procedures

The semi-structured, individual, and focus group interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours. The majority of participants were interviewed three times to capture the rich details of their experiences. Interviews took place in local restaurants and coffee shops, Punjabi-owned businesses, and participants’ homes, following all COVID-19 health and safety procedures. Only two video interviews were arranged for a single participant whose geographic location, childcare difficulties, and the threat of the ongoing pandemic prohibited a face-to-face meeting. Interviews were conducted primarily in English and a Punjabi translator was used when necessary.

During the first semi-structured interview, I presented each participant with thirteen open-ended questions. The second interview consisted of eight open-ended questions, and the final interview contained eight open-ended questions (Appendix B). Focus groups were interviewed only once and were asked fourteen open-ended questions (Appendix C). Follow-up questions were asked when necessary in order to clarify or gather more information about the participants’ experiences. All interviews were recorded on an external encrypted audio recorder, which was uploaded onto a password-protected computer in a secure location immediately after the interview.

Informed Consent

Informed consent documents were given to each participant prior to the interview. I verbally reviewed each aspect of the informed consent with the participants, including privacy and confidentiality, risk/benefit analysis, and compensation. Participants were informed of their right to refuse participation and to withdraw from the study at any point and were assured that declining to participate or withdrawing would not provoke any negative consequences. Each participant was approached before the actual interview or focus group to ensure that individuals
had sufficient opportunity to consider their participation. Legally informed consent was also obtained from each participant that provided photographs on a separate photo release form.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

Participants’ names and personal information were safeguarded, and any personal details that may have exposed their identity were excluded from the written body of the dissertation. The anonymity of volunteers was preserved unless otherwise specified by the participants. Those who were visible and identifiable in photographs were asked for consent before their use in the research and social media recruitment materials.

**Risk / Benefit Analysis**

This study did not present any direct risk or benefit to the participants. The risks of participation in the research were similar in type or intensity to what one encounters in their daily activities. However, this research did bring visibility to the Punjabi-Sikh community in Nevada and paved the way for future studies.

**Compensation**

All participants were compensated for their time and participation with lunch, coffee, or gift cards. Participants were made aware at the beginning of the interview that they would receive these items as a token of appreciation regardless of whether they decided to withdraw.

**Data Analysis**

The process delineated by Rossman and Rallis (2017) for analyzing phenomenological data was employed:

1. Organizing the data
2. Familiarizing with the data
3. Identifying categories
4. Coding the data
5. Generating themes
6. Interpreting

7. Searching for alternative understandings

8. Writing up the findings

During the organization and familiarizing process, I immersed myself in the data, becoming deeply involved in words, impressions, and the flow of events. Statements were pinpointed within the interview transcripts that described how the participants experienced the phenomena being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Clusters of meaning were generated by combining the statements, analyzing them, and grouping the information into themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Collected materials were synthesized into manageable elements and interpretations, which brought meaning and insight to the words and actions of the participants. I then coded and recoded the data in instrumental ways, developing interpretations that were written into the results (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

To remove bias while interpreting the data, I examined the data with a few willing participants in an additional focus group to uncover whether alternative explanations existed. Additionally, I triangulated the data with other studies by searching the literature for relevant theories that correspond to, extend, contradict, or deepen the conclusions. By utilizing these strategies, I can demonstrate with confidence that the interpretations written in the results are sound, logical, and grounded in the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

In chapter three, Lefebvre’s (1974) and Soja’s (1980) notion of socio-spatiality was applied in combination with Sibley’s (1981; 1995; 1998) theory of socio-spatial exclusion to answer the question of how have the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs been impacted and navigated in 2020-2021? Participant observation and in-depth interviews were conducted in order to develop a deep understanding of the Punjabi-Sikh community and uncover their experiences with socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion in the greater Reno area. Nodes of Punjabi-Sikh social networks and place-making activities were identified, observed, and analyzed.
wherever possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because Punjabi-Sikhs do not live in neatly defined residential enclaves among other Indians or South Asians, these nodes of cultural activity were especially important in cultivating feelings of inclusion and belonging in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada where they are a demographic minority. Records were kept on how these spaces/places contributed to a sense of belonging and feelings of being in place in Reno during this tumultuous period. Additionally, observations and detailed field notes were taken concerning everyday geographies of exclusion and areas from which participants felt socially and spatially separated. For this, Sibley's (1981; 1995, 1998) theory of geographic exclusion was applied, taking note of how social exclusion expressed itself spatially to produce distinctive areas of disadvantage, discrimination, and Othering. I noted how these areas contributed to a sense of insecurity and feeling out of place.

In the fourth chapter, the question *What are the implications of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic?* was addressed. Understanding how the Punjabi-Sikh community was affected by the isolating COVID-19 government mandates was essential as ethnic and migratory groups depend on social spaces and gatherings to reaffirm a sense of cultural cohesion and belonging in their everyday lives. Foundational work on transnational spaces by Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Price & Whitworth (2004), and virtual thirdspaces by Mitra (1997), Skop (2013), and Gittinger (2015) was applied to discover how this adaptive process occurred. Participant observation was initially intended to include social gatherings and events and informal conversations in which Punjabi-Sikhs described and demonstrated their approaches to culturally regrouping in the greater Reno area. However, these attempts were thwarted by the COVID-19 global pandemic as all gatherings were ceased and events were canceled to prevent further contagion. Instead, observations were taken in virtual settings and at socially-distanced peaceful demonstrations of solidarity with India’s farmers. During interviews, I paid particular attention to the hardships faced by the Punjabi-Sikh community regarding the loss
of social gathering spaces and noted the implications of such losses. Adaptive strategies and space transformations, including virtual space transformations, implemented by Punjabi-Sikh participants during 2020-2021 were identified, observed, and analyzed.

In the fifth chapter, the question *how is the Punjabi-Sikh body Othered?* was addressed. The scope of this chapter focused on how *embodied Otherness* was ultimately lived and experienced by Punjabi-Sikhs in the context of everyday practices in particular social spaces in the greater Reno area during this contemporary era of social and political turmoil. To understand how this phenomenon occurred, I combined Simonsen’s and Koefoed’s (2020) notion of geographies of embodiment with Mahalingam’s (2012) concept of misembodiment, which describes how Punjabi-Sikhs experience a higher level of anxiety, shame, and greater body awareness due to being constantly objectified and misidentified by others. Throughout observation and interviews, I kept comprehensive field notes about the instances in which participants noted that they were made to feel like outsiders in everyday spaces. This observation included documentation and analysis of their embodied and intersectional experiences with Othering and their connections to broader geopolitical events.

The qualitative analysis described above has allowed for a better understanding of what it means to be Punjabi-Sikh in a contemporary re-emerging immigrant gateway and how they experience and navigate socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion when presented with the newfound challenges of life in the early twenties-twenties. The analysis and resulting narratives have provided insight into Punjabi-Sikh socio-spatial worlds and have yielded answers to the research questions. In the next section, I describe the physical and human characteristics of the greater Reno area where the study took place.

**The Biggest Little City in the World**

Reno, Nevada, the Biggest Little City in the World, has long maintained an ability to attract attention not afforded to similar-sized places like Garland, Texas, or Glendale, Arizona
(Moreno, 2015). Its image has far exceeded its reality. In popular culture, Reno has been the subject of numerous songs, books, movies, and television programs and has often been depicted as one of the last outposts of personal freedom and a sinister place filled with offbeat characters. This notorious city, located in the American West, has acquired much fascination because it is a land that conjures romantic images of lawlessness, freedom, wide-open spaces, and limitless opportunities (Moreno, 2015). The process by which Reno developed this reputation was gradual and complex (Barber, 2008). Still, the impression of this city from the outside is just one factor in the creation of its place identity; another is the sense of place as experienced by its residents (Barber, 2008).

Sense of place—the way people perceive places such as streets, communities, or cities—influences their well-being, how they describe and interact with a place, what they value in a place, and how they perceive its affordances. Sense of place also reflects the historical and experiential knowledge of a place (Adams et al., 2016). In general, sense of place describes the human relationship with places, expressed in different dimensions of human life: emotions, biographies, imagination, stories, and personal experiences (Basso, 1996). However, different people perceive and experience places in different ways. In the coming chapters, I explore the relationship between the greater Reno area and its Punjabi-Sikh residents. To appreciate and understand the experiences of these residents in this specific setting, below, I provide a brief overview of the greater Reno area’s physical, historical, and contemporary human landscape.

**Physical Landscape**

The state of Nevada takes its name from the Spanish word *nevada*, meaning "snow-clad," a reference to the high mountain scenery of the Sierra Nevada range, which rises to the West and provides a stunning backdrop for the greater Reno area. Most of Nevada lies within the Great Basin section of the Basin and Range Province. The topography is characterized by rugged mountains, vast flat valleys punctuated by buttes and mesas, and sandy deserts (McNamee &
Because Nevada is situated in the rain shadow of the Sierra Nevada Mountains, it is the most arid state in the country. The state's northern areas have long, cold winters and short, relatively hot summers. In the southern part of the state, the summers are long and hot, and the winters are brief and mild (McNamee & Zorn, n.d.). Nevada’s dynamic tourist landscapes embrace the nightlife and entertainment that Las Vegas and Reno have to offer, along with natural beauty and abundant year-round outdoor recreational opportunities (Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, 2021).

Throughout this dissertation, the greater Reno area refers to the Reno-Sparks and Carson City urban areas. Reno, Sparks, and Carson City are small to mid-sized cities in Northern Nevada, close to the Nevada-California border, in the high desert between 4,400 and 5,000 feet in elevation. The city of Reno is Nevada's second-largest population center, just behind Las Vegas, and is located in an area called the Truckee Meadows. The Truckee Meadows is the valley that spans the cities of Reno and Sparks along the Truckee River, which flows from Lake Tahoe through Reno and terminates in Pyramid Lake. Adjacent to Reno is the city of Sparks, a predominately residential community and distribution center. Carson City, the state capital, which took its name from the nearby Carson River, is just thirty miles south of Reno-Sparks and fourteen miles east of Lake Tahoe (McNamee & Zorn, n.d.).

**Historic Human Landscape**

The first people to arrive in the Truckee Meadows were not fur trappers, surveyors, or emigrants of the 1840s but hunter-gatherers who explored the valley thousands of years prior (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). While no one is certain of the identity of the original settlers, there is archaeological evidence of human presence dating back 5,000 years. Additionally, stone arrowheads and other objects uncovered in the Washoe Valley date human activity in the region to about 12,000 years ago (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). By about 1,500 years ago, members of the Washo people, also known as the Washoe, were the predominant culture living
alongside the eastern Sierra Nevada range, though this area was also within the territory of the Northern Paiute (Numu) and Shoshone people of the Great Basin (Newe). The Washo established winter villages in the Truckee Meadows that are believed to have consisted of clusters of round-shaped pit houses with rock-lined hearths and sometimes with a covering of brush and branches (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). With lush foliage, a relatively temperate climate, and a river brimming with fish, the Truckee Meadows provided an ideal environment and seasonal home for the native people of Northern Nevada (Moreno, 2015).

The first non-Native people to enter the Truckee Meadows were White settlers on route to California during the gold rush of the 1840s and 1850s (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). The town that was eventually to become known as Reno (initially called Lake’s Crossing) began in the Truckee Meadows as the preferred crossing point of the Truckee River. With the discovery of the Comstock Lode in the nearby Virginia City foothills in 1859, the river crossing became essential for the growing trade in mining and agriculture (City of Reno, n.d.; Moreno, 2015; Truckee-Donner Historical Society, 2022). By 1860, Virginia City had more than 2,300 residents and was well to become the most significant community between San Francisco and Utah (Moreno, 2015).

In 1862, President Abraham Lincoln convinced Congress to pass the first Pacific Railroad Act, which chartered the Union Pacific Railroad and authorized the construction of a transcontinental route. Central Pacific engineers and surveyors recognized the need for a station in the Truckee Meadows to serve the Comstock market and as an interchange point for future rail lines. Thus, the city of Reno was officially established in 1868, the same year as the Central Pacific Railroad's transcontinental line reached the area (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). In addition to bringing hundreds of railroad employees to the town, the railroad also spawned warehousing and transfer companies, hotels, and other commercial support businesses. The railroad depot provided the community with a focal point and a distinctive commercial area known as Commercial Row.
A wide variety of enterprises flourished along Commercial Row, which became the center of Reno during the late 19th-century (Moreno, 2015).

Although Reno had the security of location along the railroad's mainline, that was no guarantee for longevity. For its first decade, the community was dependent on the unpredictable resources of the Comstock mines. As a backup, Reno had the beef and grain produced by ranchers and farmers in the Truckee Meadows, which was shipped to both Virginia City and San Francisco (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). For over a decade, Reno stayed an overcrowded, under-built, busy, undistinguished railroad town with little reason to exist other than shipping beef to California and providing Virginia City with daily supplies. However, its steady growth, diversifying economy, and close ties to the capital-rich urban centers of San Francisco and Sacramento helped Reno weather the slow decline of the Comstock during the 1880s (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011).

Over the next few decades, the city made several other attempts to diversify the community’s economy. In 1885, community leaders successfully persuaded the legislature to relocate the University of Nevada, initially called Nevada State University, from its remote location in Elko to the more populous city of Reno. This relocation established Reno as Nevada's educational and cultural center (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). In 1931, Nevada's short six-week divorce residency requirement also helped to put Reno on the map when it became a popular landing place for Americans seeking to end their marriages (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). That same year, Nevada legalized gambling (Price, 1972). In the decades to follow, Reno became the largest and best-known city in Nevada; until the 1980s, when the growth and fame of Las Vegas began to increasingly overshadow Reno. For most of the 20th-century, however, tourism and the gaming and entertainment industries formed the backbone of Reno's economy (City of Reno, n.d.). Virginia Street, the city's main north-south thoroughfare, developed into a commercial center of moderately-scaled, locally-owned hotel-casinos and retail
stores. The transcontinental Lincoln Highway (now 4th street) passed through the heart of downtown, and many motor lodges sprang up on either side of the Virginia Street core to support booming post-war automobile tourism (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). In the 1960s, beginning with the Winter Olympics at what was then known as the ski resort of Squaw Valley (now Palisades Tahoe), the city also positioned itself as a destination for outdoor recreation (Barber, 2008). The Reno area became even more tourist-oriented in the late 20th-century as large hotel-casinos began to pervade the downtown core (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011).

Despite the appearance of its touristy city center, Reno has housed a fairly conventional residential community since its founding in 1868 (Barber, 2008). Though, in the late 1970s to early 1980s, some of these residents felt that the city’s charm was disappearing, along with what they saw as the careless demolition of the community’s heritage by the enormous construction projects occurring in the downtown area (Barber, 2008). The construction of these extensive new buildings replaced numerous older buildings and independent businesses (Barber, 2008). Such growth might have continued, unaffected by growing community concerns, if not for the onset of a national recession in the early 1980s that led to a decline in national tourism, which significantly impacted Reno’s increasingly tourism-based economy (Barber, 2008). The downtown area suffered the most, and it soon became clear that the massive casino-building boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s had produced too much competition for the diminishing visitors. Reno was once again overbuilt, and the casinos began to close (Barber, 2008). The community’s smaller, family-owned casinos were the most affected due to the combination of the economic downturn and overbuilding (Barber, 2008).

Over the last three decades of the 20th-century, the city’s residential and tourist landscapes had separated in a largely irreversible way, “with the demolition of businesses that had served generations of local residents and created the appearance” of a “respectable and stable civil presence” (Barber, 2008, p. 211). The combination of economic competition and aesthetic
deterioration in the 1980s had sent Reno’s reputation into a downward spiral, leading to further
deterioration of the landscape (Barber, 2008). Reno's residents soon began to avoid the central
business district, which mostly catered to tourists, especially after the construction of interstate
highways that bypassed downtown (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). To most Reno residents, the city’s
dichotomous reputation as a luxurious and seedy tourist destination is a source of bemusement
and frustration. Whether new arrivals or natives, locals are acutely aware of outside impressions
of their city. Most have a completely different experience of Reno than its predominant image
would suggest (Barber, 2008).

**Reno’s Ethnic Enclaves**

During the frontier days, the American West was an important meeting ground, the point
where Native America, Latin America, Anglo-America, Afro-America, and Asia intersected
(Nelson-Limerick, 1987). Cultural pluralism and responses to race formed primary issues in
frontier social relations. The American West, although culturally diverse, had no magic power for
dissolving prejudices, a fact that Americans confronted at all levels (Nelson-Limerick, 1987),
including the residents of Reno. Reno and the entire state of Nevada were no different from other
places when it came to discrimination against minority groups, notably Blacks, Native
Americans, and Asians. Racism was common and blatant (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). However,
for a period, Reno had a few ethnic enclaves that catered to its diverse inhabitants.

According to Shepperson (1970), from its beginning, Reno's population comprised
various ethnic communities ranging from native Washoe and Northern Paiute to Basque, Chinese,
Arabian, South African, and Chilean. The 1920 Census recorded entrepreneurs from Poland,
Germany, Syria, Russia, Armenia, Persia, Turkey, Romania, Greece, China, and Italy doing
business on Commercial Row (Shepperson, 1970). The presence of many cultural groups was
typical of urban centers in the American West. Mining towns such as Virginia City had diverse
populations drawn by the prospects of wealth and resources, and Reno attracted people of all
types for the same reason (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). As Reno developed, some ethnic groups began to self-segregate into distinct neighborhoods.

Reno's first residential areas formed just beyond the city's commercial district. Among them, in the 1880s, was the Powning's Addition, which ran from Arlington Avenue to Keystone Avenue, and was bordered by the Central Pacific Railroad at the north and the Truckee River at the south. Powning's Addition was one of several areas in Reno called "Little Italy" because it housed considerable Italian families (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). Another Little Italy was situated closer to the downtown area, located a block south of Douglas Alley along Lake Street. This Little Italy was well known as the commercial center for immigrant Italians and their American-born descendants (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). The area contained Italian-owned grocery stores and hotels, such as the Toscano and Columbo. The best-known building was the Pincolini (later Mizpah) Hotel, which became the anchor of Little Italy upon its completion in 1930. Reno's Italian district was not as clearly defined as those in cities such as Boston, New York, or Philadelphia and was much smaller. However, most Italian districts in other cities exhibited similar ill-defined boundaries and contained various ethnic groups (Cofone, 1983).

Like many Western communities, early Reno had a Chinese district established even earlier than its Little Italy in the 1870s (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Reno's small Chinatown was settled by Chinese work crews who had constructed the Central Pacific Railroad from Sacramento to Reno through the Sierra Nevada range (Moreno, 2015). The Chinese neighborhood was initially located along First Street, between Virginia and Lake Streets. However, the local press viewed Chinatown unfavorably, in accordance with the anti-Asian prejudice of the time and used it as a scapegoat for any suspicions of disease or criminal activity (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Much of Reno's Chinatown consisted of flimsy wooden shacks and structures, and many White locals thought the neighborhood to be an eyesore (Moreno, 2015). The district burned down in 1878, and there is some debate about the cause of the fire in the literature. According to
Ringhoff and Stoner (2011), the neighborhood was set ablaze when William H. Salisbury
knocked over a lamp during a fight and started a fire. Whereas Moreno (2015) alleges that
members of the Workingman's Party, an anti-Chinese organization, torched more than half of the
Chinese section because they were angry that the contract to build the Truckee and Steamboat
Springs irrigation canal had been awarded to a Chinese company (Moreno, 2015).

Regardless of the cause, after the fire, Chinatown's residents were forced to relocate north
of the river between Lake and East Street (now Record Street). This placed the heart of
Chinatown about two blocks south of the future Lake-Evans block businesses and established a
long-lived Chinese commercial and residential district (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). In December
1908, Washoe County officials razed a large portion of Reno's Chinese neighborhood on the
pretense that the district constituted a health hazard (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015).
The county tore down at least sixty buildings, leaving more than one hundred people homeless,
an event that prompted some people to leave the city. Those who stayed continued to operate
their businesses out of the Lake Street area well into the 20th-century (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011;
Moreno, 2015).

From its earliest days, Reno also counted a small number of Black residents, most of
whom lived in either the Lake-Evans block area or Black Springs, a cluster of homes just north of
town on Highway 395 (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). In the early 1900s, many Nevada communities
aggressively discriminated against Blacks and did not allow them to purchase land, which
continued for several decades. Thus, a neighborhood developed in Black Springs in the 1950s. By
the late 1960s, Black Springs was home to around seventy-five families. For years, the
community fought with Washoe County officials over access to essential services, like paved
roads, water, sewer, and police and fire protection (Moreno, 2015).

After World War II, large casinos such as Harold's Club and Harrah's dominated
downtown Reno and opened up new recreational opportunities. However, these opportunities
were not available to everyone; Blacks, Native Americans, and frequently Asians were excluded from most downtown casinos and restaurants (Chew, 2000). By that time, the Lake-Evans area consisted of saloons, small hotels, restaurants, brothels, and some dwellings, and there is evidence that the block served as a Black enclave as early as 1880 (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011; Moreno, 2015). In response to Prohibition, speakeasies began to occupy the brick buildings in the Lake-Evans block, and Blacks were the primary owners of these clubs from as early as 1932. After the repeal of Prohibition, local Black and Asian business owners transformed the Lake-Evans block into a commercial and recreational destination. As an unsegregated place to gather and socialize during the years when the city's landscape was highly segregated, the block contained the most visible ethnic commercial enclave in Reno (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011).

The Harlem Club-Soul Club was the longest-lived 20th-century business in the Lake-Evans parcel; it closed in 1977 after twenty-nine years of operation (Moreno, 2015). The building was demolished soon afterward, and the area was paved over. A similar fate was to come to some Chinese-owned businesses; for example, the New China Club was torn down in the early 1980s and replaced by a paid parking lot (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). These were the few businesses in Reno that allowed the patronage of Asians, Blacks, and Native Americans alike. All ethnic groups faced prejudice from the White majority, and accordingly, some of their entrepreneurs banded together to do business (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Ironically, the primary reason for the decline of the Lake-Evans commercial area was desegregation, which began in the mid-1960s. The Civil Rights movement's success had an unintended adverse effect on minority-owned businesses. When Blacks could freely patronize other establishments in addition to the Harlem Club and the New China Club, the clientele that had once belonged exclusively to them became redistributed among other businesses (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011).

As Shackel (2003) states, understanding how and why some groups remember or forget a particular past is essential for critically evaluating and knowing how people understand and
experience landscapes. Forces such as segregation and exclusion have physical, social, and cultural manifestations. Responses to social forces sometimes include consciously manipulating physical objects and spaces to reinforce or reinterpret cultural identities (Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). While ethnic enclaves no longer exist in the greater Reno area, ethnic communities in the region continue to transform and adapt the landscape in unique ways to reinforce their cultural identities and establish a sense of community.

**Contemporary Human Landscape**

In many respects, contemporary Nevada is far removed from the days when Virginia City was a fabled frontier town, thriving on the plentiful silver mines of the Comstock Lode. However, many frontier qualities remain, though subtly transformed by a cosmopolitan urban environment. Modern-day fortune seekers in gambling casinos have replaced the early prospectors who came to the state in search of mineral wealth, and historic saloons have evolved into lavish nightclubs and entertainment centers (McNamee & Zorn, n.d.). Today, tourism and related activities contribute more to Nevada's income than mining, agriculture, and manufacturing combined and employ more than two-fifths of the workforce (City of Reno, n.d.; Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, 2021).

Although the large-scale tourism industry dominates Nevada's economy, many small, independently-owned businesses thrive. Because Nevada has a low-regulation environment, streamlined licensing and approval processes, and favorable tax conditions, it has earned a reputation for being a business-friendly state. Many businesses choose to stage their operations in Nevada for the low-cost startup and annual fees, competitive utility rates for commercial operations, the combination of rich transportation infrastructure and advantageous geographic location (proximity to West Coast markets), and reduced shipping and storage costs (Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, 2021). Additionally, Nevada's fiscal policies are distinctly conservative; the state's constitution limits taxation and indebtedness, and there is a
maximum tax rate on real estate (Bowers, 2006). Gaming and sales taxes are the primary sources of the state's income (Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, 2021), which reduces the financial burden for both businesses and individuals. However, this situation also presents challenges with regard to earning adequate state revenue during a recession or a global pandemic.

Because Nevada is composed of an array of distinct and divergent communities, landscapes, and lifestyles, its political ecosystem is equally complex and multi-dimensional (Schaus, 2021). Similar to other states in the nation, Nevada exhibits an urban-rural divide; the densely populated metropolitan areas of Las Vegas and Reno are "blue cities" in a predominately "red state" (Allen, 2020). Traditionally, the Democratic Party dominated politics in Nevada, that is, until the 1980s when conservative values rose to prominence, mainly due to changes in the state's voter profile brought about by an increase of new residents (McNamee & Zorn, n.d.). Since then, the state has shifted between political parties in both local and national elections and has maintained a position as a swing state. In the early 21st-century, however, Nevada leaned a bit toward the Democratic side, most likely due to an influx of young, highly educated, and Asian and Hispanic voters (Schaus, 2021). Though, according to the latest national projections, Nevada is predicted to shift, once again, toward Republicans in the upcoming 2022 elections (Solis, 2022).

Although Nevada is rapidly diversifying, the state's population remains predominately White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). According to the United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), 31.3% of Nevada’s population is non-White based on the category “race alone or in combination,” and 28.9% are Hispanic or Latino (American Community Survey, 2020). In the Reno Metropolitan Area, 19.7% are non-White, and 24.5% of people identify as Hispanic or Latino. When compared to the nation as a whole, 24.9% of the population is non-White and 18.2% are Hispanic or Latino (American Community Survey, 2020). In terms of
immigrants, from 2016 to 2020, the “foreign-born population” of Nevada was 19.4%, while Reno contained a 14.3% foreign-born population. Whereas the nation had a 13.5% foreign-born population in 2016-2020 (American Community Survey, 2020).

A small percentage of Nevada's population lives in rural areas, and the culture of these places differs significantly from that of the major metropolitan regions (Robinson, 2014). The rural population is also less diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (Robinson, 2014). Until the mid-20th-century the state's population was small and dispersed, and cultural values were those of a ranching and agrarian society. Las Vegas and Reno developed noticeable metropolitan characteristics with the establishment of resort industries and population increases (Bowers, 2006), although Western culture remains a prominent attribute of both urban areas.

Traditionally, Nevadans have mingled rural conservatism and individualism of the Old West. Today, many annual pageants and festivals commemorate the Silver State's legacy. The greater Reno area hosts several frontier and Western-themed events, like the Nevada Day (Admission Day) celebration in Carson City and the Reno Rodeo. On the anniversary of Admission Day (October 31st), Nevada celebrates its concession to the Union with a parade and costume ball at the state capitol. Nevada was the 36th state admitted into the United States and one of only two states admitted during the Civil War—hence, Nevada's nickname as the "Battle Born" state, a phrase that appears on the state flag (Travel Nevada, n.d.). The Nevada Day celebration provides a variety of festivities that acknowledge its distinct heritage, like mining championships, beard-growing contests, single-jack rock drilling competitions, rail-bike tours along the historic railway, and an extravagant parade. The parade marches through downtown Carson City for about two miles and consists of more than 200 entries—floats, marching bands, teams, and banners—making it one of the largest parades in the country (Travel Nevada, n.d.).

One of the most popular and longest-running events celebrating the region's Western culture is the Reno Rodeo—dubbed the "Wildest, Richest Rodeo in the West"—held at the Reno-
Sparks Livestock Events Center (Reno Tahoe, n.d.). During the ten days and nights of the rodeo, attendees witness one of the most infamous rodeo competitions in the country, featuring more than 750 professional bull riding athletes, steer wrestling, team roping, barrel racing, concerts showcasing notable and rising country music stars, and an iconic cattle drive. The cattle drive begins five days before the rodeo, and the spectacle involves herding three hundred head of steer over one hundred miles from Doyle, California, to the Reno-Sparks Livestock Events Center. The rodeo also features costume parties that change annually; examples of themes include "Tough Enough to Wear Pink" and "Patriot Night" (Reno Tahoe, n.d.).

Although greater Reno continues to celebrate its Wild West origins, it has come a long way since its frontier days. The city’s current skyline features apartment and office buildings, hotels, and bank towers, and recreational opportunities range from indoor gambling and entertainment to outdoor sporting activities—attributes of a residential community juxtaposed alongside those of the tourist industry. In this manner, Reno is not unlike many other contemporary American cities where tourist and residential landscapes overlap and intertwine (Sieber, 1997). Nonetheless, Reno’s specific appearance—a city in the high desert with its neon facades and blinking lights, surrounded by snow-peaked mountains—is undoubtedly distinct. As Barber (2008) states, while the city may feature “slot machines in the supermarkets and more all-you-can-eat buffets per capita than the average American town, Reno’s anomalies are far outnumbered by the similarities of its residential neighborhoods, schools, churches, suburban developments, and playgrounds to those of any other mid-sized city” (p. 2-3). While Reno has long maintained an ability to attract attention not afforded to other places, in many respects it is not unlike other small to mid-sized cities of the 21st-century.

In the early American West, frontier railroad and mining towns, such as Reno, initially attracted diverse populations who were drawn by the prospects of wealth (Nelson-Limerick, 1987; Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Although the Silver State has always remained rich in mineral
resources, its immigrant populations dwindled in the mid-20th century. However, at the tail end of the 20th-century and into the 21st-century, the greater Reno metropolitan area saw fast immigration growth and re-emerged as a sizable immigrant gateway (Singer, 2015). In the coming chapters, I examine the experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs, a transnational BIPOC group, and their engagement with unfolding current events and other public issues that have affected their day-to-day experiences and socio-spatialities. Using the greater Reno area as a model, this research offers examples of ongoing social processes, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary changes in small to mid-sized urban areas and re-emerging immigrant gateways in the United States.

**Organization**

The present dissertation is in a research article format, which reports on three questions, and is a compilation of publishable research articles. These research articles constitute individual chapters and are supported with introductory, background, and concluding chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the focus, methodology, and setting of the study, the background chapter describes the overall context, and the conclusion recaps the contribution and implications of the study as a whole. Each chapter will address the topics as follows:

- **Chapter Two: Punjabi-Sikh History and Identity**
  - This chapter summarizes significant historical events that have shaped contemporary Punjabi-Sikh identity. Because this dissertation is presented in research article format and each chapter is intended to be individually published, some of the material will be repeated in the following chapters.

- **Chapter Three: How have the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs been impacted and navigated?**
• This chapter explores geographies of inclusion and exclusion and the reciprocal relationship between social spaces in the greater Reno area and Punjabi-Sikh individuals.

• Chapter Four: What are the implications of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic?
  • This chapter focuses on the implications of the loss of transnational thridspace for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area and the space transformations that occurred during the coronavirus pandemic.

• Chapter Five: How has the Punjabi-Sikh body been Othered in everyday spaces during this tumultuous period?
  • This chapter explores geographies of embodiment and how embodied Otherness is lived and experienced in the context of everyday practices in particular social spaces in the greater Reno area.

• Chapter Six: Conclusion

Each chapter contains a literature review and results section. Subsections in each chapter are structured around dominant themes, and quotes are used to illustrate broader trends.
Chapter Two

Punjabi-Sikh History and Identity

To appreciate the experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs today, their history needs to be explored. This chapter provides an overview of Sikhism (commonly referred to as "Sikhism" in Western societies) and historical events that have shaped contemporary Punjabi-Sikh identity.

Overview of Sikhism

Although Sikhism is the world’s fifth-largest religion, most non-Sikh individuals have little knowledge of the Sikh faith and its basic principles (Ahluwalia, 2013). Understanding the Punjabi-Sikh community requires an exploration of Sikhism’s five-hundred-year history. The history of the religion is essential to understand, as many of the profound themes that formed contemporary Sikh identity arose during this time. The trauma and memory of these events established the legacy of martyrdom and the fighting against injustice and oppression (Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion that originated with the birth of Guru Nanak in 1469 in the Pakistan portion of Punjab in South Asia during an era of significant oppression (Cole & Sambi, 1998; Burns Power, 2003; Nesbitt, 2005; Patwant Singh, 2006; Sikh Missionary Center, 2008). The term “Sikh” refers to adherents of Sikhism as a religion, not an ethnic group. A Punjabi is any individual from the region of Punjab who speaks the Punjabi language. However, because conversion is rare in Sikhism, most Sikhs share strong ethno-religious ties (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Anyone can become a Sikh as long as one conforms to the established practice of the Khalsa Rahit (code of conduct) (Shani, 2002). At the outset, Sikhism is seen to consist of a series of doctrines and practices centered around the reading of a holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, written in a sacred script (Gurmukhi) (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008), and in a Sikh place of worship (gurdwara) (Shani, 2002).
Guru Nanak, the first of ten gurus, taught his disciples that the ultimate purpose of human life was to achieve liberation, which is the state of being united with Waheguru (God) (Shani, 2010). Nanak sought a more humane direction for a subcontinent wracked by centuries of continuous warfare, with the ideas of Hinduism and Islam competing for the minds of the people (Burns Power, 2003). Sikhi grew out of the basic compassion of Hinduism and the essential brotherhood of Islam. Still, it suffered the wrath of both Hindus and Muslims because it rejected the intolerance of both faiths, the caste system, and idol worship (Patwant Singh, 2006).

The foundations of Sikhi are based on Nanak’s critique of the “socially oppressive practices” of the caste system by the “orthodox Brahminical Hindu religion” and the “politically oppressive policies of the Muslim Moghul regime” (Pritam Singh, 2007, p. 556). Guru Nanak advocated for caste and gender equality, believed that liberation was possible for everyone (Patwant Singh, 2006; Shani, 2008), and began a social revolution by founding Sikhi (Tiwana, 2012). At Nanak’s birth, seventy to eighty percent of India’s population was composed of individuals from lower castes (Khushwant Singh, 1999). The Sikh Coalition (n.d.) asserts that the central tenets of Guru Nanak’s revolution were:

1. **Simran**: Mediation on the Divine’s name (Waheguru or God);
2. **Equality**: The Divine resides in every human being and their entire creation;
3. **Non-Ritualism**: Blind ritualism does not bring one closer to the Divine;
4. **Grīst-Jeevan**: Retreat from familial and social relationships does not help one become closer to the Divine. The triumphs and obstacles of these kinds of interactions support the journey toward that Divine connection;
5. **Seva**: Selfless service is a prerequisite for achieving harmony with the Divine;
6. **Gurprasad**: The belief that everything occurs according to the Divine’s grace or will;
7. **Love**: A set of actions conducted out of the will to follow the tenants of the faith that help one to connect;

Additionally, Guru Nanak established the three main pillars of Sikhi (Tiwana, 2012):

- **Naam-Japna**: Recite and meditate on the name of the omnipresent higher power;
- **Kirat Karni**: Do honest work;
- **Vand-Chhako**: Share/consume in congregation with others.

**Guru Ka Langar**, a free kitchen and communal meal, was also instituted by Nanak. The practice of *langar* further challenged the caste system and empowered individuals by creating solidarity within the *Sangat* (spiritual assembly) (Shani, 2010). This meant that all who came to worship—regardless of caste, gender, or race—were required to sit on the floor together to share a meal (Mahmood, 1996). Concepts of *karma* and reincarnation were included in Sikh belief, where past and present behavior determined whether or not the individual could be united with *Waheguru* or must complete another cycle of reincarnation (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). An additional tenet of Sikhi is that the Sikhs should “be active righteous citizens of the world” and be firm advocates for social justice and equity for all human beings (Arora & Ahluwalia, 2014, p. 184).

Nanak was succeeded by nine *Gurus*, all of whom reinforced the teachings of their predecessors, made unique contributions to the faith, and battled with the region’s other religious powers—for example, Moguls, Persians, Afghan invaders, Muslim extremists, and Kashmiri separatists—to defend their faith and their territory (Burns Power, 2003; Patwant Singh, 2006; Sikh Missionary Center, 2008; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). The last living *Guru*, Gobind Singh (1675-1708), responded to the extreme oppression of the Mughal Empire by militarizing the Sikh community, creating the *Khalsa* (community of the pure) in 1699, producing a distinct and uniform identity for the Sikhs (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Initiation into the *Khalsa* required taking *Amrit* (holy water), and the first members inducted into the *Khalsa* were referred to as the *Panj Pyare* (beloved five) (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Each of the five men came from
different castes, symbolically representing the exclusion of the caste system within the *Khalsa* (Tiwana, 2012; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Once initiated into the *Khalsa* order, members were required to wear the Five Ks so they could embody the “spiritual tradition” and be “outwardly distinguishable in battle and ready to defend themselves and those in need” (Arora, 2009, p. 26):

- *kesh*, unshorn hair;
- *kangha*, a comb;
- *kacherra*, knee-length undergarments worn by soldiers of that time;
- *kara*, a steel bracelet worn on the right wrist;
- *kirpan*, a small, curved dagger.

These five items were not just religious symbols but articles of faith that collectively formed an external identity and displayed the devotee's commitment to the Sikh way of life (Tatla, 1999; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). The result was the establishment of a community of *sant sipahis* (saint soldiers) who were inspired by a moral vision of righteousness to take up arms against tyranny, oppression, inequality, and injustice (Patwant Singh, 2006). All men were given the surname *Singh* (lion), while women were named *Kaur* (princess). This introduced a strict religious process and supported social egalitarianism in keeping with the faith’s message (Shani, 2002).

Both men and women initiated into the *Khalsa* were required to maintain unshorn hair (*kesh*), but only men were required to wear a turban (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Most Sikh women covered their heads with a *chunni* (headscarf), while few opted to wear a turban (Ahluwalia, 2013), although historically, this has been a less common practice. At the time of the *Khalsa*’s birth, the turban was worn by South Asian royalty, but Sikhs adopted the practice to reject the hierarchy of the caste system prevalent in India. It was worn to demonstrate a public commitment to maintaining the values and ethics of the tradition, including service, compassion, honesty, and equality (Ochieng, 2017). This innovation was aimed at providing every Sikh with a visible
cultural distinctiveness, instilling them with a strong sense of self and purpose, and a means of strengthening bonds between members of the group (Patwant Singh, 2006).

*Guru* Gobind Singh further crystallized the practices and beliefs of the faith and determined that no future living *Guru* was needed (Tiwana, 2012). The *Khalsa*, as a sovereign community capable of defending itself, no longer required the guidance of a human *Guru* (Shani, 2002; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). At his death, *Guru* Gobind Singh made the Holy Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, the final leader of the Sikhs. As such, the *Guru Granth Sahib* is observed as the spiritual manifestation of the *Guru* (Burns Power, 2003; Patwant Singh, 2006; Sikh Missionary Center, 2008; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). In compliance with *Guru* Gobind Singh's last wishes, today, the religion is guided by the *Guru Granth* and *Guru Panth* (global Sikh religious body) (Tiwana, 2012).

**Migration and Significant Events that have Shaped Contemporary Punjabi-Sikh Identity**

Since the birth of the religion, the Sikh community has experienced continuous intolerance, violence, and discrimination worldwide, which is essential to understand when examining contemporary Punjabi-Sikh identity. The longstanding history of systemic discrimination and injustice suffered at the hands of the majority groups in India and the United States has caused Punjabi-Sikhs to experience a strong cultural devaluation in both countries (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The following section will examine significant events that have shaped Punjabi-Sikh identity in India, events that prompted emigration, and the subsequent section will focus on their history of immigration and discrimination in the U.S. Below, I provide a brief explanation of two particular historical events in India that have played a fundamental role in shaping modern Punjabi-Sikh identity: Partition (1947) and the Sikh Genocide (1984). Following that, I briefly describe the history of Punjabi-Sikh immigration and discrimination in the United States. This is not a comprehensive listing of all events that have shaped contemporary Punjabi-Sikh identity and migratory history but a
succinct list of events with long-lasting effects. For more detailed historical descriptions, see Tatla (1999), Khushwant Singh (1999), La Brack (1988), Mann (2004), Patwant Singh (2006), and Sohi (2014).

**Independence and Partition**

Sikhs have been defending their traditional homeland, Punjab, since the birth of their religion in the mid-15th century. The Sikh homeland is in an extremely fertile region of South Asia, located in the Indus Valley, where agriculture is thought to have been invented (K. Singh, n.d.). Punjab has been long disputed; it is an agricultural plain that sits at a geographic crossroads between many different cultures and has seen centuries of bitter bloodshed (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). For the Sikhs, as a minority religion and ethnic population in the region, defending their territory proved difficult. They were uprooted and forced to move from their religious centers by the dominant ruling parties several times in the centuries following the birth of their religious identity (Mann, 2004).

Punjabi-Sikhs have historically been very mobile people; moving with changing political, economic, or social environments. Before the arrival of the British in the early 1600s, Punjabis were already scattered over a wide geographical area, consisting both of greater Punjab and other regions in South Asia—wherever trading opportunities or religious movements took them. However, the modern period of migration is dated to the arrival of the British (Thandi, 2015). British colonization subjugated the indigenous population, resulting in systematic impoverishment (Sloan, Joyner, Stakeman, & Schmitz, 2018) and a significant out-migration.

Before India gained independence from the British Raj (British rule), the Muslim League demanded a separate country for Muslims in 1940 via the Lahore Resolution. Sikh leaders grew concerned that they would be left without a homeland following the partition of India between Hindus and Muslims, so they put forward the idea of Khalistan (Punjabi for “The Land of the Pure”), a theocratic Sikh-majority state. Sikhs had developed a powerful myth centered on the
belief that the land of Punjab belonged to them as a special gift from the tenth guru (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). The Indian government rejected Khalistan because they determined it would further sour the relationship with Hindus, and they were not sure how Punjabi-Sikhs would react if war were to erupt with Pakistan (Gunawardena, 2001). However, Partition's effect on the Punjabi-Sikh community was largely overlooked (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008; Tatla, 1999; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

Partition occurred on April 14, 1947, when India finally gained independence from Britain, splitting Punjab, the heartland of the Sikh, along religious lines—known as the Radcliffe line—displacing millions of people. West Punjab became known as the Muslim/Pakistan side, and East Punjab as the Hindu-Sikh/Indian side (Dhillon, 1996; Tatla, 1999; Mann, 2004; Gohil & Sidhu, 2008). Although Sikhs were grouped with Hindus, they were only superficially accepted by them, and as a minority group, they lacked the sociopolitical power of the Hindu majority (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). This action laid the foundation for future discrimination of Sikhs in the Hindu-dominant country of India (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013).

Partition brought about the largest mass migration in history, prompting twelve million Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims to cross the border between the recently independent nations (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Around 4.5 million Sikhs and Hindus left West Punjab and migrated into East Punjab, while close to 5.5 million Muslims traversed from East Punjab into the newly formed state of Pakistan (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013; Tatla, 1999; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). In the process of dislocation and trying to make the long and difficult journey across the border, the now divided Punjab experienced riots and violence (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus were the perpetrators and the victims of this horrendous ethnic cleansing (Tatla, 1999; Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013). Ultimately, the violence of this event took the lives of over one million people (Khushwant Singh, 1999; Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013; Tripathy, 2014), with some historians arguing the number may even be as high as two million (Talbot & Singh, 2009).
Due to their distinct turbans, Sikhs were highly visible during the migration and were often the first targets in an attack (Talbot & Singh, 2009; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Innumerable Sikhs were slaughtered while crossing the border into India (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008), and tens of thousands were forced to leave their lands and businesses behind (Patwant Singh, 1999). In addition to their agricultural holdings, Sikhs lost the cultural capital of Lahore, which had served as the capital of the Sikh Empire during the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (Arora, 2009; Tiwana, 2012; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). In the end, Sikhs were forced to abandon hundreds of Sikh shrines and numerous gurdwaras (Tatla, 1999; Nesbitt, 2005). Some of these gurdwaras had been constructed during the era of the Gurus and were considered historical in nature (Arora, 2009; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Thus, the partition and its bloody aftermath caused tensions between Sikhs and the Indian government (Mann, 2004; Oberoi, 1987; Tatla, 1999) and accelerated emigration.

1984 Genocide

Another pivotal moment that shaped contemporary Sikh identity occurred in 1984. This event is known as the “Sikh Genocide” or the “Sikh Massacre” (Tatla, 1999; Patwant Singh, 2006; P. Singh, 2008). There were two instances of violent assault inflicted upon the Sikh community in that year: Operation Blue Star and the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi.

Operation Blue Star

A Khalistan nationalist identity developed in response to the nation-building efforts of India and Pakistan that continued to deny Sikhs sovereignty. After partition and a severe economic downturn in the agricultural industry brought on by the failure of several irrigation projects proposed by the nation of India, Sikhs began to lose faith in the Indian government. Instead, they turned toward the growing Khalistan separatist movement. After a series of protests, violence, and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, the Indian government agreed to a partition, creating the state of Punjab, but Sikh leaders demanded more autonomy (Tatla, 1999). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, political tension grew between the Sikh minority and the Hindu-majority
government (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India and a member of the Hindu majority, was primarily concerned with a radical named Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (Pritam Singh, 2007; Arora, 2009; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). As tensions grew, Bhindranwale and his militant supporters sought protection within the Golden Temple in Amritsar (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013).

In June 1984, Indira Gandhi enacted Operation Blue Star and sent roughly 70,000 armed personnel into the Golden Temple to dislodge Bhindranwale and his protesters demanding statehood (Tatla, 1999). Unfortunately, it was not only Sikh militants occupying the gurdwara complex at that time. Thousands of Sikhs had pilgrimaged to the Golden Temple to observe the martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). On June 4th, when the army invaded and opened fire on the compound at the command of Indira Gandhi, thousands of Sikhs that were not a part of the militia were caught in the crossfire (Mahmood, 1996; Mohanka, 2005; Arora, 2009). The operation was carried out with tanks, artillery, helicopters, and tear gas, leaving the temple grounds in ruins and killing many Sikh civilians—492 according to the Indian government and nearly 20,000 according to several independent human rights groups (Kumar et al., 2003). In addition to the Golden Temple, thirty-seven other gurdwaras were targeted, including those in neighboring states (Mahmood, 1996; Arora, 2009).

By the time the fighting ended on June 8th, thousands of innocent Sikh men and women, both young and old, had been killed alongside Bhindranwale and the Sikh militants (Pritam Singh, 2007; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Not only did the Sikhs endure the loss of thousands of their community members, but they were also not allowed to honor the deceased, as their bodies were unceremoniously disposed of (Tatla, 1999). June of 1984 was a critical juncture. Until that moment, the Sikhs had never before experienced such extreme hostility and tragedy at the hands of the government (Pritam Singh, 2007). Moreover, the attack on their holiest temple was regarded as a sacrilege, bringing into question the dignity and integrity of the government (Tatla,
1999). The Golden Temple and, more particularly, the library's contents inside the temple were the symbolic center of Sikhi. The Indian government could hardly have selected a more sensitive target (Tatla, 1999; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). The list of irreplaceable artifacts lost included paintings, copies of the sacred text and other religious manuscripts, and handwritten letters by the Gurus (Tatla, 1999). Sikhs worldwide condemned the military’s action, and many saw it as an assault on their religion and identity. Hence, Indira Gandhi’s Operation Blue Star brought about an ambivalence within the Sikh community, where devotion to their faith stood in direct contrast to their loyalty to the Indian state (Tatla, 1999; Patwant Singh, 2006; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

In response to the widespread protests and unrest following Operation Blue Star, Indira Gandhi ordered a second action known as Operation Wood Rose (Deol, 2000). To suppress public demonstrations, the Indian Army conducted house-to-house raids across the state of Punjab, during which thousands of suspected militants, overwhelmingly young men, were arrested, interrogated, and tortured, while others simply disappeared (Dhillon, 1996; Jaijee, 1999; Deol, 2000; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Initiated Sikh males were profiled and targeted based on their obvious external religious markers (Jaijee, 1999; Arora, 2009). Many believed the government was trying to wipe out the younger generation of the Sikh minority and was systematically engaged in its suppression (Deol, 2000). According to Jaijee (1999), approximately 8,000 individuals were reported as missing or killed by October 1984 as a result of the military operations of Wood Rose alone. Regrettably, these acts of torture and suspicious disappearances of Sikh males continue to occur in Punjab today (Ahluwalia, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

**Delhi Anti-Sikh Riots**

Less than five months after the attack on the Golden Temple, on October 31st, Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her two Sikh bodyguards, and brutal riots erupted in Delhi the
following day (Tatla, 1999; Patwant Singh, 2006; P. Singh, 2008; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Leaders of the Hindu majority government began providing the names and residences of Sikhs, distributing weapons, leading the killers to specific locations, and instructing the police not to intervene (Dhillon, 1996; Patwant Singh, 2006; Pritam Singh, 2007). Thousands of Sikhs across Delhi were dragged out of their homes, places of business, trains, cars, and buses to be burned alive. Their turbans were removed, and their hair and beards were cut before being doused with gasoline and set on fire (Hardgrave, 1985; Mohanka, 2005; Patwant Singh, 2006; Verma, 2010). During the four days of lawless brutality and murder, Delhi witnessed unprecedented levels of violence not seen since India’s partition (Patwant Singh, 2006). Not only were Sikhs hunted down and killed in Delhi, but thousands more were murdered in other northern Indian cities (Tatla, 1999; Patwant Singh; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). In addition to the violence inflicted on Sikh bodies, the Hindu mobs also destroyed Sikhs ’homes, properties, and gurdwaras (Arora, 2009). The rampant looting and destruction of homes during the riots displaced tens of thousands of Sikhs and rendered 50,000–60,000 homeless (Patwant Singh, 2006; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

The suffering brought on by the assault on the Golden Temple and the anti-Sikh Delhi riots left many feeling that they had become “strangers in their own land” (Mohanka, 2005, p. 591). There was a deep feeling of hurt and betrayal, as Sikhs had provided and sacrificed much for their nation (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Through their agricultural work in Punjab, they produced the majority of cereal grains for the country (Government of Punjab, n.d), and they served a prominent role in the Indian army during India’s three wars (Mohanka, 2005). After so much loss during the partition, surviving Sikhs had struggled to rebuild their lives. Now, their homes, loved ones, and sense of security were again stolen from them (Mohanka, 2005). As a result of this deliberate massacre, the Sikhs feared for their safety and felt betrayed by their nation, causing many to disconnect from their Indian identity (Tatla, 1999; Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The period after 1984 consisted of many Sikh refugees fleeing from violent
conditions in India (Tatla, 1999). Several of them were attracted to the United States due to the new immigration laws and economic incentive programs.

**History of Punjabi-Sikh Immigration and Discrimination in the United States**

Since they arrived in the United States at the turn of the 20th century, Punjabi-Sikhs have been regular targets of hate crimes and racial discrimination (Mishra, 2013; Ahluwalia, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The following section pays attention to the prejudice Punjabi-Sikhs have had to endure as racial and religious minorities and migrants in the United States. Specifically, I elaborate on their early migrations, racialization, legal obstacles and resistance, and discrimination that Punjabi-Sikhs faced during various geopolitical events.

**Early History of Punjabi-Sikh Migration**

Punjabi-Sikhs emigrated from South Asia in two major phases: colonial emigration and postcolonial emigration. Some Punjabi-Sikhs migrated voluntarily for economic reasons during both periods, while others were pushed by the political events detailed in the previous section. One of the major colonial initiatives that produced a conducive environment for emigration was the emergence of Punjab as a region of recruitment for British imperial armies (Burns Power, 2003; Thandi, 2015). This development encouraged Punjabis to venture abroad. Of the “martial [military] races” of Punjab—those whom the British considered to be well-built for fighting—*Jat* Sikhs became a favorite (Thandi, 2015). According to Barstow (1985), their diet and fondness for wrestling and weightlifting resulted in good physical attributes for soldiery. From 1858 to the First World War, the share of Punjabi-Sikh regiments in the military increased sharply, and they were deployed in many British colonies (Tatla, 1999; La Brack, 2015; Thandi, 2015). Army recruitment acted as a catalyst; however, Punjabi-Sikh emigration started much earlier in the 18th century during indentured servitude. Punjabi-Sikhs were shipped to British-controlled territories (such as Malaya in the Far East, the Mediterranean, British African colonies, and protectorates of Europe) by the thousands to meet the labor needs of the British, who had established economies
that were in dire need of additional laborers. By the end of the 19th century, Indian laborers were spread across the world as a genuinely imperial phenomenon (La Brack, 2015; Tatla, 1999).

**United States Immigration**

United States Punjabi-Sikh migration can be categorized into four main phases. The first phase began around the turn of the 20th century (from 1900-WWII). Many early Punjabi-Sikh arrivals came directly from India or one of the British colonies. Having been exposed to new lands through the imperial connection, the number of Punjabi-Sikhs migrating independently to pursue economic opportunities abroad expanded rapidly, especially to the Pacific Coast states of North America (Tatla, 1999; Thandi, 2015). Most migrants were single men or married men who journeyed without their families (Gonzales, 1986). Although these men migrated alone, they “did not decide to come to the United States as a result of an independent, personal decision, but as the outcome of a family corporate decision based on a crude cost-benefit analysis of potential loss to the group vs. potential gain” (La Brack, 1988, p. 96). The purpose of the journey out west was inspired by a sense of responsibility for their family's livelihood (Tiwana, 2012).

The second phase, the post-World War II period, was characterized by softening immigration restrictions. The Luce-Celler Act of 1946 removed Asian Indians from the “Barred Zone” and allocated a quota of 100 immigrants per year, a total that was gradually increased. The following Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolished the prior quota system and established a new immigration policy based on reuniting immigrant families and attracting skilled laborers, which opened the door dramatically for immigration (Bayor, 2011; Skop, 2007). In addition to the new quota system, regulations regarding the entry of relatives allowed previous South Asian Indian migrants, only a few hundred in the 1940s, to call on their relatives to join them, and fresh migrants entered in thousands, creating a process of chain migration. Between 1950 and 1966, most Asian Indians arriving in the United States were Punjabi-Sikh (La Brack,
Especially in the rural areas of California’s agricultural Central Valley, the Punjabi-Sikh population increased swiftly.

The third phase of Punjabi-Sikh immigration began in the 1980s in the wake of a severe economic downturn in the agricultural industry, Operation Blue Star, and the Genocide, which caused Punjabi-Sikhs to search for better lives on foreign soil. The population of Indian Americans, including Punjabi-Sikhs, grew considerably in the 1980s and nearly doubled in the 1990s in response to the 1984 events, the establishment of the H1B visa program, and the American Competitiveness 21st Century Act, which increased the number of visas available for workers in specialty occupations such as math, science, and medicine (Skop, 2002). Following that, the U.S. government responded to the needs of multinational corporations and set higher limits on occupational visas in the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act. As a result, highly-skilled Indian immigration dramatically accelerated during the 1990s. The 1990 legislation tripled the number of permanent residence visas granted based on occupational skills (La Brack, 2015; Skop, 2007).

With the fresh arrivals, the occupational structure had undergone a radical shift from a predominately rural farming community to a significant number of professionals. The geographical distribution also changed; early migrants concentrated in California's rural Imperial, San Joaquin, and Sacramento valleys, whereas new arrivals chose to settle in urban areas and cities. Rural Punjabi-Sikhs were mainly engaged in farming orchard crops, peaches, prunes, almonds, and walnuts, while among professionals in the cities, the majority were doctors and engineers (Tatla, 1999).

As a result of the H1B visa program, South Asian Indians have become the second-largest group of Asian Americans, just behind the Chinese (Lopez, Ruiz, & Patten, 2017), with increasing visibility in Silicon Valley and other high-tech communities. The South Asian Indian population in the U.S. grew from 1,678,765 in 2000 (0.6 percent of the total U.S. population) to
2,843,391 in 2010 (0.9 percent of the U.S. population), a growth rate of 69.37 percent, making them one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Many of these migrants are believed to achieve “model minority” status (a stereotype of a minority demographic whose members are perceived as attaining a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the average population), and as a result, more opportunities are afforded them (Li, 2008; Lung-Amam, 2017). In contrast, contemporary South Asian migrants who use family reunification channels rather than H1-B visas often find lower-status occupations. Accordingly, lower-middle and lower-class migrants may become isolated and marginalized from both upper-middle and middle-class South Asian Indians and other lower-middle and lower-class non-South Asian Indians. Many family reunification migrants lack English proficiency and technical know-how and gravitate toward employment in service jobs, creating divisions among South Asian communities (Skop, 2013). This classism is seen as a continuation of the caste system.

A reduction in immigration characterizes the fourth and current phase. After the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, more people have expressed their discomfort, dislike, or fear of people from other countries and perceive them as outsiders (Basu, 2016; Ochieng, 2017). Those who think this way have learned through the media and recent political regimes to see others, especially Middle Eastern migrants and Islamic folks, as terrorists. This xenophobia is perpetuated by the belief that certain immigrants are a better fit in the United States than others (Sheridan, 2006). Immigration continued to slow in 2016 and 2017 after a surge in anti-immigrant sentiment and the election of Donald J. Trump (SAALT, 2018). Regardless, the South Asian Indian and Punjabi-Sikh population in the United States continues to grow; many migrants come for employment or educational opportunities (Skop, 2007).

The experiences of recent Punjabi-Sikh arrivals have differed dramatically from that of the early migrants. Early migrants were viewed with scrutiny, as they were perceived as being outsiders and incapable of assimilating into American society (Mishra, 2013). Many had to
contend with verbal abuse insinuating they were racially inferior and direct insults, such as being referred to as a “rag head” (Mann, 2008, p. 110). Additionally, early Punjabi-Sikh migrants were confronted with racialized landscapes—strict state and federal laws governing immigration, citizenship, and access to resources (for example, land ownership), combined with racial prejudice, miscegenation, and anti-Asian laws—which greatly limited their social and spatial inclusion (Leonard, 1992; Rajan & Nanda, 2015). While there have been many changes to state and federal laws, contemporary Punjabi-Sikh migrants continue to face barriers to social and spatial inclusion, as will be described in more detail in the coming sections.

Racialization and the “Anti-Hindoo” Bellingham Riots

The majority of the early South Asian migrants, whether Sikh, Muslim, or Hindu, were all referred to as “Hindoos” (Balaji, 2017). “Hindu/Hindoo” was not used to refer to a religion, but rather a person of Hindustan, an old colloquial name for India (Chopra, 2019). The distinctions between the religious groups were not recognized, as “Hindu” became the racialized term to differentiate individuals with South Asian features from other groups (Takaki, 1989; Joshi, 2006; Balaji, 2017; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The majority of "Hindoos" were in fact Sikh, though smaller numbers of Hindus and Muslims were part of the racialized, vilified, and attacked Indian community in the Pacific Northwest in the early 20th-century (Balaji, 2017).

The arrival of Punjabi-Sikhs in the United States coincided with a period of intense anti-Asian activity and sentiment in response to earlier, and much more significant, influxes of Far Eastern people to the U.S., notably the Chinese and Japanese (Mann, 2008; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). A by-product of this backlash was that South Asian presence, despite their small population, attracted immediate and hostile attention in the North American West (Buchanan, 1908; Dodd, 1907; The Independent, 1907; Johnson, 1922; Millis, 1912; Mukerji, 1908; Scheffauer, 1910; U.S. Immigration Commission, 1907; La Brack, 2015). Due to the pervading anti-Asian environment, riots and protests took place targeting the presence of immigrant groups
(Wunder, 1991). Several of these riots resulted from specific hostility and resentment toward the rising number of Punjabi-Sikh laborers—referred to as a “tide of turbans” (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008)—who were resented by the White workers and viewed as a racial threat (Tatla, 1999). Within a few years of arriving and despite keeping a low profile, Punjabi-Sikhs were subjected to persecution and violence. They were sometimes driven out of towns by anti-Asian forces, including labor and nativist organizations (La Brack, 2015). The “anti-Hindu” Bellingham riot in Washington state began in 1907 as rallies organized by various labor groups in conjunction with the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League. Established in San Francisco in 1906, the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League opened branches in cities along the Pacific Coast in the following year to influence congress to pass national laws to restrict the immigration of what they considered to be a menace to American labor (Tatla, 1999; La Brack, 2015).

By the early twentieth century, there was a sizable increase in Punjabi-Sikhs migrating to the West Coast to find employment as agricultural laborers, on the railroads, and in the lumber industry (Cole & Sambhi, 1998; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). During this period, the timber industry experienced a boom due to the greater demand for lumber resources to rebuild San Francisco after the destruction caused by the earthquake and “Ham and Eggs” fire of 1906 (Shah, 2011). The need for labor brought about the migration of Punjabi-Sikh men from across the border in British Columbia (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Growing anti-Asian sentiment in Canada forced Punjabi-Sikhs to cross the country’s southern border and migrate into California, Washington, and Oregon to find employment (Tatla, 1999; Takhar, 2002). As the number of Punjabi-Sikh laborers increased, local newspapers began printing propaganda about the “Hindus of Bellingham” being a public nuisance and “calling for the deportation of the immigrants as undesirable citizens” (Englesberg, 2015, p. 143), in addition to claiming that the “yellow peril” was a menace to the United States (Sohi, 2014).
A couple of days before the riot, a mob of men gathered to voice their concerns that the “Hindu laborers” were willing to work for lower wages and were taking jobs away from White Americans (Hallberg, 1973; Wunder, 1991; Shah, 2011; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Mill owners in the Pacific Northwest were interested in a steady labor supply, and Punjabi-Sikhs had a reputation for being dependable employees. However, employers used Punjabi-Sikhs to undercut the labor movement and organizing efforts of the local European American loggers, which caused racial tension to build between the groups (Tatla, 1999). On September 5, 1907, a mob of approximately 500 White men attacked the living quarters of South Asian workers. Determined to drive the “Hindoos” out of the city, the mob dragged South Asian mill workers from their beds, threw their belongings into the streets, beat them, and demanded they vacate Bellingham (Shah, 2011; Sohi, 2014). Having taken the mob’s threat seriously, over 400 migrant laborers fled from Bellingham to other cities in the Pacific Northwest (Shah, 2011; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). During and after the Bellingham riot, local police and federal governments did little to protect Punjabi-Sikhs from violence at the hands of White mobs. Instead, officials added insult to injury by enacting discriminatory immigration policies (Sohi, 2014). The press and general public were also unsympathetic to their plight (Anderson, 2000; K. Singh, n.d.).

The Bellingham riot marked the first large-scale outbreak of violence against Indians and Punjabi-Sikhs in North America (Sohi, 2014). The violence “sharply blocked the mobility of South Asian laborers and limited their opportunities because the threat of violent attacks made employers cower” (Shah, 2011, p. 73). After the riots, the League expanded the scope of its campaign to include Indians and changed its name to the Asiatic Exclusion League (Sohi, 2014). Though the League publicly denounced the Bellingham riot, it also claimed that the arousal of such public sentiment should be a warning to officials in Washington D.C. about the extent of public hostility toward Asian immigration on the West Coast (Sohi, 2014).
Soon after the riots, the Pacific Coast emerged as a crucial front in Indian anti-colonial struggles and global efforts to exclude Asians, consolidating White supremacy as both a transnational and a national enterprise. Even as White exclusionists on the Pacific Coast drew from and reproduced anti-Asian discourses across the White Pacific, they molded their rhetoric to fit local to national contexts (Sohi, 2014). In 1909, journalist Saint Nihal Sing published two articles in the *Modern Review* on the impact of discriminatory immigration laws. He described how Indians suffered from famine and poverty back home, while in North America, they faced discrimination and exclusion. Sing’s “A Message Gave Me for India” called on Indian migrants to take up the “brown man’s burden,” an expression of self-determination directed at both liberating India from British rule and challenging racial exclusion in claims of a shared “burden.” He situated the riots not as singular acts of injustice but as manifestations of a global practice of anti-Asian racism geared toward protecting and enforcing an international color line. Thus, Sing cast the 1907 riots and the American “race question” within a global imperial context (Sohi, 2014, p. 42).

As Sohi (2014) asserts, Indian migrations during the early twentieth century were rooted in the quest for both spaces to sell their labor and spaces from which to organize for self-rule outside of British imperial reach. These imperatives for migration quickly coalesced on the Pacific Northwest, where Indian struggles against racial discrimination and violence served to initiate and sustain an anti-colonial consciousness. Thousands of Indian migrant workers believed that their colonial and racial subjugation in India and the United States were interconnected (Sohi, 2014). As early as 1907, this conceptual convergence of colonial subjugation and racial exclusion gave birth to an anti-colonial movement in which Indian migrant workers, students, and intellectuals became close allies in the fight for self-governance. Consequently, while racially discriminatory laws and anti-radical policies were meant to exclude and silence Indians, they unintentionally produced radical forms of anti-colonialism (Sohi, 2014).
Legal Obstacles and Resistance

The region south of the Pacific Northwest proved to be a little more welcoming for Punjabi-Sikhs, but not by much. Their darker skin, distinctive turbans, non-Christian faiths, food preferences, and cultural traditions marked them as strangers and foreigners. Punjabi-Sikhs were openly and actively discriminated against, broadly stereotyped by the racist media, widely held to be incapable of assimilating, and were considered socially undesirable as citizens (La Brack, 2015). The discrimination they endured also manifested through legal obstacles, which prevented them from becoming citizens, owning or leasing property, sending for their wives, traveling out of the country, and marrying Anglo women (Leonard, 1992; Jasmine Singh, 2008; Mann, Numrich & Williams, 2008).

In the early 20th-century, most Punjabi-Sikh migrants were concentrated in California, as there was a high demand for agricultural workers (Gonzales, 1986; Tiwana, 2012). They found the dry and sunny agrarian region of the Central Valley similar to the plains of Punjab. Many Punjabi-Sikh migrants had a background in farming, so they quickly adjusted to their new environment (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). In California, they traveled along the farm belt, known worldwide for growing crops that Punjabi-Sikh farmers were familiar with in their native land (Helzer, 2015). In the early period, they took an active role in securing credit, establishing banking and attorney relationships, learning local markets and crops, and using their networks to seek employment. They also began combining their economic resources to make long-term capital investments by purchasing land, property, and farming equipment (Leonard, 1992; La Brack, 2015). The California Alien Land Law of 1913 was eventually enacted in response to their financial success, making it difficult for non-citizens to own or even lease land. Other Western states soon passed similar legislation (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008; La Brack, 2015). Not long after the debut of the California Alien Land Law, the Immigration Act of 1917 was passed, preventing new laborers from South Asia within the Asiatic Barred Zone from
entering the United States. This law also prevented those already in the country from becoming citizens and forbade them from sending for their wives (Mann, 2004; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008).

Although state and land laws articulated that immigrants who could not become citizens could likewise not own land, a few Punjabi-Sikhs were able to hold on to their property by bypassing the laws. They placed their holdings in the names of their American-born wives or children, who were U.S. citizens by birth, or in the names of Euro-American neighbors whom they trusted (Leonard, 1992; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). While this seemingly provided a solution to their problems of landholding, it brought about further backlash and legal discrimination. The U.S. government responded by passing the Cable Act of 1922, which refused to issue marriage licenses to Indians who wished to marry non-Indians (Leonard, 1992; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). White women were therefore discouraged from marrying Punjabi-Sikh men or else forfeit their citizenship (Leonard, 1992; Man, 2004).

In the 1910s, Punjabi-Sikhs on the West Coast were involved in the Ghadar party, a revolutionary group based in California committed to driving the British out of India. The Stockton gurdwara, founded in 1912, funded the group’s activities (Tatla, 1999; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). After World War I ended in 1918, the Ghadar party faded, and the Stockton gurdwara began providing a haven for wandering labor groups and illegal Punjabi-Sikh immigrants arriving over the Mexican border. During this time, the Punjabi-Sikh community did not grow due to immigration restrictions. Instead, the number of Punjabi-Sikhs dwindled, and morale dipped as time passed. Some had died of old age, while others had returned to India (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Those who remained in the United States were exhausted by their constant struggle with laws created to discourage entry and hinder their efforts to settle down (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Given all the legal hurdles Punjabi-Sikhs faced
during this period, the right to citizenship and confronting discrimination became an urgent matter (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). However, their efforts to seek justice had often failed.

The best known of these efforts went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1923 when Bhagat Singh Thind, a U.S. veteran of World War I, tried to become a U.S. citizen. Thind was initially granted citizenship; however, his citizenship was revoked four days later (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Thind argued that he should be eligible for citizenship on three grounds: (1) he had lawfully entered the United States (via Seattle in 1913); (2) he had served in the U.S. Army for six months at Camp Lewis and had received an honorable discharge as an acting sergeant; and, (3) as a Punjabi, he was a member of the Caucasian or White race. Until then, Northern Indians were historically understood to be “Aryan,” which was recognized as a subcategory of Caucasian (Tatla, 1999; Joshi, 2006). After the lower courts rejected his claim, he took his case to the Supreme Court—which also turned him down, denying his claim that Punjabis were Caucasian (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). The court ruled that Asian Indians could not be classified as “free White persons,” so they were not entitled to citizenship, nor were they afforded voting rights (Tatla, 1999). After the Thind decision, U.S. immigration and naturalization procedures began defining people from India as “Asians” (Tatla, 1999; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008).

Although numerous similar cases of Indians being granted citizenship had occurred, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) never initiated the appeal process until Thind’s case (Joshi, 2006). This critical court decision now legally prohibited all South Asian men from obtaining citizenship. Roughly sixty-nine South Asian men had become naturalized citizens by 1922; however, they were now deprived of that status (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Shah, 2011). This caused some individuals to become “citizens of no country” (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008), which was not reversed until after WWII (Scott, 1923, Jacoby, 1956; La Brack, 2015). Once
again, anti-Asian sentiments that had not been primarily or directly targeting South Asians became focused on them as a byproduct.

The ongoing fear of migrant settlement, and the possible economic threat that more South Asian immigrants would have, eventually led to the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The Immigration Act of 1924 excluded immigrants from China, Japan, Korea, and India from entering the United States. It placed the first permanent limits on immigration, established a “natural origins” quota system, and prevented recent immigrants from retrieving their wives or family members (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008; Shah, 2011). Thus, the door to immigration was effectively closed to Asians and other non-Europeans (Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). Some Punjabi-Sikh men married Mexican and Mexican-American women to maneuver around this ruling (Leonard, 1992; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008). These bi-ethnic families developed an identity as “Hindus” but also as Americans (Chopra, 2019). Punjabi-Sikh cultural life was gradually replaced by a younger generation who were baptized as Catholics, spoke English and Spanish at home, and married among Americans and Mexicans (Leonard, 1992; Tatla, 1999).

**Ramifications of Geopolitical Events**

Western representations of Arabs, Muslims, and Iranians as terrorists emerged after a series of geopolitical events in the Middle East starting in the late 1940s. Events such as the Arab-Israeli wars, the Iran Hostage Crisis, and the Gulf War (Jeet Singh, 2021), and their portrayal in Western literature and other media, formed the foundation for growing anti-Arab, anti-Iranian, and Islamophobic sentiments in the United States. These images presented non-Western cultures as “the Other” and depicted them as not only different but also inferior and thus not deserving of equal treatment and respect (Said, 1979). After these events, any individual perceived to embody a broadly Arab identity suddenly found themselves being held responsible (Joshi, 2006). Consequently, Punjabi-Sikhs suffered misplaced blame and racial attacks when a surge of hate
crimes across the nation took place against those appearing Arab and Muslim (Jeet Singh, 2021). Anti-Islamic attacks against Punjabi-Sikhs further increased after the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 (Ahluwalia, 2011; Singh & Fenech, 2014; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

**September 11th and Mistaken Identity**

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, anti-Islamic and anti-Middle Eastern sentiments have been pervasive in the United States (Sian, 2017; McGinty, 2018). In its aftermath, the U.S. government increasingly implemented special programs with the hopes of curbing and countering terrorism and enemy combatants (Kampf & Sen, 2006). Although not explicitly intended, these programs targeted and disproportionately affected anyone perceived to visually embody the Middle Eastern or Muslim identity. Thus, the surge of Islamophobia after 9/11 resulted in increased discrimination, hate crimes, and human rights violations against the Punjabi-Sikh community (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). This is not to suggest that Arabs and Muslims are more or properly deserving of such violence. Rather, the very conflation of differing religious and ethnic groups with one another constitutes part of the precariousness and vulnerability of religiously and racially minoritized peoples in the U.S. (Ratti, 2019).

Although the vast majority of men wearing turbans in the U.S. are of the Sikh religious group, the powerful images depicted by the media of Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders wearing turbans has caused the turban to be associated with extremism and terrorism (Ahluwalia, 2011). Consequently, Sikh men who maintain their religious symbols–unshorn hair and turbans–bear the burden of looking like terrorists and intrinsically evil in the eyes of many Americans (Grewal, 2003; Joshi, 2006; Sian, 2017), despite their distinct religious views, geographic homeland, native language, and turban style (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008). Even individuals who did not heavily identify with the Sikh religion were forced to acknowledge it because of their external appearance, for example, skin color and facial features (Mishra, 2013).
The impact of 9/11 on Punjabi-Sikh Americans was profound and multifaceted (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). In the months and years to follow, Punjabi-Sikhs contended with institutionalized oppression, violation of their civil rights, and retraumatization (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Not only did 9/11 lead to hypervigilance among the Punjabi-Sikh community, but it also contributed to some Punjabi-Sikhs removing their religious markers, while others attempted to blend in by demonstrating their “Americanness” (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Bhatia, 2009; Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Arora, 2013; Verma, 2010). Others experienced changes in their interpersonal relationships and developed an altered sense of belonging as many Punjabi-Sikhs felt their status as a citizen of the nation was no longer secure (Falcone, 2006; Bhatia, 2009; Verma, 2010; Ahluwalia, 2011; Mishra, 2011; Thobani, 2013; Arora, 2013).

Thus, the events of 9/11 significantly impacted how Punjabi-Sikh individuals interacted with and moved through the American cultural landscape. Not only does the wearing of the turban, other Sikh head coverings, or the Five Ks, cause individuals to be visibly marked by difference—a difference that marks them as the Other—but lack of knowledge and mistaken identity by many non-Punjabi-Sikhs had made them a target for xenophobia, racial and religious discrimination, and socio-spatial exclusion (Basu, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2017; Ochieng, 2017; Smith, 2014). However, as a result of the ensuing problem of misidentification, Punjabi-Sikh communities have found support in collective practices that serve as antidotes to negative stereotypes (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Kurien, 2014; Rana, Qin, & Vital-Gonzales, 2019), as is shown in the coming chapters of this dissertation.

**Discrimination and Hate Crimes**

Due to being equated as threats to American sovereignty and terrorists, Punjabi-Sikhs have often been the targets of hate crimes, racial and religious profiling, and individual and institutional discrimination throughout their history and settlement in the United States. According to Jaideep Singh (2013), in the aftermath of 9/11, the nation witnessed the most
significant outbreak of hate crimes in modern history, with the victims being predominately “brown Americans.” This section draws attention to individual discrimination experienced by Punjabi-Sikhs in the post-9/11 era. Specifically, it focuses on harassment and violence, the Oak Creek Massacre, and the bullying of Punjabi-Sikh youth.

Anti-Sikh verbal harassment and violence have been a common experience for visible Sikhs since 9/11, although earlier immigrants share anecdotes of anti-Arab rhetoric during the Gulf War and Iran hostage crisis (H. Kaur, 2020). Due to the hyper-visibility of their beards and turbans, Punjabi-Sikh men become easy targets for harassment (Ahluwalia & Pelletiere, 2010; Soni, 2013; Balbir Singh, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Punjabi-Sikh men have described numerous occasions of unwarranted yelling and use of profanity by strangers, along with being called racial slurs and told to "go back to your country" (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Ahluwalia & Pelletiere, 2010; Arora, 2013; Kaur Sandhu 2019). Ahluwalia and Pelletiere (2010) reported on the subtle discrimination and microaggressions experienced by Punjabi-Sikhs through nonverbal gestures. This includes individuals becoming very quiet when detecting their presence and receiving long stares. Nonverbal attacks included a specific threatening "look" or a feeling that passes over them when someone lingers within their personal space (Ahluwalia & Pelletiere, 2010). In contrast to subtle discrimination, more direct attacks were sometimes aimed at businesses and places of worship. Punjabi-Sikh-owned businesses (for example, convenience stores, gas stations, and fast-food franchises) have been robbed and vandalized, in addition to individuals loitering outside their entrances harassing customers (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009). Additionally, gurdwaras nationwide have been defaced, along with increased community hostility in opposition to their presence (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

Verbal threats and harassment were not the only forms of abuse that Punjabi-Sikhs had to contend with after 9/11. There have been several reports of Punjabi-Sikh men being physically attacked and beaten (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Arora, 2013) and sometimes killed (Kaur Sandhu,
57

On September 15, 2001, the first person killed out of retaliation for 9/11 was Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Punjabi-Sikh man living in Mesa, Arizona (Arora, 2013). The man responsible for the crime was overheard telling people that he wanted to kill the "ragheads" accountable for the 9/11 attack (Mishra, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Sodhi was the first of many Punjabi-Sikh men to lose their lives over a crime they were not responsible for (Mishra, 2013). Today, Punjabi-Sikh men still contended with constant public hostility and violence (Jaideep Singh, 2013).

In another act of violence, on August 5th, 2012, during the early morning program at a gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, a neo-Nazi gunman entered the place of worship and opened fire, killing six people: Paramjit Kaur, Satwant Singh Kaleka, Prakash Singh, Sita Singh, Ranjit Singh, and Suveg Singh. Punjab Singh was struck in the head by a bullet and remained in a state of paralysis until his death in March of 2020 (Gast, 2012; Afridi, 2013; Balbir Singh, 2013; Rana, Qin, & Vital-Gonzalez, 2019; H. Kaur, 2020). The result of the massacre was that the Punjabi-Sikh community received the message that it was still not safe to be Sikh, for their outward religious symbols continued to be perceived as a threat (Soni, 2013). With over 300 cases of violence and discrimination in the month after 9/11 and continued hate violence leading up to and following the Oak Creek shooting, many Sikhs have become targets of anti-Muslim racism, attacked for being a visible Other in a country that boasts religious and other forms of freedom (H. Kaur, 2020). In post-Oak Creek community advocacy projects, the shooting was marked by Sikh organizations as the climax after years of anti-Sikh violence following 9/11, demonstrating how Sikhs’ visible identity made them “mistaken targets” of Islamophobia (H. Kaur, 2020).

It is worth noting that assuming that Punjabi-Sikhs were mistakenly targeted in the shooting, instead of acknowledging that the killer was aware of the Sikh religious group, has the effect of marginalizing the Punjabi-Sikh community and overlooking their pain (Afridi, 2013). The national response following the Oak Creek Massacre highlights how the significance of the discrimination and violence experienced by Punjabi-Sikhs since 9/11 is minimized within some
of the mainstream media. Incidents are dismissed by saying they were mistaken for being Muslim and often inadvertently (and wrongly) implies that there is a group that should be targeted by those who lash out in hate (Sikh Coalition, 2020). However, as detailed in the previous sections of this chapter, Punjabi-Sikhs were targets of hate crimes and racial and ethnic discrimination since their arrival at the beginning of the 20th century, far before the recent onset of Islamophobic sentiments (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). The disregard for their experience of being historically demonized and their distinct ethnic and religious identity being targeted and attacked is another form of Punjabi-Sikh marginalization. This renders their suffering invisible, insignificant, and silenced (Afridi, 2013; Balbir Singh, 2013; Thobani, 2013; Jaideep Singh, 2013; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

While both Punjabi-Sikh adults and youth were deeply impacted by the 9/11 backlash, children were the most vulnerable (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). A 1993 study by Ponterotto and Pedersen observed, "children, adolescents, and adults develop perceptions of racial/ethnic groups consistent with the way members of these groups are portrayed (or not portrayed) in the media" (p. 32). A little over a decade later, Kromidas (2004) captured reactions to post-9/11 images of Muslims among a group of 8–9-year-olds in a New York City school. In the study, children expressed bias and negativity, saying that Muslims "like to kill people," "don't talk English," "eat out of dirty pots," "are poor," "are terrorists," and "have long hair" (p. 20). Many children reported acquiring these ideas from media representations (Kromidas, 2004). A more recent study by Brown et al. (2017) showed that these negative attitudes toward Muslims have persisted. The children being examined did not consider Muslims as Americans, based on their knowledge from the media, unless they had prior contact with Muslim children (Brown et al., 2017).

A survey conducted by the U.S.-based Sikh Coalition (2014) noted that half of the Punjabi-Sikh children attending schools in Queens were subject to bullying. When the sample
was restricted to practicing Sikhs who wore turbans, the number was even higher (67%). While Punjabi-Sikh students frequently notified the school about the bullying, about one-third of those grievances were not revisited or addressed by the faculty (Sikh Coalition, 2014). Sidhu & Gohil (2009) state that because of developmental immaturity and lack of cultural sensitivity, Punjabi-Sikh children are far more prone to experience teasing and harassment from other children. Some of the racially charged verbal harassment inflicted on Punjabi-Sikh children at school included the following: "turbanland," "go back to Afghanistan," "son/daughter of Osama bin Laden," and "don't talk to this boy/girl because he/she may blow you up" (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Verma, 2010; Sikh Coalition, 2014). The male students, in particular, were hyper-aware of the negative attention directed at them because of their patka or turban (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009). Constant surveillance of their surroundings became a necessary and automatic response (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Although some male students who cut their hair experienced less discrimination at school, they experienced disapproval and were no longer viewed as devout practicing Sikhs within their religious community. Cutting their hair to disguise their identity at school symbolized involuntary assimilation (Verma, 2010; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

Socio-Spatial Injustice

In addition to discrimination and hate crimes, Punjabi-Sikhs also experienced institutionalized racism and oppression by representatives of the U.S. government, criminal justice system, legal system, educational system, and the workplace (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Punjabi-Sikhs have experienced a systemic violation of their civil liberties in many ways to maintain domestic security (Ahluwalia, 2010; Mishra, 2011; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Two examples of socio-spatial injustice experienced by Punjabi-Sikhs are discussed below: employment discrimination and the "flying while brown" phenomenon.

According to the Sikh Coalition (2020), thousands of Sikhs have expressed being victims of workplace discrimination concerning the prohibition of head coverings, facial hair, jewelry,
and religious weapons. Since 9/11, workplaces across the country either refused to employ Sikhs or drafted dress codes banning the display of their religious symbols (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008; Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010). In some cases, "no turban" policies were enacted, and policies that banned wearing a kirpan (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Punjabi-Sikhs that did not conform to their employer's wishes faced being demoted, put on probation, fired, and sometimes even had criminal charges brought against them (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008; Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

These incidents of workplace discrimination are not solely a consequence of 9/11 but also the result of general discriminatory workplace practices. For example, Under Title VII, employers are not required to reasonably accommodate an individual's request to practice their religious grooming observances (including headwear and maintaining facial hair); instead, the religious accommodation request has to meet a de minimis cost standard, for which the threshold is very low (Sikh Coalition, 2020). As a result, employers can use virtually any excuse to discriminate against observant Sikhs, Jews, Muslims, and other faiths with religious hair requirements. Current law also fails to provide religiously observant individuals with protections against workplace segregation (Emil, 2015). This allows employers to place employees with religious observances out of view, often in subordinate roles that they did not apply for, and limit advancement opportunities (Sikh Coalition, 2020).

Workplace safety has repeatedly been used as an alibi to discriminate against Sikhs and other religious minorities. Punjabi-Sikhs, in particular, represent thousands of drivers in the commercial trucking industry and have faced disparate challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment (Kaleem, 2019). In 2008, J.B. Hunt wrongfully terminated four Punjabi-Sikh truck drivers for refusing to cut their hair for routine drug tests. In 2016, after a multi-year federal investigation, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission brokered a settlement, concluding that J.B. Hunt had discriminated against the Punjabi-Sikh truck drivers by failing to provide
religious accommodations (Weikel, 2016). During the investigation, J.B. Hunt revised its written policies and procedures and established an effective alternative to drug testing by hair sample. Nonetheless, the federal government may soon implement hair drug testing, leading to increases in these discriminatory employment incidents (Sikh Coalition, 2020).

September 11th and the War on Terror prompted increased surveillance across Western societies in a moral panic around "dangerous" brown bodies (Bhattacharyya, 2008). Racialized populations have experienced over two decades of harsh policing, profiling, and tracking across private and public spheres, including the interrogation of "suspicious" brown persons at airports (Jaideep Singh, 2013). As a response to 9/11, screening procedures at airports were changed across the country (Mishra, 2011), creating a phenomenon known as "flying while brown"; the discrimination faced by many BIPOC passengers at airports. It can range from additional questions from airport staff, to formal searches by police, to secondary security screenings and visa problems when entering the United States. Screening procedures disproportionately targeted Punjabi-Sikh men because of their visible articles of faith (Arora, 2013; Mishra, 2011). They were subjected to excessive pat-downs and were often required to remove their religious markers to be checked for weapons (Leifker, 2006; Mishra, 2011; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Punjabi-Sikhs also faced increased questioning at airports, specifically about their family, origin, and religion (Mishra, 2011; Kaur Sandhu, 2019). As such, racially marked Punjabi-Sikh bodies have become key sites for surveillance (Sian, 2017). The Transportation Security Administration continues to racially profile airline passengers, and this practice alienates and divides people under the guise of national security.

**Recent Events (2015-Present)**

The Federal Bureau of Investigation's annual hate crime report consistently categorizes anti-Sikh violence within the top five most targeted religious communities (FBI, 2019). Despite systemic issues with the underreporting of all forms of hate crimes, this data validates the
Punjabi-Sikh community's fears that they are far more likely to be targeted than their fellow Americans (Sikh Coalition, 2020). This section details recent events (2015 to present) that have impacted the Punjabi-Sikh community. Specifically, this section focuses on the presidential campaign and election of Donald J. Trump, COVID-19 and increased anti-Asian sentiment, the FedEx and rail yard shootings, and India's agricultural laws and the Farmer Protest.

**Campaign and Election of Donald J. Trump**

The 2016 United States presidential election cycle and inauguration of Donald J. Trump amplified a wave of hate violence against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities to heights not seen since the year immediately following 9/11 (Kumar, 2016; Sunar, 2017; Ewart & O'Donnell, 2018; Rana, Qin, & Vital-Gonzalez, 2019). The dramatic surge in political rhetoric rooted in anti-Black, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiment in 2016 and 2017 fueled a substantial and unparalleled atmosphere of hate and suspicion (SAALT, 2018). The first year of President Trump's administration built upon the already disturbing surge in hate violence as documented in a 2017 report by the advocacy group, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT). SAALT’s analysis reported 207 incidents of hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric aimed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities during the 2016 election cycle (defined as November 1st, 2015 to Election Day on November 8th, 2016) (SAALT, 2018). Unfortunately, SAALT’s report does not provide statistical information for the number of incidents directed at Sikhs alone.

Reports and surveys indicated a significant increase in hate groups, particularly anti-Muslim hate groups, during Trump's campaign and subsequent election in November 2016 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). Trump's presidency operated explicitly on an anti-Muslim and neonationalistic agenda under the guise of combating terrorism and putting America first (Antonsich, 2017; Bergmann, 2020; Haynes, 2021). A few days after his inauguration, President Trump signed an Executive Order—commonly referred to as the "Muslim Ban"—that had ripple
effects throughout the country, further targeting and marginalizing an already politically and socially stigmatized minority group (McGinty, 2018). His inflammatory and divisive rhetoric emboldened the perpetrators of hate crimes, validated xenophobic sentiments (Edwards & Rushin, 2018), and appealed to the Christian Right and many secular nationalists (Haynes, 2021). Overall, the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump energized the radical right and unleashed strong xenophobic and racist passions with detrimental outcomes (McGinty, 2018; Thompson, 2021), particularly for those perceived to be Muslim or Middle Eastern, a frenzy that continued throughout the 2020 presidential election.

**COVID-19 and Increased Anti-Asian Sentiment**

According to the Department of Homeland Security, racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists—mainly White supremacist extremists—have been deemed "the most persistent and lethal threat in the Homeland" (Woodruff Swan, 2020). Political rhetoric focused on Islamophobia, xenophobia, and more recently, COVID-19-driven anti-Asian discrimination has increased the risk of White nationalists and supremacists targeting minority communities, including Punjabi-Sikhs (Sikh Coalition, 2020). Since the coronavirus was first reported in China, people of Asian and Pacific Islander descent have been treated as scapegoats solely based on their race (Associated Press, 2021a).

The frequency of anti-Asian incidents, from taunts to outright assaults, reported in the United States (at the time of writing in December 2021) has surpassed 2020 numbers despite months of political and social activism. Stop AAPI Hate, a national coalition devoted to gathering data on racially motivated attacks related to the pandemic, received 10,370 incident reports between March 2020 and September 2021. Of the hate incidents reflected in this report, 4,599 occurred in 2020 (44.4%), and 5,771 occurred in 2021 (55.7%), though again, numbers are not provided for incidents directed specifically at Punjabi-Sikhs. Overall, the report found that verbal harassment and avoidance make up the two most significant shares of total incidents, while
physical assaults comprise the third (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). Many Asian Americans and others blame former President Donald Trump for mobilizing the danger by talking about the virus in racially charged terms. While Biden has demonstrated unity, there is concern that a U.S. investigation into the origins of COVID-19 could lead to more hostility and treatment of Asian Americans as enemy foreigners (Associated Press, 2021a).

Despite the 2021 passage of the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, much work remains to protect all communities from hate incidents and intimidation. Pursuing initiatives that reduce hate incidents, providing more robust mechanisms to document hate, and addressing racial profiling remains critical. Furthermore, while hate crimes are traditionally prosecuted as a state offense, federal guidance remains essential with respect to implementing hate crime laws, providing law enforcement and prosecutors with cultural competency training, and emphasizing restorative justice (Sikh Coalition, 2020).

FedEx and Rail Yard Shootings

In the spring of 2021, two mass shootings in the United States renewed concerns about violence that the Sikh religious group has faced for years (Zhou, 2021), notably the Indianapolis FedEx and San Jose rail yard shootings. Both acts of mass violence came amid a surge in neo-nationalism and anti-Asian sentiment stimulated by the COVID-19 global pandemic and ongoing culture wars in the United States.

On April 15, 2021, four Punjabi-Sikhs were murdered, and several others were injured by a former employee, Brandon Scott Hole, at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis, Indiana. Members of the Indianapolis Sikh community pressed local and federal law enforcement to investigate the shooter's motive, emphasizing that Hole chose a place known for hiring people of color, specifically a Punjabi Sikh-majority (Associated Press, 2021b). While the investigation determined the act "was not racially or ethnically motivated" (Associated Press, 2021b), according to law enforcement, the shooter had reportedly visited White supremacist and neo-Nazi
websites beforehand (Sikh Coalition, 2020). In an interview with NPR, Sikh Coalition Legal Director, Amrith Kaur, said that while "it's impossible" to know Hole's thinking, she was disappointed police did not release additional details about how they ruled out bias as a possible motive. Kaur continued, "it is important to recognize that bias can be a factor in addition to these other issues… Though law enforcement has said this investigation is over, for all the families who lost loved ones, the survivors, the Sikh community, and anyone else impacted by hate violence, these questions will remain forever" (Associated Press, 2021b).

In San Jose, California, on May 26, 2021, another gunman opened fire at a Northern California light rail yard. At this facility, the Valley Transit Authority (VTA) employed many Punjabi-Sikh community members and transported large numbers of Punjabi-Sikh commuters living in the San Joaquin region (Howland, 2021). During the shooting, Taptejdeep Singh rushed out of an office where his co-workers were hiding and frantically called others to warn them. He ran through the building, trying to secure it, and helped others find safe hiding before he was eventually gunned down in a stairwell (Fernando & Ortiz, 2021). In a statement released by his family, Singh's brother expressed that, "even in these moments of chaos, Taptejdeep was living by the values of *Sikhi*: living in service and protection of others... We choose to remember Taptejdeep as the hero he was, both in those final moments and throughout his life of service" (Fernando & Ortiz, 2021).

President Biden called the ongoing gun massacres around the country a "national embarrassment" that should not be tolerated (Associated Press, 2021b). According to the Sikh Coalition, "Way too often, marginalized communities like ours are targeted, and we need to find those sensible measures to ensure that everyone feels safe, whether it's at home, at a place of worship, at school, at work, or the movie theater" (Garcia-Navarro, 2021). They stress the need for federal policymakers to recognize and elevate concern regarding the role White supremacist
ideology plays in the loss of life that Punjabi-Sikhs and other minority communities have seen across the nation (Sikh Coalition, 2020).

**India’s Agricultural Laws and the Farmer Protest**

Although U.S. Punjabi-Sikhs have different social backgrounds and diverse migration experiences, most can still trace their roots to the greater Punjab region. Enduring ties to the homeland persists even as the land they left behind has undergone partition and further reorganization (Tatla, 1999). Recent studies have demonstrated the vital role of migrants, particularly in North America, in financing and influencing religious-political movements in India (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007; Varghese & Rajan, 2015). Advancements in communications technologies have allowed for instant connections with home societies, and many expatriates tend to closely follow developments in their homelands. As a result, some events like wars, partitions, riots, nuclear tests, and the destruction of sacred sites have an emotional impact on the diaspora (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007). The 2020-2021 Farmer Protest is yet another example of a homeland issue that significantly impacted Punjabi-Sikhs across the globe and demonstrated the power of their influence.

In addition to the national and global issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, in November of 2020, farmers in the Indian homeland began a battle with Prime Minister Modi’s government over changes to agricultural laws. These new laws altered how crops were produced, stored, and sold, leaving farmers to fend for themselves at the mercy of the free market (Saaliq, 2021). One of the regions most affected by these changes was Punjab, India’s breadbasket, where agriculture is a way of life. Of the 5.03 million hectares (12.43 million acres) of land that comprises the state of Punjab, 4.23 million hectares (10.45 million acres) are under cultivation (Government of Punjab, n.d). More than sixty percent of India’s 1.3 billion people still depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and in Punjab, agriculturalists account for nearly 75 percent of the total population (Government of Punjab, n.d). That reliance increased after the pandemic
negatively impacted the urban economy and sent millions of laborers back to their villages (Marshal, Schmall, & Goldman, 2021).

Among the multitude of people who were impacted by the new legislation, many were Punjabi-Sikh farmers (Marshal, Schmall, & Goldman, 2021) who have family connections throughout the diaspora. These outside connections resulted in peaceful demonstrations of solidarity with India's farmers on almost every continent and numerous cities worldwide. In November of 2021, a year after the protests began and after the death of 650 farmers while on protest in Delhi, the Government of India announced a repeal of the three controversial farm laws that threatened to corporatize the country's agricultural sector. Modi's decision came ahead of elections in key states, like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, that are significant agricultural producers and where the right-wing Bharatiya Janata (BJP) Party was eager to shore up support (Saaliq, 2021). Regardless of the repeal, this event put additional strain on the already precarious relationship between the Sikh minority and the Hindu-majority government of India and ignited displays of long-distance nationalism worldwide.

**Intersectional Punjabi-Sikhism**

In the coming chapters, I describe contemporary Punjabi-Sikh experiences in the context of the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada. However, I do not wish to flatten their experiences or claim that they occur evenly across the wider Punjabi-Sikh community. Intersectionality is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences with particular phenomena and we must consider anything and everything that can affect their experiences—gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc. Understanding contemporary Punjabi-Sikh experiences necessitates an intersectional analysis that demonstrates different people's differential and layered experiences resulting from multiple vectors of influence (Ratti, 2019). In this section, I briefly describe their intersectional experiences as it relates to gender and
generation. More details about their gendered and generational experiences are discussed in chapter five.

Before any other identification, Punjabi-Sikhs have been doubly minoritized by race and religion (Ratti, 2019). For Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area, this means working within a majority culture that is White and Christian. Aside from their physical attributes, Punjabi-Sikhs maintain a distinct cultural identity that makes them stand out in public (Sikh Coalition, n.d.). The most visible aspect of that identity is unshorn hair and the turban, which can be worn by men and women alike (Ahluwalia, 2013; Sikh Coalition, 2020), though female adoption is less common. Therefore, Punjabi-Sikh men are highly visible in the predominately White spaces of the greater Reno area because their distinctive turbans and facial hair are at the forefront of social interactions. While the visual attributes of men cause them to have different experiences and spatial movements throughout the greater Reno area, what is constant for Punjabi-Sikh women is their negotiation of patriarchy (Ratti, 2019). This broadens the frame of analysis by recognizing and including groups within a community, but it also shifts the frame of attention from the dominant and majority community (in the case of Nevada and the greater Reno area, Whites and Christians) to the minoritized community (Ratti, 2019).

Not only do Punjabi-Sikh socio-spatial patterns and experiences vary by gender, but they also fluctuate with age. The characteristics and realities of the American-raised generation are diverse and differ from that of their parent’s generation. Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological change in immigrant groups, families, and individuals following intercultural contact (Berry, 2007), and there tends to be a generational disparity in the cultural and psychological changes that take place during the acculturation process. There are differences in the degree to which Punjabi-Sikhs prefer to maintain their original heritage and identity and the degree to which they pursue engagement with the new dominant culture (Fleck & Fleck, 2013). Most Punjabi-Sikh immigrant parents may still have close ties to Punjab, whereas their children
are more likely to maintain a strong connection to the United States (Lou, 2020). Therefore, while individual experiences vary from person to person, the American-raised generation is more inclined to engage with the dominant culture of the greater Reno area. Consequently, immigrant parents find that their roles and relationships with their children change, and their parenting ability is placed under significant stress (Fleck & Fleck, 2013).

Parenting involves transmitting cultural values to children, and many members of the immigrant generation were well-prepared for parenting in Punjab. They had a well-defined sense of ethnic identity and knew how things should be in their original culture and country. However, individuals of the immigrant generation sometimes feel lost or at least off balance in the greater Reno area, where this new culture's differing values and expectations may not be well understood (Fleck & Fleck, 2013). Many Punjabi-Sikh parents immigrated for economic reasons and may have had little desire to learn a new language and adapt to the values and customs of their new environment. Whereas the American-raised generation may quickly learn the language and adopt the values and customs of their peers (Fleck & Fleck, 2013). Nevertheless, leaving one culture and settling in another brings into focus the contrast between their present ethnic identity and how their identities will transform in their new society. This identity development process can be stressed by the difficulties of negotiating two identities and the perception of not fitting in well with the new mainstream culture (Fleck & Fleck, 2013). The immigrant family can provide the basic foundation for ethnic identity development but can also be the source of considerable stress for adolescents struggling with identity issues. This disparity in acculturation patterns between the immigrant generation and their American-raised children contributes to several generational and cultural dilemmas (Fleck & Fleck, 2013) for Punjabi-Sikh families in the greater Reno area.

Just as there is no single immigrant story, there is no single story for the children of immigrants (Lou, 2020). Hence, in the context of Punjabi-Sikhism, an intersectional perspective brings to light the range of lived experiences among those who identify as Punjabi-Sikh (Ratti,
Recognition of the intersectionality of Punjabi-Sikh identity is therefore essential in the context of their individual experiences with geographic inclusion and exclusion.

**Summary**

Since the religion's formation over 500 years ago, Sikhs have been continually persecuted as an ethnic and religious minority group in India. The relationship between the Sikh minority and the predominantly Hindu nation of India has always been contentious. The partition of Punjab between India and Pakistan in 1947 further marginalized their community, and 40 years later, in the 1980s, particularly in 1984, tensions peaked, and the relationship between Sikhs and the government of India turned highly violent.

In the United States, Punjabi-Sikh migrants were not entirely welcomed either. In the early migratory period at the turn of the 20th century, there were barriers to immigration, laws restricting marriage, land ownership, and citizenship, and they faced widespread anti-Asian sentiment. Later geopolitical events in the Middle East and both Trade Center attacks and their portrayal in the Western media stimulated anti-Arab, anti-Iranian, and Islamophobic sentiments in the United States. Racialization and misidentification of Punjabi-Sikhs as terrorists further complicated matters. After 9/11, Punjabi-Sikhs not only had to contend with individual acts of discrimination, hate crimes, and misplaced Islamophobia, but they also experienced violations of their civil liberties and socio-spatial injustice. More recently, Donald Trump’s political presence encouraged a significant anti-Islamic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Asian backlash. Consequently, many Punjabi-Sikh Americans existed in a climate of perpetual fear and hypervigilance under the Trump administration.

The events outlined in this chapter have had a profound impact on contemporary Punjabi-Sikh identity and altered how they experience and move through the American landscape. This chapter demonstrates that Punjabi-Sikhs have been negotiating socio-spatial exclusion for much of their history and have become incredibly adaptive in how they navigate it.
While past and present events impact all Punjabi-Sikhs both in India and the United States, more research needs to be done to uncover their experiences during this new era of social and political upheaval. This research investigates the socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikh and their experiences with geographies of inclusion and exclusion in the re-emerging immigrant gateway of the greater Reno area in 2020-2021, a period broadly characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic, a contentious political election, and a surge in neo-nationalism and anti-Asian sentiment.
Chapter Three

“I Feel Out of Place There”: Punjabi-Sikh Socio-Spatialities in Reno, Nevada

In early the 21st-century, Nevada experienced the most significant population increase of any other state. Much of this growth can be found in major cities, fueled primarily by immigration (American Immigration Council, 2020). Despite the rate and scale of these population changes, little research has focused on the new and evolving human experiences of Nevada’s re-emerging immigrant gateways. In contemporary immigrant destination scholarship, there is a particular interest in understanding the lived experiences of migrants and transnational groups in re-emerging and previously overlooked urban areas (Singer, 2015). In the early days of the American West, frontier railroad and mining towns, such as Reno, Nevada, initially attracted diverse populations drawn by the prospects of wealth. Yet, as mineral resources dwindled, so did their populations (Nelson-Limerick, 1987; Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Within the last few decades, however, the greater Reno metropolitan area has re-emerged as a significant immigrant destination. As such, this work uses the greater Reno area to address the gap in the literature by examining an understudied transnational group, Punjabi-Sikhs, in a re-emerging and previously overlooked immigrant gateway.

In this study, I apply Lefebvre’s (1974) and Soja’s (1980) notion of socio-spatiality in combination with Sibley’s (1981; 1995; 1998) theory of geographic exclusion to answer the question of how the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs have been impacted and navigated in the greater Reno area in 2020-2021, a period broadly characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic, a contentious political election, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and a surge in neo-nationalism and anti-Asian sentiment. Specifically, I focus on how Punjabi-Sikhs engage with these unfolding current events and public issues that have affected their day-to-day experiences and socio-spatialities. Given the newfound challenges of life in the early twenty-twenties, I argue that although Punjabi-Sikhs regularly experience geographic exclusion, they
have adapted their socio-spatial patterns to minimize exclusionary encounters and create avenues to inclusion.

Punjabi-Sikhs are an ethno-religious group from the Punjab region of South Asia. For more than a century, Punjabi-Sikhs have borne the brunt of American hostility, ignorance, and racism (Gumbel, 2018). To comply with religious beliefs, initiated Sikhs must maintain unshorn hair, but only men are required to wear the turban (Tatla, 1999). However, many non-Sikhs do not understand the religious significance attached to these symbols of faith and find the distinctive appearance strange or threatening. This was especially evident in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks (hereafter 9/11) (Mishra, 2013; Shah, 2011). Additionally, it has been documented that the 2016 presidential election cycle and the inauguration of Donald J. Trump further amplified a wave of hate violence against Punjabi-Sikh communities to heights not seen since the period immediately following 9/11. Many Sikh civil rights groups believe that Trump's presidency was to blame for a seventeen percent spike in anti-Sikh violence since the 2016 election and a flood of other discriminatory incidents in the workplace, housing, schools, and airport security checkpoints (Gumbel, 2018). This trend continued into the 2020 election. Not only does wearing the turban cause individuals to be visibly marked by difference, but lack of knowledge combined with mistaken identity by many non-Sikhs makes them a target for xenophobia, racial and religious discrimination, and socio-spatial exclusion (Basu, 2016; Hopkins et al., 2017; Ochieng, 2017; Smith, 2014).

Nevada’s transformation, notably the migration of ethnic populations in the greater Reno area, is central to this study. Nevada’s political status as a swing state is also especially pertinent concerning the presidential election period in which this research was conducted. For this research, “the greater Reno area” refers to the Reno-Sparks and Carson City Metropolitan Statistical Areas. The city of Reno is located along the Nevada-California border in the southern part of Washoe County. Although Reno is Nevada’s second-largest population center, it is
nicknamed “The Biggest Little City in the World” (City of Reno, n.d.). Carson City and Sparks are smaller, independent cities located to the south and east of Reno, and these metropolitan areas are interconnected both socially and economically. Although this area has attracted many of Nevada’s immigrants and is ethnically diverse, these small to mid-sized cities do not have the scale of migrant and transnational networks and ethnic enclaves of larger cities like San Francisco and New York. The absence of such networks and enclaves in the greater Reno area results in unique socio-spatial patterns among its migrants and ethnic communities.

Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer to the question of how many Punjabi-Sikhs are present in the U.S., the state of Nevada, or in the greater Reno area. Because the United States Census Bureau has not traditionally asked Americans about their religious affiliation, estimating the number of Sikhs (or any small religious group) in a given region is problematic. At the time of writing, the Census Bureau had not released its standard 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) estimates because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). According to the most recent ACS (2016), there are 280,867 Punjabi speakers in the United States, and forty-eight percent of those speakers reside on the West Coast in California. In Washoe County, Nevada, which shares a border with California, 1.5-2.4 percent of the population speaks the Punjabi language, and this percentage is higher than any other county in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Still, the number of Punjabi speakers in a given region does not accurately reflect the number of Sikhs. Some Sikhs speak Hindi, and many second- and third-generation Sikhs in America are not fluent or familiar with the Punjabi language. The upcoming 2020 decennial U.S. Census changed the way religious groups were counted and included questions about religious affiliation; these numbers will aid in determining the size of the Punjabi-Sikh community once they become available. Regardless of these barriers to understanding the extent of the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area, it is evident that they maintain a racial and religious minority status in the predominately White spaces of Northern Nevada.
Socio-Spatial Inclusion and Exclusion

Socio-spatialities are the connections between space and social relations, in which people and societies, through interactions with each other, are creating and re-creating spaces and places. The notion of socio-spatiality is attributed to two scholars, Henri Lefebvre (1974) and Edward Soja (1980). Lefebvre (1974) made famous the term *production of space* which suggests that space is created, coded, and used through social, political, and everyday processes. Drawing on Lefebvre, Soja took the concept a step further, stating that the reciprocal relationship, or the balance between space and the individual, is based on people modifying the spaces they live in, and in turn, being modified by them (Soja, 1980; 1985). Socio-spatial exclusion can be explained with a framework that combines Lefebvre's and Soja's concept of socio-spatiality with David Sibley’s (1981; 1995; 1998) theory on geographic exclusion. Sibley’s (1981; 1995) *Outsiders in urban society* and *Geographies of exclusion* borrow from psychoanalytic theory to explore the will of the Self to distance itself from all that it regards as Other (alien, impure, polluting, and abject). Sibley hypothesized that such psycho-dynamics, inherent in individual psyches, translate into more extensive socio-spatial configurations that establish lines of exclusion between people considered to be similar and those cast out as the Other.

Central to Sibley's ideas on geographic inclusion/exclusion is an approach known as object relations theory. Object relations theory suggests that individuals and groups form positive identities by excluding individuals and groups thought to be abnormal. Through establishing physical, psychological, and social boundaries, the polluting Other is kept at a distance, and the Self is constructed as whole and pure. Transgression of these boundaries is more than just border-crossing; it threatens to destabilize social order altogether. Foundational work in object relations theory includes anthropologist Mary Douglas’ (1966) *Purity and danger*, which explores religious, sexual, and social taboos; philosopher and feminist Julia Kristeva’s (1982) *Powers of horror*, which develops the notion of the *abject*, or that which is so repulsive that it is rejected...
instinctually; and psychoanalyst Melanie Klein’s (1975) work on children and identity formation as a competition between positive ‘Eros’ and destructive ‘Thanatos’ in *The psychoanalysis of children*. Sibley built upon this foundational work and illustrated how the deeply felt need to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ in a psychological sense was translated into spatial terms.

This research documents how social exclusion expresses itself spatially, producing a sense of insecurity and feeling *out of place*, and how the spatial expression of inclusion aids in cultivating feelings of belonging and being *in place*. For this research, Lefebvre’s and Soja’s concept of socio-spatiality was applied in combination with Sibley’s theory of geographic exclusion to focus on the entanglements of exclusion and inclusion for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. Documenting the everyday experiences of Punjabi-Sikhs in mainstream society reveals a complex geography of exclusion and inclusion, from avoidance, verbal taunts, and physical abuse to indifference, acceptance, and incorporation in different social spaces (Sibley, 1995). For many, this means marginalization into small action spaces (Laws & Radford, 1998), while for some, spaces of acceptance are found. This study uses phenomenological analysis to explain how the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs have been impacted and navigated during this contemporary period of social and political upheaval in a small to mid-sized urban area and re-emerging immigrant destination.

**Methodology**

The qualitative phenomenological analysis of this study relied on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups with fifteen adult Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada. Some participants migrated directly from Punjabi villages, some were American-born or American-raised with immigrant parents, and others step migrated from other regions. Most participants were independent entrepreneurs or were employed in the family business, mainly in the hospitality and foodservice industries, while others were students or stay-at-home parents. Regardless of whether they actively practiced the faith’s tenets, all participants
described themselves as Sikh. No restriction was placed on their level of religiosity or familiarity with Sikh doctrines.

The sample was drawn from multiple sources independent of each other and wherever participation could be solicited in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions. I visited both gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and numerous businesses in the region where Punjabis congregated, interviewees were asked for referrals, and participants were recruited via social media (Instagram). Discussions occurred at local restaurants and coffee shops, Punjabi-owned businesses, and informants’ homes, following all COVID-19 health and safety procedures. Only two video interviews were arranged for a single participant whose geographic location, childcare difficulties, and the threat of the ongoing pandemic prohibited a face-to-face meeting. Interviews and focus groups were forty-five minutes to two hours in length, and the majority of participants were interviewed three times in order to capture the rich details of their experiences. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, although a Punjabi translator was used when necessary.

Public health restrictions limited participant observation at community service initiatives and holiday celebrations. Many traditional social networks and gathering spaces were closed or restricted to prevent contagion. The social networks and gatherings identified by participants during fieldwork were unobservable and are instead described with the expectation that these networks and events will re-engage once public health restrictions are lifted. Thus, when possible, detailed field notes were taken throughout observation regarding everyday geographies of inclusion/exclusion and socio-spatial processes. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, in 2017, I conducted a pilot study that assisted in making connections and building relationships with participants, framing the research, and providing context to interpret the data. Conversations were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed with field notes and other collected documents through an exploratory coding process to uncover overarching themes and patterns. Transcripts were edited for clarity, and all names used are pseudonyms.
Data analysis involved three types of coding and analysis. Initially, comments from interviews were coded with respect to present political and social phenomena that altered socio-spatial processes in the greater Reno area. Second, results from the initial coding process were re-coded if they related to everyday geographies of exclusion. Third, results from the initial coding process were analyzed, paying attention to navigational methods and community building that created avenues to inclusion. The results from this analysis were designed to better understand how the socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs were impacted and navigated during the early twenty-twenties, and this coding became the basis for identifying these complex and entangled experiences. I do not claim that the following narratives are a comprehensive listing of all experiences with inclusion/exclusion for Punjabi-Sikhs; rather, these are what emerged throughout this study. The following sections are structured around the dominant themes that surfaced during the analysis, and quotes are used to illustrate wider trends.

**Socio-Spatial Exclusion: “I Feel Out of Place There”**

Exclusionary spaces are those from which certain members of a society are separated. The concept is primarily imagined in social terms; social exclusion may express itself spatially to produce distinctive areas of disadvantage and discrimination (Sibley, 1981; 1995). These discriminatory and exclusive spaces may present themselves in common areas such as restaurants, neighborhoods, schools, public transport, and places of employment. During interviews, participants elaborated on the everyday exclusion they experienced in these common areas. Nineteen-year-old Manpreet noted how this exclusion was often related to her visible appearance:

Manpreet (19): If I go from the *gurdwara* to somewhere else around town and I'm still wearing my suit (*salwar kameez*), people are curious. Sometimes you can see that people want to get away from you. If we’re standing in line, they'll go to the other line and away from where we are. It sucks because you're still living in the same city. We’re all the same people. We share the same space.
The example provided by Manpreet exemplifies object relations theory which is central to Sibley’s argument on geographic exclusion. Here, the Other, visibly different in dress and skin color, is physically separated from those who consider themselves similar. An invisible line was drawn between individuals who believed themselves to have “positive identities” and outgroups who were perceived as abnormal (Sibley, 1981; 1995). Experiencing this in everyday spaces sends a message to the Punjabi-Sikhs on the receiving end that they do not belong. Harnoor echoed Manpreet’s position—that exclusion was often related to bodily appearance—by describing her encounters in (quasi)public and everyday spaces, such as grocery stores and coffee shops. She believed these exclusionary experiences occurred more frequently as a result of the presidential election:

Harnoor (20): I was at the grocery store, and there was a mom with her child. As I walked past them, she grabbed her daughter and said, “Keep away from her.” She continued to stare at me as I walked past. Another time, my mom and I went out for coffee after going to the gurdwara. We were wearing our traditional Indian clothes. People were wearing Trump 2020 masks, and they stared at us the entire time we ordered. We were just wearing clothing. There's no need to bump shoulders, or say anything, or be rude…With everything that’s going on politically, with the Trump election going on, I receive a lot of double-takes. People look at me differently. People look at minorities differently now.

In 2020-2021, it was clear that the discriminatory language used by those in positions of power such as elected officials, public figures, law enforcement personnel, hate groups, and mass media had targeted and scapegoated BIPOC and migrant communities for political gain. The xenophobic rhetoric explicitly used by President Trump had significant consequences not only for Punjabi-Sikhs but members of other BIPOC and migratory groups as well. In both the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, Trump’s right-wing ideology was characterized by a rhetoric of exclusion, targeting minorities as a threat while promoting White supremacy (Giroux, 2017). Thus, in the early twenty-twenties, BIPOC and migrant communities felt more vulnerable in everyday spaces after being the repeated targets of xenophobic political rhetoric, such as that employed by Donald Trump.
Participants communicated that the atmosphere of certain places had changed due to the intensity of the political election and described how these changes impacted their feelings of belonging, safety, and overall comfort. These changes were not necessarily permanent or significant physical alterations to the everyday landscape but changes to the general ambiance that left them feeling unsettled, causing them to alter the way they interacted with and moved through space. Sukhbir commented on the presence of “strangers” and how their presence in everyday spaces made him question his family’s belonging and brought about the desire to relocate:

Sukhbir (44): We saw big trucks and big flags, Trump and all that stuff, that made it uncomfortable where you didn’t feel at home. The U.S. was not home. Well, it was still home, but strangers were coming out of nowhere. There’s so much discrimination. What the hell happened to this town? In my neighborhood, there are a few people who have Trump flags. My wife was scared. She did a bit of research online about which neighbors were Trump supporters. We were at the point where she was like, “If he wins or something happens, I want to move.” I was stressed out because she was stressed out. What are we doing in this society that doesn’t care, and there’s no equal justice for everyone? That’s what made me nervous. They had the power… I didn’t feel comfortable raising the kids in that kind of environment.

In the period leading up to the presidential election, the public space of the street sometimes became a location for exclusion. Harnoor, who lives in Carson City but attends school in Reno, expressed similar uneasiness at the sight of the Trump campaign merchandise in everyday streetscapes:

Harnoor (20): In the neighborhood that I live in, every single house has a Trump 2020 flag or those little signs that pin into the lawn. I always thought my neighborhood was a safe and comfortable place, but seeing that everyone supports Trump—who is very open about being disrespectful and rude to minorities—supporting him means you feel that way, too. That’s a big indicator. When people are outright like that, it’s not something that makes you feel comfortable whatsoever. I have family in Minden and Gardnerville, and I feel they shouldn’t be out there. It does not feel safe out there anymore.

She continued to discuss how Reno and the university, which previously made her feel comfortable in its diverse setting, at times made her feel uncomfortable depending on the people who were using the space:
Harnoor (20): Trump got elected, and the next day I felt uncomfortable on campus. All these people felt empowered to come forward and park on campus with their trucks with Confederate flags on the back. They got into no trouble whatsoever. TP USA (Turning Point USA) had an event on campus. There were people from the community in attendance because it was open to the public. I’ve never seen these people come to campus before. White power chants were going on during this thing. I never knew that many people from Reno felt so strongly about White power. Seeing those people walk in… I didn’t feel comfortable or safe. Something about their looks or the way they carry themselves feels hostile. It feels like they're against you for no apparent reason. When I see a group of people like that, those kinds of areas…I don't need to be there.

Trump’s xenophobic political discourse had an emboldening effect on far-right groups and opened the door for these radicalized individuals to be brought into the political landscape. The presence of these neonationalists in everyday spaces made members of ethnic communities and migrant groups question their belonging and safety in the United States, a valid concern given the statistical rise in violence directed at their populations (FBI, 2019; SAALT, 2018). Both Sukhbir and Harnoor referred to what they perceived to be a shifting power dynamic and expressed their discomfort at the visibility of people they considered to be hostile strangers in their community that once felt familiar and safe. These strangers who recently made themselves more visible due to the Trump effect (Newman et al., 2020) now felt empowered to transgress the normative geography of the greater Reno area, which altered how Sukhbir and Harnoor experienced and navigated space.

Physical abuse is the ultimate form of Othering and exclusion and experiencing it in a community where the individual lives define the exclusionary sense of being out of place (Mencap, 1999). While many of the Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed for this research did not have a personal account of physical abuse, they knew others, friends or family members, who had experienced incidents of violence related to their outward appearance. Talking about the incidents stirred up feelings of fear, sympathy, and anger among community members, confirmed the exclusionary and intimidatory nature of certain public spaces, and pointed to the value of the "intimate social and spatial worlds" (Parr, 2000, p. 226) that are developed amongst Punjabi-
Sikhs to avoid such confrontations. For example, most participants now avoided large gatherings of predominately older White people. For them, a sense of safety and a type of inclusion could be achieved by self-exclusion from the spaces and activities of the majority (Hall, 2005). Several participants used the Reno Rodeo as an example of a place they avoided due to heightened political tensions. Twenty-two-year-old Sajeev expressed his position on the Reno Rodeo:

Sajeev (22): I avoid big gatherings of people. It makes me uncomfortable. For example, at things like the Rodeo—things that are very Nevadan—you're automatically seen as some sort of foreigner. Even though I don't know a life other than the one I live here in Reno. I'm pretty much as native as any native Nevadan, but people look at you differently when you go there. They talk to you differently, in a condescending way. They see someone with different skin color, someone who looks different, and assume they don’t know English. They don’t know our culture. They don’t integrate. If you go into a large gathering like that, it goes back to square one. Everybody goes straight to that mindset, and that's uncomfortable.

In a separate interview, Amar also brought up the Rodeo as a place to avoid, in addition to other gatherings with primarily the older White population in attendance:

Amar: I used to go to the Rodeo pretty often. Now, I avoid it. It's too politicized. The last time I went to Virginia City, that was weird, too. There were Confederate flags and blackface, a lot of racist stuff out there, which I don't remember when I was younger. I think I blocked that out. Now, I notice it more. Nothing specific happened; I just feel out of place there. It's a mob mentality. Everyone is casually racist. With the recent political stuff…I think a lot of people draw up casual racism where they think it’s okay to be racist… Hot August Nights is another one to avoid because they're all boomers. It’s just the boomers… We're the only brown people there. There are no other people of color. It's a weird vibe. I used to go to A Night in the Country, too. I don't think I would go now.

Both Amar and Sajeev separately expressed that they previously enjoyed the Reno Rodeo; they are Nevada natives and true Nevadans at heart. Although no direct action was made toward either of them, they now avoid it and feel out of place. In these examples, Amar and Sajeev felt that they were transgressing the normative geography of the Rodeo by simply being there and being visibly different. The looks and body language experienced in some of these spaces were intimidating for many participants and combined to give a strong sense of exclusion or being unwelcome. In the locations mentioned above, the geography of exclusion in (semi)public and shared spaces—such as restaurants, schools, and local events—was transparent for participants.
Some places were known to be sites of intimidation and rejection. Their mental map of exclusionary spaces guided them to a limited number of places—such as the gurdwara and Sikh events—where they were confident of being treated well.

**Socio-Spatial Inclusion: “Just Think Local”**

This section explores how Punjabi-Sikhs responded to socio-spatial exclusion by forming spaces of safety and inclusion, asserting themselves in exclusionary situations, and acting collectively to raise awareness at the local level. However, it is important to note that such strategies fall short of challenging the underlying reasons for and processes of socio-spatial exclusion of Punjabi-Sikhs on a larger scale (H. Kaur, 2020).

All Sikhs are encouraged by their Guru, Guru Granth Sahib (the holy book of Sikhism), to perform seva or Selfless Service. Twelve of the fifteen participants cited seva as an avenue to inclusion. Seva involves acting selflessly and helping others in various ways without any reward or personal gain. Sikhs perform seva by helping at the gurdwara (cleaning, washing dishes, or serving food) and assisting the local community. It is a way of life for many Sikhs and part of their daily routine. Seva assists in uplifting the individual, developing internal strength, and improving community relations. Fifty-one-year-old Jagpreet described some activities of the Northern Nevada Sikh Society’s seva group:

Jagpreet (51): We run a group called the Reno Sikh Civil Society. We feed the homeless once a month. Recently, there was a BLM protest downtown, and there was a lot of broken glass. We gathered everybody to help clean up. We try to give back to the community as much as we can. So, we do our share.

Manpreet and Ramneek described the activities and intentions of the university’s Seva Club, of which Harnoor and Sajeev were also members:

Manpreet (19): We have a Seva Club at the university. We bond by helping others. Our community is trying to raise awareness and show people that we help everyone. We volunteer.
Ramneek (22): It’s really hard for us to let other people know who we are.
Manpreet (19): That is why there are so many clubs now. We got to know a lot of new people through the university’s Seva Club. There are Gujaratis, Pakistanis, and Hindus—
a wide range. We also have Asians, like Chinese and Filipinos. A lot of White people, too, and a couple of Hispanics. It’s pretty diverse now; it was only Indians at first. We meet once a month to plan events and goals. We talk about what we do and how it impacts the community. Last winter, we made care packages for the homeless and the people we normally give food to.

These accounts—particularly the comments about wanting to change opinions and raise awareness—point to the ways in which they feel they might be regarded as suspect, viewed as a potential risk, or misrecognized. To avoid this, Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area purposefully engaged in positive interactions as a sophisticated strategy to increase the likelihood of being included and accepted and minimize the possibility of an encounter being unpleasant or resentful.

Similar to a study done by Hopkins et al. (2017), another frequent response when participants had exclusionary encounters in everyday spaces was to employ humor. Humor is often used as a coping device, a tool to destabilize popular geopolitical narratives, a form of resistance, and a tactic of survival amid adversity (Fluri & Clark, 2019). In the example below, Gurtej opted to make light of the situations in which he was questioned and ethnically misrecognized at his place of employment:

Gurtej (28): People think I'm Hispanic. At the store, people will walk up and start speaking Spanish to me. I don't mind it. A lot of people get pissed off about that, and I think their turbans are on too tight or something! (laughs) Why did you get mad about that? There's no reason to get so riled up. It's not going to fix anything. You're just going to be mad about it, and then you're going to go home, you're going to eat your dinner, and you're going to go to sleep. Just be chill, man. Skins are thin.

Although these accounts may appear light-hearted, it is essential to note that “those who question exercise a power relation that defines…the territory as theirs, drawing a clear boundary between you, the racial Other…and we, the Whites, who question and control” (Kilomba, 2013, p. 66). In conceiving exclusion as both a process and a condition, particular groups (or individuals) must actively exercise their power to exclude, while others are on the receiving end of these actions and experience exclusion (Rose, 1997). Power relations, therefore, affect the experiences
of exclusion as they are lived within people's everyday lives and are associated with stigmatization and stereotyping (Morris, 2003).

In addition to responding to experiences of misrecognition in everyday spaces through humor, a typical response was to clarify their religious affiliation. In this sense, participants countered xenophobia and discriminatory remarks by using the occasion as an opportunity to educate others:

Sajeev (22): The best response is to smile at someone. Something simple as a smile can go a long way. If possible, try to educate them. When we did the Seva Club, one of the main intentions was to get the word out about Sikhism. We help people and tell them who we are and what we belong to without ever trying to convert anyone. It's about educating people about other cultures so they can have a little bit of an open mind.

The majority of participants cited lack of knowledge as the reason for misunderstandings and exclusionary encounters with many non-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. Ramneek and Manpreet expressed their annoyance about this lack of information:

Manpreet (19): There isn't enough representation. More information is needed because people aren't informed. The majority of the people don't know who we are. Ramneek (22): They're just not willing to look into it. Manpreet (19): If there were more information out there, maybe we would feel safer. People haven’t gotten to know who the Muslims are, who Punjabis are, who Hispanics and Hindus are. Everyone needs information on how to approach someone with a different religion. Just take a few classes and get information, so you’re not ignorant.

Sukhbir echoed this annoyance and stated that the American educational system is at fault for this cultural ignorance:

Sukhbir (44): Learn about your community. There are a lot of kids who wear turbans now. People are not educated enough. Schools don’t teach people about the world. We teach American history here, Western tradition, and that’s it. They think they don’t need anything else.

The frustration surrounding the issue of cross-cultural insensitivity was articulated by participants on multiple occasions. The American educational system, as Sukhbir stated, has remained largely Eurocentric, outdated, and disconnected from the growing diverse populations of the United States. Unfortunately, for participants, this lack of worldly knowledge has created a
pervasive ignorance (Fuentes, 2015) which results in continued spatial divisions among social groups. While interest in the topic of racial equality was reenergized in the early twenty-twenties after the murder of George Floyd and the historic protests that followed, participants maintained that more exposure and education were needed so that members of BIPOC and migratory groups would, as Manpreet stated, “feel safer” in their daily lives and everyday spaces.

Another method for self-inclusion involved using public events to encourage cross-cultural understanding. These events included cultural celebrations and holiday festivities, like Diwali and Vaisakhi, at the gurdwaras and other local venues, and hosting Bollywood dance nights at nearby nightclubs. Nevertheless, these attempts to create community bonds were not always met with approval and instead caused friction between patrons. For example, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Sikhs across the nation increased efforts to raise awareness about their religion and identity. In the greater Reno area, Punjabi-Sikhs began participating in the annual Carson City Nevada Day Parade to bring visibility to the local Sikh community, educate others, change opinions, and encourage positive interactions. However, the parade soon became the site of a discriminatory encounter for Harnoor and other parade participants. She recalled:

Harnoor (20): When Trump was running for president, around the time we had the Nevada Day Parade, I remember this 6-year-old kid yelling, “I can't wait for Trump to get elected so we can build a wall and throw all your people over!” It was our float. We were walking past. It was our float walking past. Whenever we walked past, they’d scream and hold up their Trump flyers.

Harnoor expressed distress and bewilderment at the racialized comment articulated by a child in the audience. Not only was the Punjabi-Sikh parade procession not recognized by their true identity, but they were reduced to being identified as simply non-White bodies undeserving of existing in Trump’s America. The Punjabi-Sikh procession carried a “foreignness” and “difference” (visible physical and cultural attributes such as skin color and clothing) directly on their bodies (McGinty, 2018) and were, therefore, the objects of an anti-immigrant attack. Sajeev
similarly recalled an experience recounted by one of his friends while distributing food and conducting seva at the parade:

Sajeev (22): I’ve only been to the Nevada Day Parade once. One of my friends who lives in Minden goes every year. They’re happy, they’re passing out food, they’re marching in the parade, and somebody gave him the middle finger. Stuff like that happens every year.

Within this supposed space of inclusion, a series of exclusionary practices and experiences come into play—verbal and non-verbal intimidation from the public and other non-Sikh community organizers. Although local Punjabi-Sikhs wish to continue participating in the parade, they do so with the knowledge that others see them as out of place.

Participants also saw success in business as a common form of community inclusion. Tejpal (50) and Jagpreet (51) noted the number of people they employed, between 20 and 70 employees each, and the number of families their paychecks supported. They believed this painted them in a favorable light with non-Sikhs in Reno. Additionally, Rajdeep and Gurtej elaborated on the authentic relationships they had with their clientele that made them feel connected:

Rajdeep (50): When I take a day off, my customers are missing me. They say, “Oh, we like her so much! Where is she?” My daughter said, “Mama, when you going, no more store, they're going to cry for you.” No matter whether I have a Black customer, American customer, or Hispanic customer, they love me so much.

Gurtej (22): When I work at the store, I interact with people. I hear the buzz, I guess you could say. I work at the counter. My dad would like me to do more important stuff, but I really like the interaction. You have your regulars, and you kind of shoot the shit with them. They're almost like friends. That helps me feel like I'm a part of the community. If I didn't have that, I’d feel a little more alienated.

Similar to a study conducted by Mitra (2020) on Sikh cab drivers in New York, participants who were independent business owners in Reno perceived themselves to be the object of envy due to their financial strength. Amar touched on this idea here:

Amar (26): We’re pretty prevalent. We own a lot of property and businesses here. Later on, it will be our responsibility to move it in an ethical way. Fair wages and bettering the community instead of building cookie-cutter housing developments and shopping centers. I have six employees right now, I pay pretty high, and a lot of people ask, "Why are you
paying so much?" Because it's fair… Punjabis are super competitive. Punjabis are probably the wealthiest minority in Reno. I have no doubt about that.

Here, Amar represented Punjabi-Sikh business owners as materially successful—“they have money”—to gain the respect of others. Likewise, Gurtej stated that the native-born offspring are often more upwardly mobile due to the hard work of their immigrant parents. According to Gurtej, “One of the priorities of the immigrant generation, my parent’s generation, was they wanted their kids to excel in studies so they could get a professional job and not have to worry about running a business. Just clock out and be stress-free.” The participants mobilized the idea of hardworking “Asians” in line with the “model minority” trope, which constructs Asian Americans as more hardworking than African Americans and Hispanics. They also mobilized culture to assert superiority over all Americans. Because Americans, they believed, were not as hardworking and strategic and were often jealous of the wealth immigrants have accumulated working what some would consider lower-ranked occupations. While some Punjabi-Sikhs might argue for selective inclusion as contributing members of society, the limits of Whiteness push them to do so by devaluing other racialized communities (Mitra, 2020).

Less frequently mentioned methods for inclusion involved not letting exclusionary actions bother them, removing religious markers to blend in, and denying that racism exists. A splinter of participants opted not to repeat the victim narratives they said were created by the mainstream media and were often reluctant to point fingers in overtly political directions or even assume that actions against them were racially or culturally motivated. Eight participants admitted, however, that although they were making conscious efforts to create avenues to inclusion, there was always room for improvement:

Amarjot (50): I feel like I am part of the community here. However, most of my interactions are with the Sikh community. I have just become the president of the Sikh temple and I hope to build relationships with other communities.

Tejpal (50): We could probably do a better job of getting other outside people into those events, realistically.
Navtej (50): My son is working on that. He’s been suffering for the entire time he’s been in high school. So, he brings a lot of kids to events to show them what we’re about.

Ten of the fifteen participants admitted they do not have extensive contacts outside of the community; their friendships were almost exclusively within Punjabi-Sikh networks. Still, continued efforts for socio-spatial inclusion made at the local level were believed to have a positive impact:

Sukhbir (44): I always think that what you do in your little community is what you can do to survive. Just think local, think Reno-level. It’s not going to change your life if you continue looking at the national level. You’re going to be more stressed. Small-level. People got together and showed that these things were not acceptable. The rallies, the Women’s March we do every year, the Native American March. We showed that Black lives matter. We stirred. We have to show we still value these things at the local level.

In summary, the narratives detailed above illustrate the entanglements of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion for Punjabi-Sikhs in the particular setting of the greater Reno area. The geographies of exclusion and inclusion in public and private areas were clear for the Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed. Some places were known to be sites of intimidation and discomfort, while others were understood as welcoming. These accounts also highlight the damage that misrecognition and lack of knowledge can do, especially when characterized by experiences of exclusion, marginalization, stigmatization, and violence.

**Conclusion**

This research addressed the gap in the 21st-century new immigrant destination scholarship by focusing on an understudied transnational group in a re-emerging and previously overlooked immigrant gateway in the fast-growing state of Nevada. Lefebvre’s (1974) and Soja’s (1980) notion of socio-spatiality was applied in combination with Sibley’s (1981; 1995; 1998) theory of geographic exclusion to uncover how current events and ongoing public issues have impacted and altered the socio-spatialities of a migrant and transnational group in the greater Reno area. Thus, this research provided examples of continuous social processes, making it a
resource to contextualize contemporary changes in re-emerging gateways and previously overlooked small to mid-sized urban areas and immigrant destinations in the United States.

Due to the elevated racial and political tensions that came about during the early twenty-twenties, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno experienced geographic exclusion in everyday spaces more regularly. In the ordinary landscapes of greater Reno, invisible lines were drawn between those who were different in skin color and dress and those who were understood to be similar. The Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed identified distinctive areas of disadvantage, discrimination, and spaces where they were made to feel like outsiders. Socio-spatial exclusion presented itself in (quasi)public and everyday spaces such as grocery stores, coffee shops, college campuses, local events, neighborhoods, and streetscapes. The looks and body language experienced in some of these spaces induced feelings of intimidation and being unwelcome. Some participants expressed discomfort at the sight of Trump campaign merchandise in everyday landscapes and noted the anti-minority/anti-immigrant sentiment associated with such items. Participants also recognized transgressions of normative geographies and shifting power dynamics, which impacted their feelings of belonging, safety, and overall comfort. Transgressions occurred when right-wing extremists made themselves more visible in everyday spaces due to the Trump effect (Newman et al., 2020) and when Punjabi-Sikhs were present and visibly different at local events occupied by a predominately White demographic.

Although the Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed noted that they experienced geographic exclusion more frequently in the early twenty-twenties, they adapted their socio-spatial patterns to minimize exclusionary encounters and create avenues to inclusion. A sense of security and inclusion was achieved by self-exclusion from the spaces and activities of the majority (Hall, 2005) and by occupying spaces produced and maintained by other Punjabi-Sikhs. Punjabi-Sikhs cultivated feelings of being in place by creating spaces of safety and cultural celebration, asserting themselves in exclusionary situations, and collaborating to raise awareness at the local level.
Public events were purposefully employed to encourage cross-cultural understanding and community building; these included acts of *seva*, inviting the public to participate in cultural events, and participating in local affairs such as the annual Nevada Day Parade. Participants countered misrecognition, xenophobia, and discriminatory remarks in everyday spaces by employing humor and using the occasion as an opportunity to educate others about their religion and identity. Being successful in business was also seen as a common form of community inclusion. In this manner, participants challenged socio-spatial exclusion through the lens of money, mobilizing financial strength to their advantage (Mitra, 2020). The efforts described here are sophisticated strategies that bring visibility to the Punjabi-Sikh community and increase the likelihood of being included and accepted and minimize the occurrence of unpleasant encounters in everyday spaces. Thus, physical changes to the everyday landscape and changes to the general atmosphere that occurred in the early twenty-twenties caused Punjabi-Sikhs to alter the way they interacted with and navigated space in the greater Reno area.

From the geographies of discrimination and acceptance, to the experience of work and school, and the ability to assert themselves individually and collectively, for some Punjabi-Sikhs exclusionary experiences can be countered by inclusionary networks of support and by looking inward. The *Guru Granth Sahib* (the holy book of *Sikhi*) quotes oppression and discrimination as external social forces that cause suffering; to overcome this "victim" feeling, one must take personal responsibility to alleviate the suffering (Sandhu, 2004; Ahluwalia & Pelletiere, 2010). Sikhs are taught that happiness is created by looking inward; it is "a state of mind and a choice we make" (Kalra *et al.*, 2010, p. 341). Thus, through the development of internal strength, Punjabi-Sikhs are able to contend with injustice (Ahluwalia & Alimchandani, 2013; Kalra *et al.*, 2010) during this turbulent time of political and social upheaval.
Chapter Four

Pandemic Implications: Punjabi-Sikh Transnational Spaces and Long-Distance Nationalism

The coronavirus pandemic has exerted enormous pressure on American society and forced a host of changes to how we live in and navigate space. To prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommended for a time that intra- and international travel cease, businesses close, schools transition to remote learning, and all gatherings—large and small—cancel or redesign events to allow for safe social distancing (CDC, 2021). While every American was personally affected by these shutdowns, migrants and transnational groups who depend on social spaces and gatherings to reaffirm a sense of cultural cohesion and belonging were uniquely affected.

For migrant and transnational communities, certain spaces and events—such as temples, community centers, holiday festivals, and political rallies—offer opportunities for what Gittinger (2015) calls cultural regrouping. Cultural regrouping refers to the phenomenon that occurs when an immigrant or diasporic individual enters a location, setting, or community gathering which invokes the homeland to remind one of their original, authentic, or native cultural character and where one can be among community members who share a similar identity (Gittinger, 2015). For those born and raised outside of the homeland or native country, diasporic identity, authenticity, or ethnicity can be socially constructed in such arenas. In these spaces, the person regroups with the traditions, practices, and community, which foster ties to the homeland and native culture. Thus, the process of regrouping is an effort to create a personal narrative that affirms a religious and cultural identity tied to a geography and history that is no longer physically occupied (Gittinger, 2015).

In recent decades, the greater Reno area has re-emerged as a significant immigrant destination. Although this small to mid-sized urban area has attracted many of Nevada’s 21st-century immigrants and is more ethnically diverse than other regions of the state, it does not have
the scale of migrant and transnational networks and ethnic enclaves of larger cities. Ethnic neighborhoods, enclaves, and commercial zones—for example, a “Little India” or “Chinatown”—aid migrants in establishing and maintaining feelings of belonging in their new territory (Li, 2008). Given the absence of such networks and enclaves in the greater Reno area, migrants and transnationals in the region have had to develop a sense of cohesion by other means, which often involves regrouping in transnational spaces. However, when gatherings in transnational spaces, whether permanent or liminal, became unavailable during the pandemic “lockdown” mandates, migratory and transnational groups in the greater Reno area faced unexpected challenges. This research uncovers the challenges faced by a migrant and transnational community during the pandemic in a small to mid-sized urban area that already lacked well-established transnational networks and ethnic neighborhoods. Specifically, this research explores the implications of such losses with a focus on Punjabi-Sikhs, an understudied transnational group, in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada, a re-emerging and previously overlooked immigrant destination.

The Sikh tradition, known in the Punjabi language as Sikhi but commonly referred to as “Sikhism" in Western societies, is a relatively young monotheistic religion founded in South Asia’s Punjab region (Sikh Missionary Center, 2008). A Punjabi is any individual from the region of Punjab who speaks the Punjabi language. The term Sikh refers to adherents of Sikhi as a religion, not an ethnic group. However, because Sikhi is not a universalizing religion and does not pursue converts, most adherents share strong ethno-religious ties. Migrant Sikh communities in the United States and abroad identify as part of a global Indian or Punjabi diaspora (Dusenbery, 1995). Although U.S. Sikhs have different social backgrounds and diverse migration experiences, a majority can still trace their roots to the greater Punjab region, and enduring ties to the homeland have persisted.

In addition to the national and global issues presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, in November of 2020, farmers in the Indian homeland began a battle with Prime Minister Modi's
government over changes to agricultural laws, which altered how crops were produced, stored, and sold, leaving farmers to fend for themselves at the mercy of the free market (Saaliq, 2021).

One of the regions most affected by these changes was Punjab, India’s breadbasket, where agriculture is a way of life. Of the 5.03 million hectares (12.43 million acres) of land that comprises the state of Punjab, 4.23 million hectares (10.45 million acres) are under cultivation (Government of Punjab, n.d). More than sixty percent of India’s 1.3 billion people still depend on agriculture for their livelihood, and in Punjab, agriculturalists account for nearly 75 percent of the total population (Government of Punjab, n.d). That reliance increased after the pandemic negatively impacted the urban economy and sent millions of laborers back to their villages (Marshal, Schmall, & Goldman, 2021). Many of the Punjabi-Sikh farmers affected by the new mandates have family and community connections throughout the diaspora. Consequently, these outside connections aided in instigating the peaceful demonstrations of solidarity with India’s farmers on almost every continent and in numerous cities worldwide.

My argument in this chapter is two-fold. First, I argue that Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area were uniquely affected by the isolating government mandates as the loss of physical gatherings in transnational spaces disrupted the usual avenues to cultural regrouping. To withstand this disruption, Punjabi-Sikhs adapted and transformed spaces to suit their needs, which included spending more time in virtual thirdspaces and online ethnic neighborhoods. Second, I argue that increased exposure to Indian media in virtual thirdspaces during this period caused them to become more involved in homeland issues, particularly the Farmer Protest, and resulted in new displays of long-distance nationalism. In what follows, I first discuss transnational spaces and cultural regrouping in the context of the pandemic. This follows with a discussion of the case study and the methods. The chapter then proceeds to the empirical section and discussion, which draws on the narratives of the Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed. Finally, the chapter closes with concluding remarks.
Transnationalism and Transnational Spaces

Transnationalism is a concept that describes a movement or set of linkages that occur across national borders. Increased use of the term “transnationalism” in scholarly work indicates the heightened interconnectivity of people and things that flow across borders and boundaries at a greater volume and with greater speed than ever before. Bourne (1916) first used “transnationalism” to refer to a state of being in which migrants maintain cultural ties to their home countries. He challenged the assumptions of an American melting pot scenario, which assumed that new migrants had to assimilate fully into their country of residence (Ernste, Van Houtum, & Zoomers, 2009). Increased immigration to developed countries in response to global economic development has since resulted in multicultural societies where immigrants are more likely to maintain contact with their culture of origin and less likely to assimilate.

In the early 1990s, transnationalism (like diaspora) became a popular concept, extending itself across different scholarly fields and serving as a helpful critique of global development theories (Quayson & Daswani, 2013). Going beyond the bipolar model (Rouse, 1991), this interdisciplinary field emphasized the ways in which migrants built transnational social fields that cut across geographic, cultural, and political borders. While closely linked to the processes of economic globalization, which are often conceptualized in abstract global terms, transnationalism is generally applied to express the transcendence of the specific workings of the nation-state (Kearney, 1995). Therefore, it is used to describe phenomena in which a nation’s cultural or territorial boundaries and the state’s regulatory devices are crossed or contested in new ways. Transnational community refers to groups who migrate and reside in a receiving nation for a considerable time yet maintain a strong connection to their homeland(s).

The phenomenon of ethnic loyalty toward the homeland is commonly called a “diaspora.” The term diaspora is derived from a Greek word meaning “dispersion” (Quayson & Daswani, 2013) and assumes there is a homeland to which the dispersed population will
eventually return. In seeking a standard theory for the diverse phenomena of human migrations, scholars have asserted the term “diaspora” to capture the shared experiences of displacement associated with migration: homelessness, painful memories, and a wish to return (Tatla, 1999). Classical diasporas satisfy the following conditions: (a) displacement from a center, (b) a troubled relationship between a diaspora and its host society, (c) a sense of community among the diaspora transcending national borders, and (d) the promotion of a return movement and the reconstitution of the national homeland (Tatla, 1999). The meaning of the classic definition has widened beyond a victim group to include migrants who have suffered in the process of resettlement (Tatla, 1999). Sheffer (1986) contends that ethnic diasporas are created by voluntary migration or expulsion from the homeland and settlement in one or more countries where they remain a minority. Studies of diasporas are inherently geographical, revolving around space and place, mobility and locatedness, the nation, and transnationality (Blunt, 2015).

As Gittinger (2015) has asserted, transnational spaces, whether permanent and enduring (such as a church) or temporary and liminal (such as a street parade), offer opportunities to culturally regroup. In small to mid-sized urban areas that lack well-established transnational networks and enclaves, one way that migrants and transnationals regroup is through the notion of thirddspace. Transnational thirddspaces provide ethnic groups, migrants, and members of the diaspora with spaces to cultivate kinship in their new host societies. Scholars such as Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Price & Whitworth (2004) have detailed the importance of thirddspaces by providing ethnic groups and transnational migrants with a link to their communities of origin.

Thirddspace is a concept developed by Edward Soja (1996) in his book Thirddspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places. Soja developed the idea by drawing on Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of “lived space,” which refers to the ways in which people experience space. Thirddspace can only be understood through first- and secondspace. By definition, firstspace is the physical space that people currently occupy, and secondspace is an
imagined or remembered space. Accordingly, thirdspace is both the currently occupied physical space and an imagined or remembered space. For transnationals, thirdspace is best understood as representing the tensions that exist between the lived-in space (the host society) and a perceived or remembered space (the homeland) (Price & Whitworth, 2004). This reconciliation between two worlds, a current space and a remembered space, leads transnationals to someplace in between.

Thirdspaces exist as transnational spaces only temporarily, to be returned to their customary purposes once the events conclude (Benson & Helzer, 2017). They often take the form of holiday and festival events, parades, sporting events and leagues, folk dance performances, and pop-up flea markets. For example, the Fresno Hmong New Year celebration in 2018 occupied the Fresno fairgrounds for one week and was well-attended by thousands of people from the Hmong community. During the week-long celebration, the fairgrounds were converted into a Hmong cultural space that reflected their distant and remembered homeland (Lei Lani, 2018). Once the celebration was over, the fairgrounds were left spotless as if nothing had happened at that location. In this manner, thirdspaces unite transnationals and migrants by providing them with temporary location to share leisure activities, and an outlet to socialize, network, and collectively reminisce on life back home and imagine life in the future. Additionally, thirdspaces provide transnationals with a space to transmit cultural traditions to the American-born generation (Price & Whitworth, 2004). Thus, the trialectics of spatiality (Soja, 1996), especially the concept of thirdspace, offers a conceptual handle with which to theorize about the complex spatiality of urban areas. However, questions remain about the implications of the loss of transnational spaces—such as religious assemblies, cultural events, and athletic leagues—for migrants and transnationals during the COVID-19 social distancing mandates.

**Virtual Thirdspace and Long-Distance Nationalism**
In contrast to highly visible physical spaces, scholars such as Mitra (1997), Skop (2013), and Gittinger (2015) have argued that, with the advent of the Internet, cyberspace also functions as a transnational thirdspace. With the exception of dense urban centers which host enclave communities—often formed in large cities like New York, Chicago, or San Francisco when early immigrants set up neighborhoods with shared language and business—most present-day immigrants are more scattered across the Western hemisphere (Gittinger, 2015). As Mitra (1997) has pointed out, this “has produced an increasing need for alternative means of community formation” and “one of the many ways such groups are being formed is with the use of electronic communication systems” (p. 57). Mitra (1997) argues that computer-mediated communication technologies recreate a sense of virtual community through rediscovered commonality and a perception of shared culture. Skop (2013) reinforces Mitra’s argument and asserts that gathering in contemporary online thirdspaces, which reach beyond the extent of the host society’s physical environments, creates an empowering sense of community. Gittinger (2015) further demonstrates that in the modern era of Web 2.0 (the advent of social media, increased accessibility, and the rise of the smartphone), computer-mediated communication provides a space for forming virtual communities and digital ethnic neighborhoods to an even greater extent.

Virtual community takes on a very real-world application when discussing diaspora and transnationalism. Various individual migrants, and local and regional sub-ethnic group organizations, are linked via websites to major Internet portals in their home countries and to various services that cater to their corresponding migrant populations (Skop, 2013). While a pattern of transnational life has been present in past migrations to varying degrees, the new transportation, communication, and computing technologies have greatly facilitated such arrangements and changed the spatialities among these individuals and groups (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc, 1995). However, the utilization of Internet technologies is uncertain. Their incorporation within social processes, community formation, and identity construction does not
take a predictable course; rather, it varies from person to person and from place to place, and in some cases, from generation to generation (Skop, 2013; Montgomery, 2008; Dodge & Kitchin, 2005; Staeheli et al., 2002; Crang et al., 1999; Castells, 1999; Graham & Marvin, 1996).

Furthermore, online thirdspaces can provide new arenas to promote old divisions based on social structures and hierarchies that once existed here and there but now exist everywhere (Skop, 2013). Advancements in communications technologies have allowed for instant connections with home societies, and many expatriates tend to closely follow developments in their homelands. As a result, some events like wars, partitions, riots, nuclear tests, and the destruction of sacred sites have an emotional impact on members of the diaspora (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007) and have inspired displays of long-distance nationalism.

Long-distance nationalism is a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various geographical locations to a specific territory that they see as their ancestral home (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). Long-distance nationalism is closely connected to the classic notion of nationalism and the nation-state. However, long-distance nationalism differs from other forms of nationalism in that national borders are not thought to delimit membership in the nation (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). Travel and long-distance communication technologies have become cheaper and more accessible, allowing social networks and modern infrastructures to easily link nation-states over vast distances (Vertovec, 2004). For this reason, borders do not interfere with the relationship between members of the nation and their national homeland. Long-distant nationalists typically maintain loyalty to the homeland and take whatever action the homeland requires. The nature of these actions varies, depending on the political and economic situation of the homeland, but may include voting, demonstrating, lobbying, contributing money, creating works of art, fighting, killing, and dying (Glick-Schiller & Fouron, 2001). Examples of long-distance nationalism via computer-mediated communication technologies show how migrants contribute to a national effort in their home countries by sending remittances and
organizing mobilization efforts from abroad (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2001; Quayson & Daswani, 2013).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments introduced steps such as spatial distancing and “stay at home” policies to curb its spread and impact. The absence of physical gathering spaces during the “lockdown” increased the use of computer-mediated communication technologies to keep parts of the economy going, allow large groups of people to work, study, and worship from home, augment social connections, and provide greatly needed entertainment (Király et al., 2020). For transnational and migratory groups, this meant more time spent in online ethnic neighborhoods and virtual communities. Online thirdspaces notably facilitated the transnational experience during the pandemic, not only through social media and chat forums but also by providing a virtual landscape in which to interact with one’s native culture.

As Skop (2013) has stated, gathering in online thirdspaces allows for the widespread expansion of issues that, before the advent of the Internet, were previously tied to a particular geography. Consequently, at a time when Punjabi-Sikhs were more often utilizing virtual ethnic neighborhoods during the pandemic, India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi enacted a series of laws intended to modernize India’s agricultural industry that significantly impacted the livelihoods of farmers in the homeland (Saaliq, 2021), triggering the Farmer Protest. As described in more detail in the following section, one of the regions most affected by these changes was the farming state of Punjab (Saaliq, 2021) and the sending state of most Punjabi-Sikh migrants in Western societies (Taylor, Singh, & Booth, 2015). In the era of Web 2.0, rather than the Farmer Protest being strictly a homeland problem, members of the diaspora could now be involved and play a role in the matter from abroad. Although the issue was not getting much attention from major media outlets in the United States, international organizations that cater to the pan-Sikh community—like Sikh Expo, Sikh Coalition, and Khalsa Aid—provided daily updates. Because
Punjabi-Sikhs in the diaspora had refocused their attention to the online realm during the pandemic, they were exposed to increased Indian media surrounding the Farmer Protest, which sparked global involvement in the form of satellite demonstrations of solidarity and both physical and virtual displays of long-distance nationalism.

### Punjabi-Sikhs in the Greater Reno Area

This case study draws on in-depth personal interviews with Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area to explore the challenges they faced with the loss of transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic “lockdowns” and how the space transformations and adaptations that occurred during this period contributed to their long-distance involvement in the Farmer Protest. In this section, I describe the group being studied, followed by a description of the locale.

### Sikhi and the Punjabi Diaspora

_Sikhi_ teaches a message based on the principles of love and oneness and calls on all followers to be spiritual warriors (Tatla, 1999). According to the code of conduct, a Sikh is any human being who faithfully believes in: One Immortal Being; ten _Gurus_ (from _Guru_ Nanak to _Guru_ Gobind Singh); the teachings of the ten _Gurus_; and the baptism bestowed by the tenth _Guru_ making the scripture, otherwise known as _Guru Granth Sahib_, the final _Guru_. Baptized Sikhs can be distinguished by wearing the Five Ks; _kesh_ (uncut hair), _kangha_ (a wooden comb), _kara_ (a metal bracelet), _kasherā_ (cotton undergarments), and the _kirpan_ (a small curved sword) (Sikh Coalition, n.d.). However, most contemporary Sikhs in the United States choose to display the turban (traditionally worn by males), the _kara_, and _kesh_ only.

A Sikh temple is called a _gurdwara_ (meaning “House of the _Guru_”). The establishment of the _gurdwara_ aids in commemorating the historical landscape of Sikh communities, including important objects and historical sites related to the _Gurus_ (Murphy, 2012). In theory, if not entirely in practice, anybody can enter the _gurdwara_ and join services irrespective of caste, creed, race, color, sex, religion, or nationality as long as they cover their heads, are not under the
influence of intoxicants, take off their shoes, and wash their hands (Sikh Missionary Center, 2008). Gurdwara visitors are also encouraged to have langar (a communal meal) operated by the congregation’s donations, charity, and seva (acts of service) (Lee & Nadeau, 2011; Arora, 2020).

As a religious community scattered from its center, Punjabi-Sikhs share a common feeling of displacement, reinforced by several migrations suffered in the 20th century. The partition of Punjab in 1947 brought chaos to millions of people who became refugees crossing the newly formed borders of India and Pakistan amid displays of extraordinary communal violence (Tatla, 1999). Although much of the post-1947 emigration has been economic and voluntary, it has been argued that it was a product of general dislocation, uncertainty, and violence caused by the partition. Later political conflicts, such as the militancy and traumatic events of the 1980s in Punjab, contributed to their emigration from India by prompting thousands of Sikhs to flee to escape persecution. Nonetheless, enduring ties to Punjab have persisted even as the land they left behind has undergone partition and reorganization (Tatla, 1999).

Punjabi-Sikhs provide a unique case study of attracting sympathy and support from their populations settled abroad, resulting in the mobilization of overseas communities (Tatla, 1999). The tragic events in Punjab during the 1980s sharpened overseas Sikhs’ sense of an endangered homeland (Tatla, 1999). Many ethnic groups engaged in the homeland struggle have often received crucial help from their communities in foreign lands, and studies have shown the important role of Punjabi-Sikh migrants, settled in particular in North America, in financing religious-political movements in India (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007; Varghese & Rajan, 2015; Appadurai, 1990). For example, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Ghadar (Revolutionary) Party in Stockton, California, was the first to mobilize against British rule under the leadership of Gandhi. They fought for a free and independent India four decades before that status was actually achieved and played a significant role in the Khalistan separatist movement as well (LaBrack, 2015; Mann, 2004; Mann, Numrich, & Williams, 2008; Oberoi, 1987; P. Singh,
2008; Tatla, 1999). Thus, those who have left India and Punjab have been among the most
politicized and defensive of their identities (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007).

Recent political events in India have once again highlighted the role of the diaspora in
influencing homeland affairs. The growing strength of communities abroad, coupled with the
events in Punjab during the 1980s and more recently during the Farmer Protest, have reinforced
Punjabi-Sikhs’ ethnic identity, social values, religious traditions, and linguistic bonds, thus
making them a distinct and influential diaspora and transnational community.

The Greater Reno Area of Northern Nevada

This study takes place in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada (encompassing the
communities of Reno, Sparks, and Carson City). Census figures from the last few decades
indicate that Nevada is rapidly diversifying, and much of this growth can be found in its major
cities, fueled primarily by immigration (American Community Survey, 2019). Immigrants are an
essential part of the state’s labor force across all sectors, accounting for nearly two-fifths of all
workers in the hotel and food services industries and almost a third of those in the arts,
entertainment, and recreation industries (American Immigration Council, 2020). Washoe County
is Nevada’s second-largest population center, and along with Clark County in the south, this area
has attracted the most significant number of immigrants and is ethnically diverse.

The city of Reno is located along the Nevada-California border in the southern part of
Washoe County on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. With a population of over
235,000, Reno is the largest city in Northern Nevada (City of Reno, n.d.). Carson City and Sparks
are smaller, independent cities along Reno’s border, and these three communities are
interconnected both socially and economically. For example, participants of this study that reside
in Carson City and Sparks commute to Reno daily or weekly for school, work, and worship, as
there is no _gurdwara_ at either location.

Reno’s Punjabi-Sikh Population
It is difficult to determine the size and extent of the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area. The United States Census Bureau has not traditionally asked Americans about their religious affiliation, so estimating the number of Sikhs in a given region is problematic. The 2020 decennial U.S. Census changed the way religious groups were counted and included questions about religious affiliation; however, at the time of writing, the Census Bureau had not released its standard population estimates due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). According to the most recent American Community Survey (2016), in Washoe County, around two percent of the population speaks the Punjabi language (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Still, the number of Punjabi speakers in a given region does not accurately reflect the number of Punjabi-Sikhs. Some Punjabi-Sikhs speak Hindi, and many American-raised Punjabi-Sikhs are not fluent or familiar with the Punjabi language.

Today, hundreds of *gurdwaras* in the U.S. cater to the needs of the growing Punjabi-Sikh transnational population, two of which are located in the city of Reno. These temples serve as important inclusive, religious, and cultural regrouping spaces for the Punjabi-Sikh community. According to local religious leaders, these *gurdwaras* serve a congregation of approximately 300-500 Sikhs (estimate is based on personal communications with religious leaders in Reno during fieldwork). The first *gurdwara*, the Reno Sikh Temple, was constructed on 2nd Street during the mid-1980s, and in 2008, the Northern Nevada Sikh Society (NNSS) (Figure 1) was built on Selmi Drive. Two years after construction began on the NNSS, the Reno Sikh Temple was destroyed by a fire (Figure 2). Curiously, local authorities did not consider the arson a hate crime but rather a way to cover up a burglary (Pearce, 2010). Although the 2nd Street *gurdwara* currently operates out of a smaller building at the same location (Figure 3) with plans to rebuild, its destruction impacted the community’s sense of security and belonging.
To summarize, transnational spaces serve essential functions in the regrouping process for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. The absence of such gathering spaces during the pandemic presented unique challenges for the local Punjabi-Sikh community. To withstand the disruption to the regrouping process, Punjabi-Sikhs adapted and transformed spaces to suit their needs, which included refocusing their attention on virtual thirdspaces and online ethnic neighborhoods. Increased time spent in virtual thirdspaces increased their exposure to Indian media, which brought about more involvement in the Farmer Protest and resulted in new displays of long-distance nationalism. The present research expands the literature on re-emerging and previously overlooked immigrant destinations by looking at an understudied transnational group in the United States in a small to mid-sized urban area at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, I broaden this research both conceptually and temporally. This research explores the implications of the loss of physical gathering spaces for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area and how they adapted the use of transnational spaces during the pandemic “lockdowns.” These space transformations had implications that extended far beyond the boundaries of Reno. The following section introduces the methodology on which the article is based.

Figure 1. The Northern Nevada Sikh Society (Benson, 2020).
Figure 2. Reno Sikh Temple destroyed by arson in May 2010 (NNSS, 2010).

Figure 3. The Reno Sikh Temple at the current 2nd Street location (Benson, 2020).
Methodology

The phenomenological analysis presented in this chapter relied on participant observation and semistructured individual interviews and focus groups with fifteen adults who self-identified as Punjabi-Sikh. The men and women included in this study ranged in age from 19 to 69, with a median age of 39 years. Approximately fifty-three percent of participants were first-generation migrants, and the remainder were Nevada-born or arrived in Nevada before the age of sixteen. Interviews were forty-five minutes to two hours in length, and the majority of participants were interviewed three times in accordance with the phenomenological design. Interviews were conducted primarily in English, using a Punjabi translator when necessary. Fieldwork was conducted in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Discussions occurred at local restaurants, coffee shops, Punjabi-owned businesses, and informants’ homes, following all COVID-19 health and safety guidelines. Only two virtual interviews were conducted with a single participant whose geographic location, childcare difficulties, and the risk of viral transmission prohibited an in-person meeting.

Participants were recruited from multiple sources and wherever participation could be solicited under COVID-19 restrictions. I visited both gurdwaras and numerous businesses in the region where Punjabi-Sikhs congregated, interviewees were asked for referrals, and participants were recruited via social media. I created an Instagram page devoted to the research and utilized that account to recruit volunteers and gather information. During fieldwork, public health restrictions limited participant observation at community service initiatives and festival celebrations. Many traditional social networks and gathering spaces set in place by local actors were canceled to prevent contagion. In 2020-2021, aside from the two peaceful demonstrations of solidarity, the gathering spaces and social events identified by participants during fieldwork were unobservable and are instead described with the expectation that these spaces and events will re-engage once public health officials determine it is safe to do so. It is worth bearing in mind that
before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, in 2017, I conducted a pilot study that helped to make connections, build relationships and trust with participants, enabled me to frame the research appropriately, and provided context that was used to interpret the data.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through an iterative qualitative coding process to uncover common experiences, themes, and patterns. First, comments from interviews were coded with respect to the importance of transnational spaces in the regrouping process. Second, the initial coding results were re-coded if they related to the challenges that resulted from the absence of transnational spaces during the coronavirus pandemic. Third, results were again analyzed, paying attention to virtual transnational spaces and expressions of long-distance nationalism. This coding became the basis for identifying the implications of the pandemic for the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area and how it occurred. I do not claim that the following narratives are common experiences for all Punjabi-Sikhs in small to mid-sized urban areas during the COVID-19 pandemic; instead, these are what emerged throughout this project.

The narratives presented in the coming sections provide insight into Punjabi-Sikh socio-spatial worlds. The following sections are structured around dominant themes, and quotes illustrate broader trends. Individual and group interviews were used to build narratives about the importance of physical and virtual thirdspaces for creating cultural cohesion among others in the diaspora and their social and political connections to the homeland. Transcripts have been edited for clarity, spelling, and grammar, and all names used here are pseudonyms.

**Loss of Transnational Spaces During COVID-19**

This section elaborates on the social networks and transnational thirdspaces of Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following subsections detail the importance of transnational gathering spaces—specifically the *gurdwara*, cultural events, and
athletic leagues—and the hardships faced due to their loss during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns.

**Transmitting Culture to the Next Generation**

Werbner (2013), in her article “Migration and transnational studies: Between simultaneity and rupture,” makes the point that while migrants become acquainted with their new social environments and landscapes, their resettlement overseas has set in motion a process of dislocation. This dislocation often results in a deep sense of loss; their communities, face-to-face relationships, and familiar landscapes have all disappeared. Migration has also created a sense of “double consciousness,” a doubling-up of one’s sense of belonging and alienation (Werbner, 2013, p. 107). The intimate knowledge they once had of their homelands and home societies have been disrupted by their migratory experience. Over time, the gap between the home country and the country of migration gradually widens and ruptures soon become apparent. This is especially true for the migrants’ offspring who are raised abroad and have little connection to the land from which their parents emigrated.

Intergenerational value transmission is the process of one generation, intentionally or unintentionally, influencing the values and behaviors of the next generation (Van IJzendoorn, 1992). This is a bidirectional process between parents and children in which they negotiate their preferred values and, thus, maintain elements of their culture within the boundaries of the new host society. However, the transmission process becomes complicated when it takes place in a foreign land and in times of rapid change. Parents may feel stuck between adopting new values and customs and maintaining those from the past. Punjabi-Sikh parents in Reno expressed concern about the difficulties of transmitting their culture to the next generation:

Amarjot (50): Growing up, every kid wants to fit in. It doesn’t matter if you’re from a different religion or not; kids just want to fit in with their peers. The challenge I face is raising my kids here. It has been a challenge to teach them our religion and values when they are exposed to Western culture.
Tejpal (50): We're first gen. Most of us came here as teenagers, give or take a few years. So, we were more connected. Our struggle is trying to keep our kids connected to us, to our culture. It's easy for them to blend in; they are basically American. That's fine with us, we don't have a problem with that, but our effort is always trying to keep them connected to our culture.

Jasmine reiterated the concern of Amarjot and Tejpal but added that convening with other Punjabi-Sikhs and going to the temple helped to alleviate some of that anxiety:

Jasmine (32): I think our kids might adapt; they might completely forget. If we’re on our own, for example, in [Reno], they might forget what the Indian culture is like. But if we have gatherings and if we’re involved… For example, my mom and my father-in-law, prior to COVID, were going to the temple every weekend. I’ve said to them, “Take my son with you,” so he understands what's going on.

During interviews, it was apparent that participants saw social gatherings, cultural events, and *gurdwara* services as a means for transmitting cultural values to the second generation. These were places where the Punjabi-Sikh youth could assemble with people of similar identities, speak the Punjabi language, listen to traditional music, and eat traditional foods. Like Skop’s (2013) research on Indian migrants in Arizona, gatherings in Punjabi-Sikh spaces become activities that further cement the emotional bonds among migrants and their embeddedness in ever-increasing transnational networks. The loss of these spaces during the pandemic limited the ability of Punjabi-Sikh parents to transmit culture to the American-born and American-raised generation.

**Loss of the Gurdwara**

The most common form of cultural regrouping is found at local religious centers and churches; these are places that remind people of their history—a history primarily tied to a national, cultural, and ethnic narrative—and where one can be among other like-minded individuals. The role of religion is central to ethnic construction in transnational contexts because it serves as an instrument for the transmission of culture and provides the institutional framework for community formation (Gittinger, 2015). Thus, the relationship between the *gurdwara* and Punjabi-Sikhs is central to the regrouping process. In an interview with Sajeev, he expressed the
importance of the gurdwara in finding community, which he previously lacked due to his remote location:

Sajeev (22): Growing up, I wasn't very close with the Sikh community because I lived in South Reno. There are very few Sikhs down there. Most live near the temple in North Reno. Once I came to the university and started socializing with more Sikhs, I was like, “Oh my gosh, there’s a community!” I knew about them, and I went to the temple occasionally, but not that much. After starting at the university, I was closer to the temple began going more often. I started making friends; it was pretty cool.

The gurdwara functions as a physical place for prayer and provides a space for community cohesion through social forms of religious practice that other private areas (for example, homes) and public areas do not. Gurdwaras are “every sense community centers as much as they are places of worship” (Mandair, 2013, p. 117). During our discussions, Jasmine also confirmed that the gurdwara functioned as a social space and a space where her son could learn and use the Punjabi language:

Jasmine (32): We have friends at the gurdwara, and we have gatherings. We wear clothes that express our culture. We try and teach our kids Punjabi. When I was growing up, we were taught from the beginning that you have to speak Punjabi. I lived in India for a little while, and it was rooted in us from the very beginning. Whereas now, English automatically comes out. If you speak to my son in Punjabi, he'll respond in English. We have to speak to them in Punjabi for them to learn the language so that they are aware of their culture. If we don't pass it on, it will die out. We were going to the gurdwara every week until the lockdown. They have Punjabi classes on Sundays. I’m going to send my son once the gurdwara is back open. We have to keep pushing it to keep it going with our kids.

The narratives provided by Sajeev and Jasmine illustrate that the gurdwara is a significant hub for cultural regrouping in the greater Reno area. When the gurdwara became unavailable due to pandemic restrictions, local Punjabi-Sikhs suffered negative cultural implications in terms of language transmission and community formation.

Many interviewees indicated that before the pandemic, their religious lifestyle was often structured along the day or week. This usually entailed a fixed and regular routine, such as attending Sunday services or monthly participation in seva groups. Through these routines, the process of cultural regrouping was firmly embedded in the participants’ daily lives. Many of them
indicated that as these routines fell away during the COVID-19 crisis, it resulted in the sense of loss or emptiness. For instance, Manpreet had a well-organized and packed religious life before the pandemic in which she went to the gurdwara several times throughout the week with her mother:

Manpreet (19): The hardest part of COVID for me was the loss of the temple. My mom and I go all the time. It was shut down, and we wanted to go there. It felt weird not being able to go after years of attending all the time.

Manpreet attached great importance to the physical aspects of the gurdwara and its daily and weekly habitual practice. As demonstrated by scholars such as Ahmed (2004) and Das (2007), bodily actions and habits, especially within the domain of religious practice, are not anchored in a specific body. Instead, they are in affective relationships with other bodies at gurdwaras, like Reno’s NNSS and the Reno Sikh Temple. As such, the gurdwara is not only a religious center but functions as a place for Punjabi-Sikh bodies to congregate and establish a sense of community and transmit culture. The loss of which reduced the number of opportunities for Punjabi-Sikhs to physically regroup through habitual practice during the pandemic.

**Loss of Cultural Events and Athletic Leagues**

Instances of cultural regrouping can also happen outside of religious institutions. Examples of this, as I have stated in the literature review, are enclaves and ethnic neighborhoods where businesses reflect the food, clothing, language, and material goods of that ethnic community, which not only buffer the effects of an alien culture on a newly-arrived immigrant but enable members to retain ties throughout the community (Gittinger, 2015). Another example is found in organizations like the university-sponsored Seva Club and the community-sponsored Punjabi Cultural & Sports Club. In particular, thirdsaces such as holiday festivals and athletic leagues are very public demonstrations of regrouping. They are often open and inviting to non-community members and provide a way to share culture with outsiders and proudly demonstrate its traditions or visual symbols through the affirmation of the ethnic community (Gittinger, 2015).
Thus, cultural events and athletic leagues are vital nodes of transnational social networks and place-making activities. These thirdspaces are essential when one considers that many new migrants do not live in neatly defined residential enclaves among people with similar identities (Price & Whitworth, 2004), as is the case for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. Rather, the increasingly common pattern is decentralized suburban living, which makes maintaining ethnic identity through enclaves less likely (Price & Whitworth, 2004).

In Reno, Punjabi-Sikh cultural events include holiday festivities, such as the annual Teeyan, Diwali, and Vaisakhi Mela celebrations, and athletic activities and competitions sponsored by the local Punjabi Cultural & Sports Club. During cultural and athletic league events, participants gather to speak their native language, mingle with like-minded individuals, play sports and games, eat food made with recipes from their home country, and support locally-owned businesses operated by other Punjabi-Sikhs. Because cultural events and athletic leagues do not create formal physical structures—as a gurdwara, Indian restaurant, or ethnic neighborhood does—their imprint and legacy are easily ignored. Outside of the gurdwara, parents articulated that these events presented opportunities for the transmission of culture to the native-born generation:

Jagpreet (51): Our goal is to get the young generation into our music. Get them involved in music, dance, language, arts, or sports. Keep them connected. We do at least one annual program where they do performances on the stage, folk dances from back home.

Jasmeet (52): We brought our culture, and we don't want our kids to forget it.

Members of the American-born and American-raised generation also recognized that these celebrations helped to preserve culture and encouraged artistic expression:

Manpreet (19): There are religious and cultural programs that we do every year. We've been doing them since...

Ramneek (22): Since I was a baby. They started doing this before we were born. It's a way for us to...

Manpreet (19): Express our culture.

Ramneek (22): There's a day called Vaisakhi in India where they harvest the wheat and crops.

Manpreet (19): It’s one of the biggest holidays in Punjabi culture.
Ramneek (22): Here, we celebrate by doing our cultural dances, *giddha*, and *bhangra*. That's how we artistically represent ourselves.

Manpreet (19): Trying to keep it alive.

Ramneek (22): We still celebrate this yearly. Well, until this year [during the pandemic]. Otherwise, that's the event everyone looks forward to the most.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno regularly offered occasions to regroup, and this was likely due to the absence of an already established ethnic enclave. With no physical ethnic neighborhood or district, community members found alternative avenues that allowed residents to achieve feelings of shared well-being. These acts resulted in a community that felt very tight-knit for participants, as expressed by Jasmine below:

Jasmine (32): Minus the pandemic, we like having our gatherings. There are a whole bunch of people that enjoy hosting. They like to stick to those roles, which is great. They take so much pride in it. Kids that have grown up in front of my eyes, they’ve been performing at the Vaisakhi events since they were tiny. Now, they're in college, and they're still doing it. It’s good to see that. It is definitely way more traditional here. When I talk to my friends [from out of town], they say, “You guys have a gathering every six months or three times a year!” It's so different; we're very connected here. People are very involved with the Sports Day, Vaisakhi, and Diwali. A couple of years ago, they started a Valentine's and New Year’s party, too. Like I said, we love to get together, and it’s definitely growing. Not having the community was kind of weird. Apart from the pandemic, you get together; you go to the *gurdwara*, you have parties, the Sports Day. You are constantly involved. They usually have volleyball games every Sunday or Saturday night. My husband has missed that.

The social networks that grow around such athletic leagues and cultural events arise from a “sympathetic deconstruction of heuristic reconstructions of the Firstspace-Secondspace duality” (Soja, 1996, p. 81). They express the tensions between the lived-in space in Reno and the remembered space of home overseas in Punjab. In this manner, Punjabi-Sikhs actively redefine space and identity through networks predicated on being neither here nor there but something in between. Their existence changes how the lived space in the greater Reno area is used and perceived.

**Space Transformations**

In this section, I elaborate on the space transformations that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and how a refocus on virtual gathering spaces increased exposure to
Indian media about the Farmer protest and contributed to new displays of long-distance nationalism.

**Home as Substitute Gurdwara**

As a racial and religious minority in the region, the home has always served as a location for cultural regrouping among Punjabi-Sikhs. Home is where one is surrounded by family who cultivate and reinforce cultural identity. As Yuval-Davis (2006) has emphasized, relationships with people and the material world, particularly family relationships, establish and reaffirm a sense of belonging. Indeed, the family, not the nation-state, might very well be the primary unit for belonging (Waters 2006; Ho 2009; hooks 2009). Sajeev articulated the importance of family and home:

Sajeev (22): When I first got into high school, I was growing up with a different identity from everyone around me, and that was challenging. But at the end of the day, you go back home to your family and get that sense of self back.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, some religious practices were conducted at home, typically in the morning and before bed. Most practicing Sikh families include a room or space inside their house that features pictures of the *Gurus*, the Golden Temple at Amritsar (the holiest of all Sikh temples), or the presence of the holy text. This room, or temporary space for an event such as a wedding, is viewed as a sacred space and a location where rituals are conducted. Manpreet described these rituals:

Manpreet (19): We pray at home in the mornings and the evenings. We have a designated God's room. The room is full of God's pictures and prayer books. We spend 20-30 minutes doing our prayers, and then at night, we do that in bed when we're going to sleep. When someone in the community buys a new house, before they put furniture in it, the first thing they do is invite everyone over for a prayer day. Everyone brings their prayer book, the priest goes, and everyone gives their blessings.

Before the pandemic, a few select religious services were live-streamed locally on social media platforms like Facebook, but these efforts were increased during quarantine. Similar to a study done by Huygens (2021) on Roman Catholics in Belgium during the pandemic, in an
attempt to uphold regrouping and religious practices, some participants found other modalities to sustain them and challenge the disturbance of their routines. An example of this is the creation of new rituals at home. In order to find stillness and meditation amid these turbulent times, some started reading the *Guru Granth Sahib* with family or streaming *kirtan* (prayers) from Internet portals more regularly. As Gittinger (2015) points out, “virtual sacred space” does not have to refer to digital space exclusively; it can also refer to a virtual or representational space in “real world” geography, which acts as a substitute for the actual location. Rather than attending in-person *gurdwara* services, many of my interviewees now watched live-streamed *gurdwara* sermons, either on television or online, and others looked to websites such as YouTube and Spotify for religious clips, music, and prayers. Harnoor described her experience:

Harnoor (20): The *gurdwara* shutdown, but they had a Facebook Live. They recorded themselves, and anyone could log onto their page and listen. That way, they still felt like they were taking part and learning. During the shutdown, my grandpa and parents read from our holy book at home. It took three weeks the first time and two weeks the second time. Then they did it at my uncle’s house for another two weeks. When we were praying, it was for our family’s safety, the safety of our community, and the safety of the world. Those two to three weeks, the TV was off. I had my head covered, although we were just at the house. We often had prayers playing in the background, too. I heard that other families were doing the same thing at their homes, listening in every day. *Gurudwaras* in India also had live broadcasts on different Punjabi channels. You were never far from hearing the word of God. You just weren’t there in person… Being quarantined, being home, I got used to speaking Punjabi. At home, I am very Punjabi. When I go out into the world, I have to be American. When I went back to school, I would randomly start speaking to people in Punjabi. I appreciated being at home for that reason. I could stay more in touch with my language.

In this example, Harnoor expressed that in addition to transformed religious regrouping practices, she felt more Punjabi during the pandemic due to extended time in the home setting where the family upheld traditions. As Kobayashi and Preston (2014) state, the sense of belonging is a set of paradoxes, of between-ness that they negotiate through an understanding of place-ness: place as the homes in which they belong but also as a set of shifting public and private contexts in which they express their identities and relationships in variable ways. Isolating with
family in the home proved beneficial for some participants when navigating these public and private contexts.

Despite the numerous online and remote alternatives, participants stated that they are not satisfactory replacements for physical gatherings. Although they genuinely appreciated the local and international efforts to help religious practitioners get through the months of isolation, they longed for a return to normalcy. Not like other religious communities who were already well trained and experienced in practicing religion online, such as some migrant or diasporic faith communities (see Leurs et al., 2012; Vekemans, 2019), or the followers who had already made use of the Internet before the pandemic. Most Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno had limited to moderate experience with practicing religion in the virtual sphere. Aside from two participants, Amar and Jasmine, who were already utilizing streaming prayer services ahead of the outbreak, many participants were not prepared for the sudden shift to the online/remote world, which further highlighted the importance of physical transnational spaces in the regrouping process for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area.

**Virtual Regrouping**

Various media, particularly the Internet, can provide a sense of togetherness, engagement in cultural traditions, and exchange of in-group information—a sense of place. The Internet serves as an alternative to physical gatherings because overcoming the friction of distance permits dispersed groups to communicate regularly (Skop, 2013). The medium of virtual thirsdspace eliminates many material challenges that make real-world community, in terms of companionship and a sense of belonging, so difficult to fulfill; however, such communal resources are easy to find on the Internet (Barney, 2004). Online regrouping in interactive spaces often mirrors the sites and relationships of offline encounters (Gittinger, 2015). Furthermore, networking in online spaces frequently facilitates physical gatherings (such as festivals, films, musical performances,
athletic competitions, and business meetings) even as the Internet constitutes a form of gathering itself, with certain key attributes of place-based interaction (Adams, 1997; Skop, 2013).

While some argue that cyberspace provides only a surrogate for community, because “communities are shaped by a sense of belonging to a place, a geographical location, by shared values, by common struggles, by tradition and history of a location” (Sardar 1996, p. 29), many scholars have illustrated that in practice the Internet as thirdspace is often appropriated by individuals and groups seeking to preserve, develop, expand or celebrate their distinctiveness even as the same technology becomes in other circumstances a means for dissolving cultural differences (Skop, 2013). Jasmine articulated how social media has helped educate others to the benefit of the Punjabi-Sikh community:

Jasmine (32): I’ve heard of horror stories where an older gentleman has been killed or badly beaten up, just because they look familiar [to Muslims]. Lack of education probably had something to do with that. I think it’s gotten better because of social media. Everyone can access the Internet. You learn lots of new things on the Internet. The ability to communicate that message, or communicate the difference, or the image, that education has helped make things better for people who may have been attacked previously or had bad experiences. I know that it still exists to some extent, but it’s not as bad as before.

Jasmine discussed how the Internet was helping to raise awareness intergenerationally as well. Issues not addressed among members of her parent’s generation, such as suicide and female equality, were now coming to the forefront due to increased attention paid by popular organizations like Sikh Expo, Sikh Coalition, Kaur Life, and Khalsa Aid on their social media pages. Additionally, these organizations aid non-resident Indians (NRIs) in keeping up-to-date on issues back home. From these social media pages, one can follow several hyperlinks to sites in India: online versions of Indian newspapers, business and cultural sites, and temples. As a result, access to online versions of news and culture in India is proportionally higher among diaspora members because the Web is often the only means of accessing such items from India (Gittinger, 2015).
In the greater Reno area, where the Indian population is spatially dispersed in what Skop (2002) terms “saffron suburbs,” the Punjabi-Sikh transnational community is sometimes forced to rely less upon proximity in creating “Little Indias” or other ethnic neighborhoods and more upon community formation based on commonalities that can be identified and shared through transnational thirdsplace and computer-mediated technology. Subsequently, we find that electronic or virtual communities are more common as technology progresses (Gittinger, 2015).

Prior to the isolating and social distancing mandates, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno utilized virtual thirdsplaces in various ways. For example, Amar used the Internet to receive mentorship from a business professional in California and to connect with other Punjabi-Sikhs who share an interest in weightlifting; Sajeev, a medical student, sought guidance from Punjabi-Sikh medical professionals who were otherwise difficult to find in Reno; Jasmine and Harnoor maintained friendships through social media with people overseas; and Gurtej used platforms such as Twitter to forge new friendships with people whose hobbies and opinions aligned with his. All but one participant voiced that these online connections, like their real-world connections, were primarily within the Punjabi-Sikh community. For them, online space presented itself as an ideal site for the recovery of and relationship with other diasporic community members with whom they explore or imagine a cultural kinship (Gajjala, 2008). Online interactions in virtual thirdsplaces became even more necessary during the widespread COVID-19 shutdowns. When in-person gatherings were no longer available, participants had only online space to look to regroup.

**Long-Distance Nationalism and the Farmer Protest**

Since Indian independence in 1947 and the creation of two separate nation-states, the Indian Subcontinent has regularly witnessed ethnic violence (several wars of varying intensity opposing India to Pakistan in 1948, 1965, 1971, 1999), partitions (1947 and 1971), bloody riots, in which different communities have been confronting each other along various lines: religious (Hindus vs. Sikhs, Hindus vs. Muslims), ethnic (Punjabis vs. Bengalis, Sindhis vs. Muhajirs), and
national (Indians vs. Pakistanis, Pakistanis vs. Bangladeshis) (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007). At times, these episodes of violence have reached astonishing levels. In India, ethnic violence has taken on such significance that the word “communalism” has been coined to define the tensions between the major ethnic groups, Hindus and Muslims in particular (Mohammad-Arif & Moliner, 2007). The Farmer Protest further complicated conflicts among ethnic groups in India as Modi’s agricultural laws and right-wing Bharatiya Janata (BJP) political party favored a Hindu nationalist agenda. Anderson (1998) points out that group bonding and formation are strongest when responding to an external threat or conflict and that definitions and boundaries become crystalized when coming in contact with the “other.” In the case of Punjabi farmers and transnationals, the “other” was Prime Minister Modi and the BJP.

In Punjabi-Sikh online spaces during this period, news about the Farmer Protest was impossible to ignore. Newsfeeds on almost every social media platform were filled with scenes of the Indian government attacking protestors, images of people bloody and beaten, and up-to-date tallies of COVID-19 fatalities due to the failing medical infrastructure, which some believed was a purposeful tactic and a form of ethnocide by the Hindu nationalist government to reduce the number of Sikhs gathering to protest. Reno restaurant owner, Sukhbir, followed news of the protest daily and displayed a sign in his restaurant stating, “We support the farmers of India in their protest against Indian Gov’t. No farmers, no food” (Figure 4). He acknowledged that the Farmer issue cut across cultural strata and was dissolving barriers among ethnic groups to create a united front:

Sukhbir (44): The national movement of farmers is so organized that they focus only on farming. They don't care about which part of India you are from. We are farmers, and that is it. The Indian government wants to create divisions. They are spreading false information. The farmers remind everyone that we are a part of the larger farming community. We are not getting involved in the politics of religion or identity. We are just farmers, and we want rights. That's been a strong focus for them. People are coming from all over to protest; it was not just Punjabis. There were Bengalis, Kashmiris—everywhere people were coming to support. That's going to bring about change; it’s bringing people together. I think Modi will disappear. It has affected a lot of communities, not just Sikhs.
The new policies have affected the Islamic community, Hindu community, and the Sikh community. They're using the British technique, divide and conquer. We just have to stay together.

Figure 4. Sign displayed in support of farmers at Punjabi-owned restaurant (Hockaday, 2020).

The dissolution of cultural barriers was also apparent at the two peaceful protests held in Reno on December 6th and 20th, 2020, as Punjabi-Sikhs, -Hindus, and -Muslims worked together to organize the events. The first demonstration was a socially-distanced vehicle rally. Participants gathered at the local university to decorate vehicles and give speeches, followed by a procession of cars and trucks down the heavily trafficked Virginia Street corridor (Figures 5, 6, and 7). Realizing that the vehicle rally was not the most effective method for raising awareness, community members organized a second demonstration next to the famous Reno Arch. They
invited local and international media outlets to attend the gathering, and community leaders provided information to the public about the immediacy of the issue (Figures 8, 9, and 10).

Those not involved in the physical demonstrations of solidarity showed support through social media by sharing information about the local rallies or by raising awareness:

Jasmine (32): If you see me post, it might be about the protests. I haven't been as involved in the local Farmer Protest as much as I want to be. When they went down Virginia Street, I just happened to be driving in the opposite direction, and I saw this whole train of cars. I see that the kids are involved in it, and that's good. This will bring awareness.

Gurtej mentioned his family’s connection to agricultural land in Punjab as a reason for staying informed and noted his efforts to raise awareness via social media, but doubted the efficacy of it:

Gurtej (28): There’s a lot of bad stuff going on in India now. I keep up to date. My dad does as well. We have some land there, agricultural land, not a whole lot. We have somebody taking care of it. Sometimes, my pops will have to go to Punjab for court-related reasons or anything related to the management of that land. We do go often, though. We went twice the last two years, but usually, it's only once a year. We stay for a minimum of two weeks, maybe three-and-a-half or four weeks maximum. We don’t have any family left in Punjab. We typically stay with my dad’s friends from college. It’s not like we can do anything about what’s happening, but we stay informed. I’m raising awareness for sure, social media awareness. How effective is it? I don't know.

Although Gurtej doubted the efficacy of raising awareness on the Internet, he recognizes the importance of international involvement:

Gurtej (28): The only thing that might make a difference is if the government feels shame on a global level. If there's enough pressure applied internationally, they will have to comply. Otherwise, politicians are so shamelessly corrupt in countries like India that they hardly even care, honestly. The government is corrupt in India. I'm sure large companies have given the Prime Minister incentives to create these laws. Offshore accounts full of rupees and for him to live on for the rest of his life. That blinds him to everything else, the people’s struggles. They don't care about the suffering or anything. I don't see any reform on the horizon because anyone with a good idea, or anybody capable of leadership, will not stay around and fix this system. They're going to leave India and go to America, Canada, or Australia.

Contrary to Gurtej’s gloomy outlook on political reform in India, in November of 2021, a year after the protests began and after the death of 650 farmers while on march, Prime Minister
Modi announced a repeal of the three controversial farm laws that threatened to corporatize the country’s agricultural sector, showing what people can achieve even in the most adverse conditions and with added international pressure from the Punjabi-Sikh the diaspora. Modi’s decision came ahead of elections in key states, like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, that are significant agricultural producers and where the BJP is eager to shore up support (Saaliq, 2021). The announcement was made on the morning of the Sikh festival *Guru Parb*, the birth anniversary of *Guru* Nanak, which participants expressed was likely a political stunt and an attempt to win the favor of Punjabi-Sikh farmers before the election.

Figure 5. Reno farmer solidarity car rally event flyer.
Figure 6. Community leaders at the solidarity car rally (Benson, 2020).

Figure 7. Child showing support for farmers through the sunroof of a truck beneath the Reno Arch. (Benson, 2020).
Figure 8. Peaceful protest at the Reno Arch event flyer.

Figure 9. Peaceful protestors at the Reno Arch (Benson, 2020).
Conclusion

The narratives above detail the importance of transnational spaces for creating cultural cohesion among Punjabi-Sikh transnationals in the greater Reno area and their social and political connections to the Punjab homeland. Important implications of the pandemic for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area are that it created barriers to cultural regrouping by restricting gatherings in transnational spaces. Pandemic mandates disrupted religious practice, reduced community interaction, and made it increasingly difficult to transmit culture to the American-raised generation. Another implication was that the pandemic expanded the use of virtual thirdspaces, which, in the case of the global Punjabi-Sikh community, promoted increased transnational involvement in India’s Farmer Protest via online media.

Participants elaborated on the importance of physical gatherings in transnational spaces and the hardships they faced due to their loss during the COVID-19 shutdowns. The dislocating
process of migration had already presented challenges for intergenerational value transmission between Punjabi-Sikh parents and their American-raised children before the pandemic. The ability to uphold cultural traditions, such as the continued use of the Punjabi language, religious practices, and folk dances, are maintained in gathering spaces such as the gurdwara, cultural events, and athletic leagues. These spaces, whether permanent or liminal, provided locations for prayer and community cohesion through social forms of religious practice and spaces to speak their native language, play sports and games, eat traditional foods, and support locally-owned businesses operated by other Punjabi-Sikhs. The challenges of maintaining these cultural traditions became ever more apparent during the pandemic when the usual avenues for cultural grouping were interrupted to prevent the continued spread of the virus.

Participants also elaborated on the space transformations that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, including transforming the home into a substitute gurdwara and refocusing attention to virtual gathering spaces. When religious gathering spaces were no longer available, the home was transformed into a space for cultural regrouping. To withstand the disruption to their daily/weekly religious routines, some Punjabi-Sikhs started reading the holy book at home and utilized online streaming religious services more regularly. Before the pandemic, a few select religious services were live-streamed locally on social media platforms, but these efforts were elevated during the “stay at home” mandates. Despite the numerous online and remote alternatives, participants stated that they were not satisfactory replacements which further highlighted the role of physical gatherings and thirdspaces in the regrouping process for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. However, within the home spaces, participants were surrounded by family who cultivated and reinforced cultural traditions. Thus, extended time spent in the home setting resulted in the strengthening of cultural identity for some participants.

Online thirdspaces were increasingly used for cultural regrouping in the absence of in-person transnational gatherings. Before the isolating and social distancing mandates of the
pandemic, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno employed the Internet to educate others about Sikhi and social issues within Indian culture, connect with Punjabi-Sikhs in other areas for mentorship, build relationships with others who share similar hobbies and ideas, and keep in touch with relatives and friends overseas. Furthermore, increased online exposure to Indian media about the Farmer Protest through popular organizations like Sikh Expo, Sikh Coalition, and Khalsa Aid contributed to new displays of long-distance nationalism by providing daily updates and facilitating mobilization efforts worldwide. In Reno, participants organized two peaceful demonstrations of solidarity and raised awareness about the issue through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Ultimately, the online regrouping experience added international pressure from the global Punjabi-Sikh community and aided in the repeal of Prime Minister Modi’s controversial farm laws, putting an end to the Farmer Protest.

Although every American was personally affected by the isolating COVID-19 government mandates, migrants and transnationals in small to mid-sized urban areas, who depend on social spaces and gatherings to reaffirm a sense of cultural cohesion and belonging, were uniquely affected. Much like the work of Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Price & Whitworth (2004), this research highlighted the vital role of transnational spaces in providing migrants with a link to their communities of origin and opportunities to culturally regroup in their new host societies. Additionally, as in work done by Mitra (1997), Skop (2013), and Gittinger (2015), this research further demonstrated that in the era of social media, increased accessibility, and the rise of the smartphone, computer-mediated communication provides a space for forming virtual communities and digital ethnic neighborhoods. These technologies are utilized to an even greater extent in the context of a global pandemic, the implications of which extend far beyond the boundaries of cities and nations. Through the narratives provided by Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada, this research determined that the space transformations that occurred during the coronavirus pandemic created barriers to cultural regrouping but promoted
increased transnational involvement in homeland issues. Without any doubt, the role of space-transcending technologies in constructing community and identity is important. It illustrates how culture is spatialized through technology and how spatialized technology is infused with cultural values (Skop, 2013).
Chapter Five

Embodied Otherness: Lived Experiences of Xenophobic Discourses in Reno, Nevada

On April 15th, 2021, nineteen-year-old Brandon Scott Hole of Indianapolis armed himself with two rifles and drove to his former place of employment, a FedEx Ground facility staffed predominately by Punjabi-Sikhs (Associated Press, 2021b). After exiting his vehicle, he opened fire on the employees in the parking lot, proceeded to the facility’s entrance, and resumed shooting for approximately four minutes before turning the gun on himself (Winsor, 2021). Of the nine people found dead at the scene, including Hole, four of the victims were Punjabi-Sikh (Associated Press, 2021b). Members of the Indianapolis Sikh community pressed local and federal law enforcement to investigate the shooter's motive, but investigators were hesitant to declare Hole’s conduct an act of hate (Moshtaghian & Holcombe, 2021). While the investigation determined the action was "not racially or ethnically motivated" (Associated Press, 2021b), according to law enforcement, the shooter had reportedly visited White supremacist and neo-Nazi websites prior to the murders (Sikh Coalition, 2020). In an interview with *Vox*, Mallika Kaur, the acting executive director of the Sikh Family Center, stated, “Even if [Hole] had only visually scanned this facility before, there would be questions of targeting those he somehow thought to be different from him. Anyone who does not enjoy the privilege of Whiteness in this country would instantaneously think racism must be investigated as a motive” (Zhou, 2021).

The following month, another gunman opened fire at a Northern California light rail yard. At this San Jose facility, the Valley Transit Authority employed many Punjabi-Sikh community members and transported large numbers of Punjabi-Sikh commuters living in the San Joaquin region (Howland, 2021). During the shooting, Taptejdeep Singh rushed out of an office where his co-workers were hiding and frantically called others to warn them. He ran through the building, trying to secure it, and helped others find safe hiding before he was eventually gunned down in a stairwell (Fernando & Ortiz, 2021). Both shootings deeply impacted the U.S. Punjabi-
Sikh community and renewed concerns about violence that members of the religious group have faced for years (Zhou, 2021), notably since September 11th, 2001 (hereafter 9/11), when they were targeted and mistaken for Muslims, and after the mass shooting by a White supremacist at a gurdwara (Sikh temple) in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, in 2012 (Bahr & Ives, 2021).

As part of the Sikh tradition, many practitioners wear turbans and long hair and beards, attributes that have been Othered in the past or conflated with terrorist stereotypes. Thus, many Punjabi-Sikh Americans have had to navigate anti-Asian sentiments, including the “forever foreigner” trope, and Islamophobia (Zhou, 2021). According to the Sikh Coalition, "way too often, marginalized communities like ours are targeted, and we need to find those sensible measures to ensure that everyone feels safe, whether it's at home, at a place of worship, at school, at work, or the movie theater" (Garcia-Navarro, 2021). They stress the need for federal policymakers to recognize and elevate concern regarding the role White supremacist ideology plays in the loss of life that Punjabi-Sikhs and other minority communities have seen across the nation (Sikh Coalition, 2020).

A growing number of geographers have called for further attention to the embodied, intimate, and emotional aspects of everyday lives to better understand larger social and geopolitical phenomena (Staeheli, Kofman, & Peak, 2004; Fluri, 2009; Dixon & Marston, 2011; Pain & Staeheli, 2014; Pain, 2015). The notion of embodied Otherness focuses on how Othering—a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are labeled as not fitting in within social norms—is ultimately lived, experienced, and embodied in everyday practices in particular spaces. Hence, this research focuses on the lives of Punjabi-Sikhs and how social and geopolitical phenomena have influenced their bodily experiences in everyday spaces. Specifically, this research asks how embodied Otherness has affected their sense of self and belonging in a post-9/11, neonationalist, and anti-Asian society? With this work, I extend discussions on geographies
of embodiment with a specific focus on Punjabi-Sikhs, an understudied, racialized, religious minority group in the Western state of Nevada during this tumultuous and politically charged era.

Plenty of research has focused on the lived experiences of migrant and transnational communities in major metropolitan regions (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008), like Indianapolis and San Jose, yet little work has focused on small or mid-sized urban areas (Singer, 2015). The greater Reno area of Northern Nevada (encompassing Reno, Sparks, and Carson City) is a small to mid-sized urban region that has recently emerged as an immigrant destination. However, this area has been largely overlooked in the literature. This research, therefore, fills the gap in the literature by exploring a previously overlooked small to mid-sized urban area and growing immigrant destination. This work uses the greater Reno area as a model to examine a transnational BIPOC group and how they experience embodied Otherness in their daily lives. This research offers examples of ongoing processes in the greater Reno area, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary migrant and BIPOC experiences in small to mid-sized urban regions in the United States.

The city of Reno is located in the southern part of Washoe County and is the largest city in Northern Nevada (City of Reno, n.d.). Washoe County is Nevada’s second-largest population center, just behind Clark County in the south. While immigrants to Clark County in southern Nevada are more numerous, Washoe County is ethnically diverse with a strong immigrant stream. Carson City and Sparks are smaller, independent cities along Reno’s border, and these three communities are interconnected both socially and economically. Although Nevada is rapidly diversifying, the state's population remains predominately White. According to the United States Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), in the Reno Metropolitan Area, only 19.7% of the population identifies as non-White. In terms of immigrants, Reno contains a 14.3% foreign-born population (American Community Survey, 2020). Compared to the national
average, 24.9% of the population is non-White, and 13.5% are foreign-born (American Community Survey, 2020).

Nevertheless, the greater Reno area has a small but diverse and growing Punjabi-Sikh community. Reno hosts the only two *gurdwaras* in Northern Nevada, and Punjabi-Sikhs from Carson City and Sparks commute for worship weekly or even daily. Since the building of the Reno Sikh Temple in the 1980s, a few other Punjabi-Sikh organizations and institutions have been established nearby, such as the Northern Nevada Sikh Society (NNSS), the Punjabi Cultural & Sports Club, the Reno Sikh Civil Society, and the university-sponsored *Seva* Club. Still, Punjabi-Sikhs remain a racial and religious minority in the predominately White spaces of the greater Reno area.

The way Otherness is lived, experienced, and embodied by the wider Punjabi-Sikh community in contemporary America is influenced by numerous factors. In the specific social and political setting of the greater Reno area, I argue that the way Otherness is lived and embodied by Punjabi-Sikhs is primarily influenced by two things: the intersectionality of their identities (such as gender and age) and geopolitical events (such as 9/11 and the political presence of Donald J. Trump). This research was conducted during the 2020-2021 global pandemic, the 2020 presidential election, and the final year of Donald Trump’s presidency, a presidency widely described as embracing neonationalistic discourses (Hirsh, 2016). By focusing on the narratives of fifteen adult men and women, this research allows for in-depth consideration of the personal biographies and emotion-laden memories and experiences of what it means to be Punjabi-Sikh in Northern Nevada, including the embodied and intersectional dimensions of Othering and their connection to broader geopolitical events. Through person-centered ethnography, this work brings to the forefront the very bodies that are the objects of xenophobic discourses (McGinty, 2018) and actions. In what follows, I first discuss the visible Punjabi-Sikh identity in a post-9/11 and neonationalist world. Second, I describe the methods and data analysis used in the study. The
chapter then proceeds to the empirical section and discussion, which draws on the narratives of the Punjabi-Sikhs interviewed. The chapter then closes with concluding remarks.

The Visible Sikh in a Post-9/11 and Neonationalist World

Identity is a subjective sense that people make for themselves through their perceptions and feelings based on their everyday experiences within wider social relations. All identities are embodied. Identities, such as race, gender, age, and physical or intellectual disability, often have powerful visual and material aspects connected with the body (Alcoff, 2006; Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Each person has a material presence in which they speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, particular culture, particular practices, experiences, and so on. Visible identities are marked on or through the body (Alcoff, 2006). Most identity theories contend that two interdependent processes are necessary for making identifications: the specification of similarities and differences. Therefore, we cannot talk about our identities, either as individuals or groups, without relating to the Other or the stranger (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). People are made strange based on their bodily appearance through what Sara Ahmed (2000) characterizes as reading the bodies of others and telling the differences between what is familiar and what is strange.

Since the birth of the religious tradition, Sikhs have maintained a physical identity that makes them stand out in public, even in the context of South Asia (Sikh Coalition, n.d.). Once initiated into the Khalsa (Sikh community), members are encouraged to wear the Five Ks—kirpan, kesh, kangha, kacherra, and kara—so they can embody the “spiritual tradition” and be “outwardly distinguishable in battle and ready to defend themselves and those in need” (Arora, 2009, p. 26). These five items are not just religious symbols but articles of faith that collectively form external identity and display the devotee's commitment to the Sikh way of life, which includes service, compassion, and social justice (Tatla, 1999). The most visible aspects of the faith are unshorn hair (kesh) and the turban, which can be worn by men and women alike (Ahluwalia, 2013; Sikh
Coalition, 2020), though female adoption of the turban is less common. In the Sikh world, items used in everyday practices such as the turban, kara (bracelet), unshorn hair and beards, and clothing such as the salwar suit, kurta pajamas, and chola take the form of practical and meaningful extensions of the Sikh body. These examples of Sikh everyday practices create Sikh subjects through habituation and inclusion into the Sikh world. The Sikh subject melts into the uniform. A fusion of person and uniform occurs, forming the body with its religious and ethnic identity (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020).

Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, anti-Islamic and anti-Middle Eastern sentiments have been pervasive in the United States (McGinty, 2018; Sian, 2017). In the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. government increasingly implemented special programs with the hopes of curbing and countering terrorism and enemy combatants (Kampf & Sen, 2006). Although not explicitly intended, these programs targeted and disproportionately affected anyone perceived to visually embody the Middle Eastern or Muslim identity. The media has inundated the public with images of “terrorists” with brown skin, turbans, long beards, and Islamic-sounding names (Ahluwalia & Pelletriere, 2010). The stereotypes propagated by the U.S. government and media have led to Middle Easterners and Muslims being viewed “as intrinsically violent and evil” (Joshi, 2006, p. 218).

The ensuing climate of Islamophobia after 9/11 resulted in a massive upsurge of discrimination, hate crimes, and human rights violations against the Punjabi-Sikh community (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Although 99% of men wearing turbans in the U.S. are of the Sikh religious group, the powerful images depicted by the media of Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders wearing turbans has caused them to be associated with extremism and terrorism (Ahluwalia, 2011). Consequently, Punjabi-Sikhs who choose to maintain their religious symbols and outward identity bear the burden of looking like terrorists in the eyes of many Americans (Grewal, 2003;
Sian, 2017), despite their distinct religious views, geographic homeland, native language, and turban style (Gohil & Sidhu, 2008; Kaur Sandhu, 2019).

The 2016 United States presidential election cycle and inauguration of Donald J. Trump amplified a wave of hate violence against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities to heights not seen since the year immediately following 9/11 (Kumar, 2016; Sunar, 2017; Ewart & O’Donnell, 2018; Rana, Qin, & Vital-Gonzalez, 2019). While Islamophobia and hate violence in the United States pre-date the September 11th era and have continued to escalate since, the dramatic surge in rhetoric rooted in anti-Black, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant sentiment in 2016 and 2017 fueled a substantial and unparalleled atmosphere of hate and suspicion (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017; SAALT, 2018). The first year of President Trump's administration built upon the already disturbing surge in hate violence as documented in a 2017 report by the advocacy group South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT). SAALT's analysis reported 207 incidents of hate violence and xenophobic political rhetoric aimed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities during the 2016 election cycle (defined as November 1st, 2015 to Election Day on November 8th, 2016) (SAALT, 2018). The report showed that one in five perpetrators of hate violence referenced President Trump, a Trump policy, or a Trump campaign slogan, underlining a strong link between President Trump’s anti-Muslim agenda and hate violence post-election (SAALT, 2018). His inflammatory and divisive rhetoric emboldened the perpetrators of hate crimes, validated xenophobic sentiments (Edwards & Rushin, 2018), and appealed to the Christian Right and many secular neonationalists (Haynes, 2021). Overall, the campaign and presidency of Donald Trump energized the radical right and unleashed strong xenophobic and racist passions with detrimental outcomes (McGinty, 2018; Thompson, 2021), a frenzy that continued throughout the 2020 presidential election.
Mahalingam (2012) states that Punjabi-Sikhs have faced a triple dilemma in the aftermath of 9/11, and as many civil rights groups and I argue, after the inauguration of President Trump. Mahalingam speaks to the psychological complexity Punjabi-Sikhs experience navigating their Punjabi-Sikh identity, the pressures of being part of the model minority, and the difficulties of a misembodied marginalized identity. Due to misembodiment—which Mahalingam defines as “the notion of embodying a wrong or mistaken identity” (p. 302)—this research shows that Punjabi-Sikhs experience a higher level of anxiety, shame, and greater body awareness due to being constantly objectified and misidentified by others in everyday spaces. For many Punjabi-Sikhs, their psychological well-being is also adversely affected by having to “negotiate the social expectations and judgments of their embodied as well as their misembodied identities” (Mahalingam, 2012, p. 302-303).

While misembodiment is a common experience for Punjabi-Sikhs, I have been cautious in studying and representing them only through the lens of misidentification and mistaken identity. Assuming that Punjabi-Sikhs are only mistakenly targeted, instead of acknowledging that individual perpetrators of discrimination and hate crime may intentionally target Punjabi-Sikhs, marginalizes the Punjabi-Sikh community and overlooks their pain (Afridi, 2013). As Harleen Kaur (2020) has stated, it is not solely a case of mistaken identity but an Othered identity that folds Punjabi-Sikhs into a larger racialized religious category and also incorporates those whom the U.S. government and media identify as enemies of the state. The embodied Otherness described in this research explores the lived and emotional experiences of xenophobic discourses and actions in everyday spaces for Punjabi-Sikhs in a post-9/11 and neonationalist world.

**Methodology**

This study relied on the interviews of fifteen adult men and women who were self-described as Punjabi-Sikhs. Similar to other faiths, there are variations in observance; I placed no restriction on the participants’ level of religiosity or familiarity with Sikh doctrines. The fifteen
participants ranged in age from nineteen to sixty-nine, with an average of thirty-nine years. Their backgrounds varied; some migrated directly from Punjabi villages, some were American-born or American-raised with immigrant parents, and others step migrated from other regions. Most participants were independent entrepreneurs or were employed in the family business, mainly in the hospitality and foodservice industries, while others were students or stay-at-home parents. Participants were recruited from multiple sources independent of each other and wherever I could solicit participation during the pandemic. I visited both gurdwaras and numerous businesses in the region where Punjabi-Sikhs congregated, interviewees were asked for referrals, and participants were recruited via social media (Instagram). I created an Instagram page devoted to the research and utilized that social media account to communicate with and recruit volunteers.

The analysis presented in this paper relied on participant observation, semistructured interviews, and focus groups. Semistructured interviews and focus groups were forty-five minutes to two hours in length, and the majority of participants were interviewed three times to capture the rich details of their experiences. Interviews were conducted primarily in English and a Punjabi translator was used when necessary. Conversations took place at local restaurants and coffee shops, Punjabi-Sikh-owned businesses, and informants’ homes. Fourteen participants were interviewed in person, and one participant was interviewed over FaceTime due to childcare difficulties and the threat of the ongoing pandemic. Although participant observation was limited during fieldwork due to public health restrictions, in 2017, I conducted a pilot study that helped me make connections, build relationships and trust with participants, frame the research, and provide the context used to interpret the data.

Discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed through qualitative exploratory coding to highlight emergent themes. First, comments from interviews were coded with respect to how participants were made to feel Othered in everyday spaces and contexts in the greater Reno area. Second, the initial coding results were re-coded if they related to the embodied
and intersectional (gendered or generational) dimensions of Othering. Third, results were again analyzed, paying attention to experiences with Othering and their connection to broader geopolitical events. The results from this analysis were designed to better understand Punjabi-Sikh experiences with embodied Otherness in a post-9/11 and neonationalist world, and this coding became the basis for identifying these experiences and the spaces and contexts in which they occurred. I do not claim that the following narratives are a comprehensive list of all incidents with embodied Otherness or that these experiences occur evenly across the Punjabi-Sikh population in all small to mid-sized urban areas in the United States; instead, these are what emerged throughout this project.

In the following discussion, I pay particular attention to the examples related to embodied Otherness for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area's particular geographic and social setting. Careful thematic analysis of participants’ interviews generated two overarching themes and their corresponding sub-themes. Below, each theme and sub-themes will be discussed in greater detail. The narratives presented in the coming sections provide insight into the personal biographies and emotion-laden memories and experiences of what it means to be Punjabi-Sikh in Northern Nevada, including the embodied and intersectional dimensions of Othering and their connection to broader geopolitical events. Transcripts have been edited for clarity, spelling, and grammar, and all names are pseudonyms.

**Intersectional Dimensions of Othering**

Each participant provided at least one example of how the xenophobia and misembodiment experienced by the Punjabi-Sikh community emotionally and psychologically impacted them, a family member, or someone close to them. Despite heightened awareness and first- or second-hand experiences with xenophobia and misembodiment, all participants expressed that they felt at home in the greater Reno area. They claim their home through various everyday practices in spaces such as the university campus and parks and streetscapes where they conduct
cultural and sporting activities. However, most participants identified how Othering was a common experience, but what they experienced differed significantly. These experiences varied depending on the intersectionality of the body in question. Thus, two sub-themes emerged: “Generational Dimensions of Othering” and “Gendered Dimensions of Othering.”

**Generational Dimensions of Othering**

Of the fifteen people interviewed, eight were first-generation immigrants, four were American-born natives, and three arrived in Nevada before the age of sixteen. All participants described how their experiences differed from their first-generation immigrant parents or their second-generation American-born or American-raised children. Six of the second-generation participants were not yet born or were very young at the time of the September 11th attacks but had come of age during the Trump administration. While both Punjabi-Sikh adults and youth were deeply impacted by the 9/11 backlash, children were the most vulnerable (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010). Sidhu & Gohil (2009) state that because of developmental immaturity and lack of cultural sensitivity, Punjabi-Sikh children are far more prone to experience teasing and harassment from other children. Some of the racially charged verbal harassment inflicted on Punjabi-Sikh children at school include the following: "go back to Afghanistan," "son/daughter of Osama bin Laden," and "don't talk to this boy/girl because he/she may blow you up" (Sidhu & Gohil, 2009; Verma, 2010; Sikh Coalition, 2014). While attending K-12 school in Carson City, Harnoor had mostly non-Punjabi-Sikh friends who accepted her for who she was. Nonetheless, she often received hurtful remarks about her visible identity and its association with terrorism from her peers at school:

Harnoor (20): In seventh grade, there was a kid that used to call me “terrorist” every single day. Every day! I had a class with him, and he’d say, “You look like a terrorist.” One year, at the Nevada Day Parade, he had taken pictures of my grandpa and other uncles wearing turbans. He asked, “Are you related to these terrorists?” He would always refer to me or anyone else in a turban as “terrorists” and nothing else. I was never able to stand up to him. When I'm in those uncomfortable situations, I sometimes laugh. That's my coping mechanism. Some people get angry or quiet down; there are so many different
ways to react. My response was laughter. It was never me laughing as though I thought it was funny, but it was just me not knowing how to deal with the situation. I think he took my laughter as permission to continue until a teacher finally sat down and talked with him.

Additionally, Harnoor was acutely aware of “the looks” she would receive when out and about in the greater Reno area when she was younger. The stares made her want to abandon her Punjabi-Sikh identity for the sake of fitting in:

Harnoor (20): When I was younger, that’s all I ever wanted to do was fit in and make sure that I was very much a part of American culture. On Sundays, we’d go to Reno and the gurdwara, and afterward, my parents would say, “let’s go to the mall,” or “watch a movie,” or “get some food.” I always brought a change of clothes because I didn’t want to be out in my Indian attire. People would stare. I remember wanting to fit in so badly. After a while, though, I stopped caring. People will stare at you, but some appreciate it and love looking at it. It’s nothing to be ashamed of.

Harnoor’s experience provides a keen example of how Otherness works through everyday relationships, as well as on the intimate space of the body (McGinty, 2018). The stares her body received and the fear of rejection by her peers at school brought about the desire to abandon her identity to shift perceptions of her Punjabi-Sikh body away from associations with terrorism. This action had psychological effects, triggering painful feelings of betrayal and distrust within herself (McGinty, 2018). However, Harnoor indicated that the bodily awareness she experienced in youth gradually faded with age and was replaced by a newfound pride in Punjabi-Sikh culture and visibility.

During interviews, second-generation participants were far more forthcoming about incidents in which they were made to feel like outsiders and tended to internalize negative encounters, which affected their sense of self and belonging. Sajeev, a twenty-two-year-old medical student, questioned whether or not he belonged in Nevada’s medical community because of his corporeal identity:

Sajeev (22): Med school emphasizes community, inclusivity, and lack of judgment—like a lot—and that’s ironic because I don't think I've ever been judged more on my appearance than when I got into med school. It's such a small community, and they see the same demographic over and over again. There’s a girl in the class above me, she has a
hijab, and she's practicing medicine, right? I talked to her a couple of weeks after starting, about how it was for her in med school, and she told me it was really difficult to integrate. The med school does a good job of providing resources and support systems, but at the end of the day, they already have their ideal doctors in mind. There's an image, and it doesn't necessarily include a person with a turban or a hijab. In California, I would assume lots of doctors wear turbans, but in Nevada, not so much. The med school has been around for fifty-two years now, and I'm the first turbaned Sikh to attend, as far as I know… [Discrimination at] the rodeo? That never surprises me. I'm used to that. The med school thing, however, caught me off-guard. I did not expect that at all. It was kind of painful at the beginning because you have the stress of med school alone, which breaks people down consistently, and then you have this added aspect of like, am I really a part of this community? Because sometimes you just don't feel like it.

The realities of identities often come from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them (Alcoff, 2006). At the intersection between identity and spatiality emerges the problem of spatial identities or belonging—the issue of “feeling at home.” To be at home in the world is tied to feeling a certain comfort (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). In Sajeev’s example, the visual aspect of his body made him feel out-of-place and uncomfortable in med school. When participants, like Sajeev, were made aware that they stood out in everyday spaces, perceiving the judgments of others, it affected their overall comfort and resulted in moments of disorientation and alienation.

Although the second-generation participants more often internalized encounters in which they were made to feel Othered and out-of-place, all of them acknowledged that the first-generation migrants—those who were present in the United States during, or shortly after, the September 11th attacks—had to endure frequent and more severe bigotry, xenophobia, and institutional discrimination, in addition to the challenges already presented by the migratory process and assimilating into a new host society. Manpreet elaborated on her father’s first-generation experiences in a post-9/11 society and how his misembodied identity caused him to be a target for hate crime. She emphasized that existing in a climate of Islamophobia caused her
father to live in a state of perpetual fear. She noted that the situation was improving but that ethnic and racial bias remain a part of her everyday life:

Manpreet (19): It’s worse for our parents, in my opinion. I was born in 2001, a couple of months before the bombing. My parents were here then. They came a couple of years prior, but it was harder for them to adapt after it happened. My dad is a full Sikh. He has a beard, the long hair, the turban—everything. Back then, people had the misconception that he was a terrorist or a Muslim. They assumed he had a bomb or whatever. Since he arrived in the United States, he has worked at gas stations and liquor stores to earn a living and move up in society. He received a ton of death threats, was robbed, held at gunpoint, and even got jumped, all because of the way he looked. He felt like he was in constant danger, you know? It has gotten a lot better through the years. Obviously, it's still there; you’re always going to have those people. I'm just saying, the White people in our generation are more understanding than older White people in my parent’s generation, you know?

Immediately following 9/11, many first-generation immigrants opted to disguise their bodily identities to avoid being targeted and misrecognized in everyday spaces. However, similar to the American-born and American-raised generation, the desire to mask their unique and visible identities faded with time. Harnoor detailed her grandfather’s experience:

Harnoor (20): Carson City is majority White; as a Sikh, it’s easy to feel singled out here. The older generations lived through 9/11 and all the misunderstandings afterward. My grandpa used to wear a baseball cap instead of a turban when going out in Carson. His head had to be covered, but he didn’t want to wear his turban because he was worried about being targeted. My grandpa is less afraid of wearing his turban now, though. He doesn’t feel right wearing his baseball cap. He doesn’t wear hats at all anymore. I think he’s becoming more comfortable. Times are changing… We want to wear what is traditional, and we want to stick to our traditional roots.

In the White world, as Fanon (1967) says, under the influence of the White gaze, the person of color develops a third-person consciousness: a consciousness of one’s body as a body-for-others. Participants must reconcile themselves to the double consciousness, experiencing one’s body from both the inside and outside (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). The narrative provided by Harnoor demonstrates how the Punjabi-Sikh body is objectified by the White gaze in the greater Reno area. Harnoor was aware that the Punjabi-Sikh outward appearance made her and her grandfather “strangers” in their majority-White community. She was reflexive about their clothing and bodily appearance. For them, it is a fundamental part of their being and self-identity.
In relation to the negative social construction of the turban, Harnoor believes it is necessary to be proud and stay strong. In this manner, there is an element of resistance in wearing the turban. Much like the headscarf (*hijab*) worn by Muslim women, the turban becomes a political symbol, part of a fight against stereotypes and a state that tries to control their religious bodies (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). This means that the body, as a producer of difference, calls forth a right to difference, formulated against the forces of homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchically organized power (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020).

In contrast to the candidness of the American-raised generation, first-generation immigrants were not as forthcoming about their experiences with Othering and tended not to internalize negative encounters. However, this does not mean they were not affected; instead, they had an alternative way of processing and responding. Rather than dwelling on negative experiences, they tried to remain unbothered and instead focused on using their bodies for work and generating income. These first-generation gentlemen shared their perspectives:

Jasmeet (52): Even White people like, you know, somebody who has freckles. “Oh, you freckled face!” Somebody is going to feel bad. I mean, oh, it's just kids. You know? People talking. As long as it doesn't turn violent. Younger people are more sensitive than us.

Jagpreet (51): Yes, as long as we don't get threatened for our life. I think that we, as an age group, are more prepared than the younger people who are born here. They ask themselves this question, why are we going through this? You know? You have to accept it. That's how you're brought into this world. This is my color, and I will face that at some point in my life. Do I make a big deal out of it? No. Do I react? Reacting can create a bigger problem.

Navtej (50): We go where there's work that we can do, work that we love, and then we make that the home. There's no complaining, just put the head down and go to work. That's the philosophy. Overall, we don't really look at things in a negative sense. Like, oh my god, you know what? Here, I don't feel safe. Can we move somewhere else? We don't do that. It's not in our mindset. To us, it's more like, put your head down, get to work, and do what you got to do.

Jasmeet (52): Once, I was in a store shopping, and there was a big guy, a pretty buff guy. He came right up to me and said, “Hey you, man, I'm gonna kick your ass!” I was shopping and then, you know, he said he’s going to kick my ass. He had just served in Afghanistan, so he was kind of messed up in his head. It just came right out. He said, “Man, I'm gonna kill you right here.” Then the store manager came around and kicked him out. Whatever. These things happen.
Throughout fieldwork, it became evident that first-generation participants were more inclined to dismiss the incidents in which they were made to feel like the Other in everyday spaces. First-generation participants approached xenophobic encounters with a “dust yourself off” mentality, so to speak. They attempted not to let the events inconvenience them and opted not to repeat the victim narratives they said were embodied by the younger generation. Additionally, first-generation Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno were often reluctant to point fingers in overtly political directions or even assume that actions against them were racially or culturally motivated.

**Gendered Dimensions of Othering**

Eighty percent of participants (twelve) recognized how Punjabi-Sikh males, especially those with turbans, were perceived as a threat or the enemy and how their presence aroused fear, suspicion, and discomfort in others. Because of the turban, their religious identities are at the forefront of everyday social interactions and, therefore, have different experiences and movements in various city spaces. Six of the fifteen participants were females, four of whom reported not feeling as directly targeted as Punjabi-Sikh males, and say they experienced few personal instances of discrimination. Although most Sikh females keep unshorn hair, many participants remarked that they could blend in more easily because they do not wear the turban, the most visible aspect of Sikh identity (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). While female participants described how their daily lives were not as impacted as the lives of their male counterparts, many females did underscore how the xenophobia and misembodiment experienced by their male family members and the larger Punjabi-Sikh community have significantly impacted their lives.

On separate occasions, Gurtej and Manpreet identified the unique struggles that first-generation Punjabi-Sikh parents faced, particularly when it came to the visibility of their sons. Both participants noted how parental hypervigilance was presented when concerning male bodies:
Manpreet (19): Because of how our parents were treated when they arrived, they are afraid of us going through the same thing. My mom and dad are just trying to keep us safe—as every parent should—but my brother has a beard and long hair. When he goes out, my parents are always worried. What if something happens when he’s out? What if some racist comes up to him and, you know, pulls out a gun or something? They've experienced it firsthand, so they're always afraid for him.

Gurtej (28): Yeah, I had a turban. I never thought that I wouldn’t have one. My dad suggested that I get a haircut because he didn't want me to become a victim of a hate crime or something. The first time he brought it up, I just walked away because I was kind of offended. After a couple of talks, we determined that that was the right decision. That's when I got my first haircut. I was going to school out of state for graduate studies, and he wanted to make sure that everything was going to be okay when I was far from home. It wasn’t one of those decisions that caused a ruckus or anything. It was done after several conversations with the family. Mostly, the pressure I felt was in terms of who I would be without my hair. I thought I would have an identity crisis—I did—but that’s done now. [When wearing the turban] I noticed people would often not associate with me because I was different. Oftentimes, I would be sitting somewhere, and people would sit away from me… If my dad has had an incident, he doesn't talk about it. He never brings it up.

Gurtej noted that removing his bodily identifiers placed him in a dilemma of choosing to either prioritize his religious identification or risk being targeted (Kaur Sandhu, 2019), which resulted in an “identity crisis.” This dilemma was present in the decision for some male participants to either maintain or remove their religious markers to counter the discourse of suspicion mapped onto their bodies and, for example, decrease the desire of others to move away from them in public spaces. Such accounts bring to light the pressure society places on Punjabi-Sikhs to conform to a particular status-quo so that their difference is never irreconcilable (Singh VanderBeek, 2019). Jasmine, additionally, recognized a few men in her life who have felt the pressure to remove such religious markers:

Jasmine (32): My brother-in-law has told my husband multiple times, “cut your beard” or “stop wearing the turban,” but he refuses. On the other hand, my dad has always worn a turban, but he’s comfortable going without it. He has really short hair, but if he goes to the temple, or to see family, or somewhere special, then he’ll wear it. Otherwise, he does not wear his turban anymore… I had a friend in school who cut his hair. If he had stayed in India, I don’t think he would have done that. Going to school here and seeing that he was different made him want to cut it. It was pretty long, too.
As stated in the previous section, all second-generation participants described incidents in which they were made to feel different and bullied at school. The developmental immaturity and lack of cultural sensitivity in children meant that both genders frequently experienced racially charged verbal harassment at a young age. Being called a “terrorist” or “Osama bin Laden” and a “suicide bomber” were common occurrences. While all participants had personal histories of bullying, males were disproportionately affected by their noticeable religious affiliation. Amar described how bullying inspired him to get into weightlifting to protect himself:

Amar (26): In school, kids were dumb, but I was bigger than everybody. That’s the reason I started working out. I was in India in boarding school at the time, and I was like, I’m going to go back to the U.S., and I’m going to get big. I was going to be a freshman in high school, and I knew that if I didn’t make myself big and scary I would get messed around with.

Likewise, Harnoor was bullied at school but recounted the heartache she experienced when witnessing her brother contend with unequal teasing:

Harnoor (20): My high school had a majority of White kids. We did this exercise in one of my classes, and the motto was "It's cool to be kind." The idea was to create a giant flower, and every student got a petal. The instructions were to write the rudest thing someone has said to you on the petal. People wrote things like you’re not smart, you’re not this, you’re not that. My brother and I were in that same class and we both, unbeknownst to each other, wrote “terrorist.” The two girls reading the petals out loud felt uncomfortable reading ours. My brother and I looked at each other—there’s no one else in this class who has been called a “terrorist”… My brother always tried to fit in. Making friends was hard for him because he was very shy growing up. I remember he was afraid to show me this one picture circulating throughout our school. When I asked what he was so scared to show me, he said, “You’re gonna get mad, and you’ll report it.” It was a picture of him photoshopped onto a suicide bomber. He had an explosive jacket, and there were ghosts around him. He was like, “Everyone else thinks it’s funny.” I said, “This is awful! Why are you letting them do this? No, it’s not okay!”

Harnoor became noticeably triggered when recounting her brother's misembodiment. The actions of their schoolmates marked and racialized Harnoor's brother's identity and body as different and deviant, a body that other children did not want to associate with. This account signifies a gendered process of racialization through which the self-presentation of male Punjabi-Sikh bodies are judged as unwanted and abnormal, often forcing males to uncover and cut their
hair and dress in "normal" clothes, which then dishonors their faith, as Sikh identity sometimes alienates those who do not entirely ascribe to that formation (Singh VanderBeek, 2019). These embodied experiences are highly gendered and further illustrate how xenophobic attitudes are acted upon the Punjabi-Sikh body.

**Connection to Geopolitical Events**

Geopolitical events such as 9/11, influence the way Punjabi-Sikhs experience embodied Otherness in the everyday spaces. Twelve of the fifteen participants noted how 9/11 and Islamophobia impacted their bodily experience or that of someone close to them. Over half of the participants mentioned Donald J. Trump’s 2016 ascent to the White House, his presidency, and the 2020 presidential election as additional influencing factors. Accordingly, two sub-themes emerged: “9/11 and Misembodiment” and “Increased Fear Under the Trump Administration.”

**9/11 and Misembodiment**

There have been several studies in the United States from various disciplines about the damaging consequences that misrecognition has for the Punjabi-Sikh community, particularly following 9/11 (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010; Arora, 2013; Mahalingam, 2012). Participants spoke directly about their experiences with internalized Islamophobia and misembodied identity and described feeling different, like a foreigner in their own country, in the aftermath of the 9/11 geopolitical event. That event brought the question of national identity to the forefront for many Punjabi-Sikhs. Several participants reported having uncertainty over this question. They expressed an emotional ambivalence connected to the conflict between feeling American and not being recognized as such by others. Rather, they expressed having one leg in each camp and having a hybrid or hyphenated identity (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). The feelings can be summed up as “I feel American but…” Many respondents could not speak about their Americanness without this “but,” which is connected to the experiences of being reproduced as a border figure of the nation (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020), especially after 9/11. The result is a
double position between inclusion/exclusion and proximity/distance, mirroring the contradictions
between how the respondents identify themselves and how they are identified by others
(Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Amarjot touched on his outsider status here:

Amarjot (50): Reno is home away from home. I still have a pull to my motherland as I
have fond memories of growing up there. Sometimes there are situations that make me
think we will never be treated the same here, and we will always be outsiders, such as the
attacks on Sikh temples and Sikh men after 9/11.

Harnoor, although born and raised in Carson City, also feels like an outsider. Harnoor
described her family’s fear and insecurities triggered by the violent attacks. Each year on the
annual remembrance of 9/11, family members warn her to stay vigilant and not to go out in public
to avoid being targeted:

Harnoor (20): Every 9/11, we are told to go home immediately after work or school. The
instructions are to go to school and come straight back home. No staying out. One time,
my grandpa and I had to pick up my grandma’s medication, and someone tried to run us
over! The vehicle had a remembering sticker on it or a memorial to 9/11. My grandpa
said, “This is why I don't want you to leave the house!” The one time we left the house
on 9/11, someone tried to hit us with their car.

Harnoor’s account demonstrates how anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence infuse everyday
spaces and change everyday routines (McGinty, 2018). On the annual 9/11 remembrance,
familiar streetscapes become unsafe spaces for anyone perceived to embody a Muslim or Middle
Eastern identity. Like many other South Asian, Muslim, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab
communities, Punjabi-Sikhs “just lived with it” (McGinty, 2018). For Harnoor, this experience
triggered an awareness of her vulnerability, a sense of vulnerability that was already a part of her
parents’ and grandparents’ everyday lives. In this manner, embodied Islamophobia becomes an
integral part of the Punjabi-Sikhs’ sense of self and belonging. Harnoor’s account serves as a
reminder that Punjabi-Sikh bodies continue to be concrete and material targets for anti-Muslim
sentiments in everyday spaces.
On the weekend of the attack, Sukhbir recounted how he embarked on a houseboat trip with friends and suddenly felt their relationships had changed. An unfamiliar weight burdened him, and he quickly realized he was the “problem.” He reported how the incident left him feeling:

Sukhbir (44): We were going on a houseboat with friends in Shasta on the same weekend that 9/11 happened. I was the only brown man in the whole group. Everyone else was of European descent. I had a feeling that something wrong was going to happen, even though I’d been their friend for years. Even I doubted my friends at that time. I was only nervous for the first day or two. Otherwise, it was okay. My friends were talking. Maybe they were making fun and being racist, not intentionally. They were saying, “Your people did this.” They were just making fun of it. I don't know. There was discomfort, but I chose not to confront it.

Sukhbir’s example illustrates how the global production of fear is played out and experienced in everyday life (Pain et al., 2008). It is a kind of banal racism (Katz, 2007) where geopolitical conflicts and the fear of terror become compressed into the intimacies of everyday life and incorporated into everyday embodied encounters (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Sukhbir experienced his Otherness through the visual as the only BIPOC body in attendance. He was fixed and dissected under the eyes of his friends, and his very presence provided the group with a body to ascribe blame. Their “jokes” and banal racism left him feeling nervous and uncomfortable in a situation that, before 9/11, would have been a more relaxed encounter.

Punjabi-Sikhs experience becoming Others in the movements they make when entering a place. Their rejection or surveillance produces them as body suspects already recognized as strangers (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). University students Manpreet and Ramneek described how visits to the airport were often uncomfortable due to the suspicion mapped onto their bodies by airport security as a consequence of the heightened awareness that came about after 9/11. They recalled:

Manpreet (19): Recently, we went to the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. We had to go through security, and I was wearing my suit [salwar kameez] because it was on a Sunday. My uncle was wearing his turban and stuff. We’d normally wear regular clothes, but that day we were wearing that because we had gone to services at the gurdwara. I went through the metal detector, and it was beeping because my suit had all these metal designs on it. A lady started searching me, and I was like, “It's just my suit. Can you not
see the metal designs?” When it came to my uncle, they started patting his turban down and the whole process. *Why are you here? What are you here for? What are you doing at the airport? Show us your paperwork.* They were getting unnecessarily upset. We are not here to do any harm. We’re just trying to pick up our cousin and go. They took us into the searching room. I was like, okay, fine. It’s not like I have a frickin’ bomb with me. They took a long time with my uncle because of the turban. Everyone in security was kind of terrified and a little hesitant. At that point, you start to question yourself. *Do I have anything on me? Did I do anything?*

Ramneek (22): You know you didn't do anything. You know nothing's wrong, but you feel like a criminal. You’re like, what if I was just a *normal* person?

Being viewed as a suspect at the airport caused both women to question their identities. This suggests, as Sibley (1995) states, the ways in which boundaries emerge, separating “good” bodies from “bad” bodies, the stereotypical representations of others that inform social practices of exclusion and inclusion but which, at the same time, define the self. Their example illustrates what Simonsen and Koefoed (2020) call “the technology of racism” and how it operates and incorporates discourses of “stranger danger” in the bodily encounter. The “stranger” is stopped because they are imagined as the origin of danger, related to trouble and violence (p. 36). The young women are not strangers because they are unknown; they are already recognized as such the moment they are faced or seen. Both women described the emotional effects and feeling out-of-place in this process of estrangement (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020).

**Increased Fear Under the Trump Administration**

The 2016 presidential election embodied a social shift as the first Black U.S. President was replaced by a conservative, anti-immigration candidate who rose to power on the strength of his populistic rhetoric (Hall, Goldstein, & Ingram, 2016), and centered his campaign on countering the dangers of a stigmatizing social Other (Papakyriakopoulos & Zuckerman, 2021). Donald Trump’s ascent to political power corresponded with the emergence of identity and migration-related issues dominating the Trump political agenda. As Trump gained prominence, he systematically transgressed developing norms promoting social diversity (Conway, Repke, & Houck, 2017), criticizing them as partisan values while supporting elements of “White identity
politics” (Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2016). In such a manner, Trump’s rhetoric suggested a “zero-sum game in which the empowerment of ethnic, social, and gender minorities results in discrimination against White Americans” (Papakyriakopoulos & Zuckerman, 2021, p. 467). This position found startling levels of electoral support, and Trump’s 2016 election was seen as part of a cultural backlash (Papakyriakopoulos & Zuckerman, 2021).

Eight of the fifteen participants noted feeling more fearful and on heightened alert under the Trump administration. Many of them cited Trump’s incendiary speech toward minorities as the origin of their worry and the influence such media had on the White masses. Harnoor described feeling uneasy immediately following Trump’s 2016 election and the lack of accountability among his followers and discriminatory offenders:

Harnoor (20): [When] Trump got elected [in 2016], the next day, I felt uncomfortable on campus. All these people felt empowered to come forward and park on campus with their trucks with Confederate flags on the back. They got into no trouble whatsoever. There are so many things they could get away with… Trump got elected around the time we had the Nevada Day parade. I remember this 6-year-old kid yelling, “I can't wait for Trump to get elected so we can build a wall and throw all your people over!” We were walking past. It was our float walking past. Some people would scream and hold up Trump flyers when we walked by.

Harnoor expressed distress and bewilderment at the racialized comment articulated by a child in the audience. Not only was the Punjabi-Sikh parade procession not recognized by their true identity, but they were reduced to being identified as simply non-White bodies undeserving of existing in Trump’s America. The Punjabi-Sikh procession carried a “foreignness” and “difference” (visible physical and cultural attributes such as skin color and clothing) directly on their bodies (McGinty, 2018) and was, therefore, the object of an anti-immigrant attack. Harnoor continued to describe the fear she experienced leading up to the 2020 presidential election. She discussed the change she felt in her neighborhood and how the behavior of people wearing Trump campaign merchandise made her feel uncomfortable and singled out as a BIPOC body in everyday spaces:
Harnoor (20): In the neighborhood that I live in, every single house has a Trump 2020 flag or those little signs that pin into the lawn. I always thought my neighborhood was a safe and comfortable place, but seeing that everyone supports Trump—who is very open about being disrespectful and rude to minorities—supporting him means you feel that way, too. That’s a big indicator. When people are outright like that, it’s not something that makes you feel comfortable whatsoever… [Recently] my mom and I went out for coffee after going to the gurdwara. We were wearing our traditional Indian clothes. People were wearing Trump 2020 masks, and they stared at us the entire time we ordered. We were just wearing clothing. There’s no need to bump shoulders, or say anything, or be rude…With everything that’s going on politically… with the Trump election going on… I receive a lot of double-takes. People look at me differently. People look at minorities differently now.

Prior to Trump’s 2016 presidential win, some conservative Americans felt isolated and alienated from the rise of progressive values in American society and saw them as replacing traditional norms (Papakyriakopoulos & Zuckerman, 2021). Consequently, these voters were drawn to Trump’s “us-versus-them” rhetoric (Bucy et al., 2020). Trump profited from these identity politics by promoting his anti-immigration position (Pal et al., 2018), demonizing minorities and social groups, and arguing that dominant populations were being deprived of their rights and prosperity (Marchlewksa et al., 2018). Such rhetoric has an emboldening effect—commonly referred to as the Trump Effect—among the prejudiced, particularly where it is not clearly and firmly condemned by political actors (Newman et al., 2020). Sukhbir commented on the presence of “strangers” who recently made themselves more visible as a result of the Trump effect and how their presence in everyday spaces made him question his family’s belonging:

Sukhbir (44): The last four years [Trump’s presidency] were a mess. These people come out of nowhere. We saw big trucks and big flags, Trump and all that stuff, that made it uncomfortable where you didn’t feel at home. The U.S. was not home. Well, it was still home, but strangers were coming out of nowhere. There’s so much discrimination. What the hell happened to this town? In my neighborhood, there are a few people who have Trump flags… My wife was scared… She did a bit of research online which neighbors were Trump supporters. We were at the point where she was like, “If he wins or something happens, I want to move.” I was stressed out because she was stressed out. What are we doing in this society that doesn’t care, and there’s no equal justice for everyone? That’s what made me nervous. They had the power… I didn’t feel comfortable raising the kids in that kind of environment.
In both the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, Trump’s right-wing ideology was characterized by a rhetoric of exclusion, targeting minorities as a threat while promoting White supremacy (Giroux, 2017). Within this rhetoric, Trump described Muslims as narrow-minded people who cannot culturally integrate into Western society due to their religion and traditional beliefs. He depicted them as a peril to society and ascribed them dangerous attributes (Daghigh & Rahim, 2020). Unfortunately, since 9/11, bodies that have been consolidated into the racialized “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” category as a signifier of non-White Otherness (Naber, 2008) bear the brunt of Trump’s inflammatory speech and have had to suffer negative consequences.

**Conclusion**

A superficial understanding of intergroup differences often gives rise to the misidentification of minorities based on appearance alone. Misrecognition closes off opportunities and possibilities for cross-cultural engagement and interaction and has significant consequences for people’s ability to live together and share everyday spaces comfortably (Martineau, 2012). By exploring the intersectional and misembodied identities of Punjabi-Sikhs, and the relationship between Othering and broader geopolitical events, this research provides a relational account of social identification that emphasized corporeality, their visibility, and their basis in lived experience (Alcoff, 2006). The narratives presented illustrate common situations and experiences with embodied Otherness, all of which are connected to the visual identities of the respondents. Everyday spaces such as airports, schools, cafes, and streetscapes are identified as areas where Punjabi-Sikh bodily appearance, identity, and belonging came into question. These embodied experiences result in participants developing a double consciousness, experiencing their bodies from both the inside and outside, and revealing a process of identification in which bodily aesthetics played a crucial role (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020).

The aftermath of 9/11 not only illustrates what critical race scholars have been arguing for decades—that “visibility” is a power-laden project that has the effect of silencing critiques of
state violence and the structural inequalities that produce hatred and racism—but also reveals the objectification that often accompanies “inclusion” (Naber, 2008, p. 3). September 11th and the War on Terror prompted increased surveillance across Western societies in a moral panic around "dangerous" brown bodies (Bhattacharyya, 2008, p. 1-18). Since that significant geopolitical event, racially marked Punjabi-Sikh bodies have become key sites for surveillance (Sian, 2017). As a result, some Punjabi-Sikhs have felt compelled to remove their religious markers to secure their safety, ripping away their cultural pride and heritage to mask their negatively ascribed "dangerous" identity and prove their Americanness (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). More than two decades later, Islamophobia is still rampant, as the political prominence of Donald J. Trump stimulated a significant anti-Islamic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Asian backlash. Subsequently, under the Trump administration, Punjabi-Sikhs continued to live in a climate of perpetual fear and hypervigilance.

By looking at an understudied transnational BIPOC group in a previously overlooked small to mid-sized urban area, this research offers examples of ongoing processes, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary migrant and BIPOC experiences in small to mid-sized urban regions in the United States. It is essential to recognize the role that bias and White superiority play in these ongoing issues. The creation of Whiteness is the creation of marginality and the production and assignment of value to particular bodies (H. Kaur, 2020). Those who do not enjoy the privilege of Whiteness are often unequally targeted in everyday spaces and contexts. While the reality of ongoing racialization will continue to haunt Punjabi-Sikhs in all areas of the United States, it is necessary to question who has the authority to build these narratives for the larger community and the long-term intentions to belong based on White nationalist terms (H. Kaur, 2020).
Chapter Six

Conclusion

Plenty of research has focused on major immigrant destination metropolitan areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008), yet little work has focused on re-emerging immigrant gateways (Singer, 2015). In the early 21st-century, the greater Reno urban area in Nevada has re-emerged as an immigrant destination, yet it has been largely overlooked in the immigrant gateways scholarship. With this work, I fill the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of an understudied, transnational group (Punjabi-Sikhs) in a previously overlooked re-emerging immigrant destination (the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada). I argue that the national and international public issues that became ever more apparent in the early twenty-twenties uniquely affected BIPOC and migratory groups in re-emerging immigrant gateways and resulted in new and unexpected socio-spatialities and geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Specifically, this work focuses on how Punjabi-Sikhs experience and navigate these new and complex geographies in the greater Reno area during this contemporary era of social and political upheaval. This research offers examples of ongoing processes, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary changes in small to mid-sized urban regions and re-emerging immigrant gateways in the United States.

While there exists literature citing increased rates of violence against Punjabi-Sikhs since the fallout of 9/11, this group remains largely understudied. Relatively little is known about their lived experiences in re-emerging immigrant gateways during this contemporary period of unique external stressors. Given the absence of English language literature focusing on Punjabi-Sikhs during this current period, the purpose of this study was to investigate their experiences in a geographic context. To do this, I first provided a background of the study with a description of the Sikh tradition, details about Punjabi-Sikh migratory history, and significant events that have shaped their contemporary identity. This research utilized a qualitative, phenomenological design,
with the implementation of semi-structured interviews and focus groups to address three questions: (1) How have the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs been impacted and navigated?, (2) What are the implications of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic?, and (3) How has the Punjabi-Sikh body been Othered in everyday spaces during this tumultuous period? The examples discussed in this research illustrate these complex geographies in the particular socio-political setting of the greater Reno metropolitan area.

Summary of Findings

In chapter three, Lefebvre’s (1974) and Soja’s (1980) notion of socio-spatiality was applied in combination with Sibley’s (1981; 1995; 1998) theory of geographic exclusion to answer the question of how the lived experiences and socio-spatialities of Punjabi-Sikhs have been impacted and navigated in the greater Reno area in 2020-2021, a period broadly characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic, a contentious political election, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and a surge in neo-nationalism and anti-Asian sentiment. Specifically, I focused on how Punjabi-Sikhs engage with these unfolding current events and public issues that have affected their day-to-day experiences and socio-spatialities. Given the newfound challenges of life in the early twenty-twenties, I argued that although Punjabi-Sikhs regularly experience geographic exclusion, they have adapted their socio-spatial patterns to minimize exclusionary encounters and create avenues to inclusion.

After analyzing the data, results indicated that participants could identify distinctive areas of disadvantage, discrimination, and spaces where they were made to feel like outsiders. Due to the elevated racial and political tensions that came about during the early twenty-twenties, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno experienced geographic exclusion in everyday spaces more regularly. In the ordinary landscapes of greater Reno, invisible lines were drawn between those who were different in skin color and dress and those who were understood to be similar. Socio-spatial exclusion presented itself in (quasi)public and everyday spaces such as grocery stores, coffee
shops, college campuses, local events, neighborhoods, and streetscapes. The looks and body language experienced in some of these spaces induced feelings of intimidation and being unwelcome. Some participants expressed discomfort at the sight of Trump campaign merchandise in everyday landscapes and noted the anti-minority/anti-immigrant sentiment associated with such items. Participants also recognized transgressions of normative geographies and shifting power dynamics, which impacted their feelings of belonging, safety, and overall comfort. Transgressions occurred when right-wing extremists made themselves more visible in everyday spaces due to the Trump effect (Newman et al., 2020) and when Punjabi-Sikhs were present and visibly different at local events occupied by a predominately White demographic.

Chapter three results showed that Punjabi-Sikhs adapted their socio-spatial patterns to minimize exclusionary encounters and create avenues to inclusion. A sense of security and inclusion was achieved by self-exclusion from the spaces and activities of the majority (Hall, 2005) and by occupying spaces produced and maintained by other Punjabi-Sikhs. Punjabi-Sikhs cultivated feelings of being in place by creating spaces of safety and cultural celebration, asserting themselves in exclusionary situations, and collaborating to raise awareness at the local level. Being successful in business was also seen as a common form of community inclusion. In this manner, participants challenged socio-spatial exclusion through the lens of money, mobilizing financial strength to their advantage (Mitra, 2020). The efforts described in this chapter are sophisticated strategies that bring visibility to the Punjabi-Sikh community, increase the likelihood of being included and accepted, and minimize the occurrence of unpleasant encounters in everyday spaces. Thus, physical changes to the everyday landscape and changes to the general atmosphere that occurred in the early twenty-twenties caused Punjabi-Sikhs to alter the way they interacted with and navigated space in the greater Reno area. This analysis further highlighted the importance of socio-spatial context in shaping exclusionary/inclusionary
experiences and identified the broader uneven and unequal processes and structures that produced them.

Chapter four addressed the question of what are the implications of losing transnational gathering spaces during the pandemic? Foundational work done on transnational spaces by Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Price & Whitworth (2004), and virtual thirdspaces by Mitra (1997), Skop (2013), and Gittinger (2015) was used as a starting point to uncover how this process occurs. My argument was presented in two parts. First, I argued that Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area were uniquely affected by the isolating government mandates as the loss of physical gatherings in transnational spaces disrupted the usual avenues to cultural regrouping. To withstand this disruption, Punjabi-Sikhs adapted and transformed spaces to suit their needs, which included spending more time in virtual thirdspaces and online ethnic neighborhoods. Second, I argued that increased exposure to Indian media in virtual thirdspaces during this period caused them to become more involved in homeland issues and resulted in new displays of long-distance nationalism.

Exploration revealed the importance of physical gatherings in transnational spaces and the hardships they faced due to their loss during the COVID-19 shutdowns. The dislocating process of migration had already presented challenges for intergenerational value transmission between Punjabi-Sikh parents and their American-raised children before the pandemic. The ability to uphold cultural traditions, such as the continued use of the Punjabi language, religious practices, and folk dances, are maintained in gathering spaces such as the gurdwara, cultural events, and athletic leagues. These spaces, whether permanent or liminal, provided locations for prayer and community cohesion through social forms of religious practice and spaces to speak their native language, play sports and games, eat traditional foods, and support locally-owned businesses operated by other Punjabi-Sikhs. The challenges of maintaining these cultural
traditions became ever more apparent during the pandemic when the usual avenues for cultural grouping were interrupted to prevent the continued spread of the virus.

Participants also elaborated on the space transformations that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, including transforming the home into a substitute *gurdwara* and refocusing attention to virtual gathering spaces. When religious gathering spaces were no longer available, the home was transformed into a space for cultural regrouping. To withstand the disruption to their daily/weekly religious routines, some Punjabi-Sikhs started reading the holy book at home and utilized online streaming religious services more regularly. Before the pandemic, a few select religious services were live-streamed locally on social media platforms, but these efforts were elevated during the “stay at home” mandates. Despite the numerous online and remote alternatives, participants stated that they were not satisfactory replacements which further highlighted the role of physical gatherings and thirdspaces in the regrouping process for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area. However, within the home spaces, participants were surrounded by family who cultivated and reinforced cultural traditions. Thus, extended time spent in the home setting resulted in the strengthening of cultural identity for some participants.

Online thirdspaces were increasingly used for cultural regrouping in the absence of in-person transnational gatherings. Before the isolating and social distancing mandates of the pandemic, Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno employed the Internet to educate others about *Sikhi* and social issues within Indian culture, connect with Punjabi-Sikhs in other areas for mentorship, build relationships with others who share similar hobbies and ideas, and keep in touch with relatives and friends overseas. Furthermore, increased online exposure to Indian media about the Farmer Protest through popular organizations like Sikh Expo, Sikh Coalition, and Khalsa Aid contributed to new displays of long-distance nationalism by providing daily updates and facilitating mobilization efforts worldwide. In Reno, participants organized two peaceful demonstrations of solidarity and raised awareness about the issue through social media platforms like Facebook,
Twitter, and Instagram. Ultimately, the online regrouping experience added international pressure from the global Punjabi-Sikh community and aided in the repeal of Prime Minister Modi’s controversial farm laws, putting an end to the Farmer Protest.

Much like the work of Lefebvre (1991), Soja (1996), and Price & Whitworth (2004), this research highlighted the vital role of transnational spaces in providing migrants with a link to their communities of origin and opportunities to culturally regroup in their new host societies. Additionally, as in work done by Mitra (1997), Skop (2013), and Gittinger (2015), this research further demonstrated that in the era of social media, increased accessibility, and the rise of the smartphone, computer-mediated communication provides a space for forming virtual communities and digital ethnic neighborhoods. These technologies are utilized to an even greater extent in the context of a global pandemic, the implications of which extend far beyond the boundaries of cities and nations. Through the narratives provided by Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada, this research determined that the space transformations that occurred during the coronavirus pandemic created barriers to cultural regrouping but promoted increased transnational involvement in homeland issues.

In the penultimate chapter, which sought to examine how the Punjabi-Sikh body is Othered, I extended discussions on geographies of embodiment (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020) during this tumultuous and politically charged period by exploring the lived experiences of Punjabi-Sikh in a previously overlooked small to mid-sized urban area. The scope of this chapter focused on how embodied Otherness is ultimately lived and experienced in the context of everyday practices in particular social spaces. I argued that the way Otherness is lived and embodied by Punjabi-Sikhs is primarily influenced by two factors: the intersectionality of their identities and geopolitical events. I employed Mahalingam’s (2012) concept of misembodiment, which describes how Punjabi-Sikhs experience a higher level of anxiety, shame, and greater body awareness due to being constantly objectified and misidentified by others in everyday spaces.
However, I note that it is not just a case of mistaken identity but an Othered identity that folds Punjabi-Sikhs into a larger racialized religious category and incorporates those whom the U.S. government and media have identified as enemies of the state (H. Kaur, 2020). During interviews, participants offered insight into the personal biographies and emotionally-laden memories and experiences of what it means to be Punjabi-Sikh in Northern Nevada, including the embodied and intersectional dimensions of Othering and their connection to broader geopolitical events.

Participants provided several first- and second-hand examples of how experiences with xenophobia and misembodiment emotionally and psychologically impacted them or a loved one. Results indicated that the experiences of the first- and second-generation participants differed significantly, as did their perspectives on and reactions to the situations in which they were made to feel Othered in everyday spaces and contexts. Second-generation participants were forthcoming about their experiences with embodied Otherness and tended to internalize negative encounters, affecting their sense of self and belonging. Several second-generation participants mentioned how they were acutely aware of “the looks” they would receive when out and about in the greater Reno area, where they were an ethnic and racial minority. The stares their bodies received brought about a desire to abandon their visible ethnic markers to avoid uncomfortable interactions in everyday spaces. First-generation immigrants attempted to remain unbothered by their xenophobic and misembodied experiences. However, in the period immediately following 9/11, first-generation Punjabi-Sikhs noted that their visible and mistaken identity caused them to become frequent targets of hate crime and xenophobia. To counter the discourse of suspicion mapped onto their bodies, many first-generation Punjabi-Sikhs opted to disguise their identities, preferring to remove religious markers, cut their hair, and blend in. Yet, for both first- and second-generation Punjabi-Sikhs, the desire to fit in faded with time and was replaced with newfound pride in Punjabi-Sikh culture and visibility.
Results revealed that gender influenced how Punjabi-Sikh bodies were perceived and judged. The bodies of males were more often viewed as suspect. They had to contend with frequent bullying at a young age because the turban made their religious identities visible in everyday spaces and social interactions. This caused some participants to create a more intimidating bodily image while maintaining their religious markers, whereas others opted to remove visible identifiers altogether. Punjabi-Sikh parents expressed concern over the visibility of their sons and, in some cases, encouraged them to remove ethnic accessories to reduce the risk of harm. Participants who considered removing visible identifiers faced a dilemma of either prioritizing their religious identification or risk being targeted (Kaur Sandhu, 2019). Such accounts highlight the pressure society places on Punjabi-Sikhs to conform to a particular identity to make their difference less apparent. In contrast, Punjabi-Sikh females reported not feeling as directly targeted and experienced fewer conflicts with regard to their bodily appearance. While female participants were not as directly impacted, many underscored how the xenophobia and misembodiment experienced by their male counterparts affected their lives in distinct ways and triggered emotional responses. Thus, this research uncovered that experiences with embodied Otherness are intersectional, which sheds light on how xenophobic attitudes are disproportionately acted upon the Punjabi-Sikh body.

Additionally, participants noted that geopolitical events, such as 9/11 and the election of Donald Trump, influenced the way they experienced embodied Otherness. Participants spoke directly about their experiences with Islamophobia and mistaken identity and described feeling different, like a foreigner in their own country, in the aftermath of 9/11. The result was a double position, an awareness of how the respondents identified themselves and how they were identified by others (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Participants also provided accounts demonstrating how anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence infused everyday spaces and changed routines (McGinty, 2018). Punjabi-Sikh subjects sometimes became body suspects in familiar streetscapes, airports,
and gathering spaces due to their misidentification and categorization as the “stranger,” serving as reminders that Sikh bodies continue to be material targets for surveillance and anti-Muslim sentiments. Donald J. Trump’s political presence was another influencing factor, and participants noted feeling more fearful and on heightened alert under the Trump administration. Trump’s incendiary speech concerning minorities was cited as the origin of worry, and participants emphasized the influence such statements in the media had on the emerging neonationalists. Unfortunately for Punjabi-Sikhs, bodies that have been consolidated into the racialized “Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim” category bear the brunt of the 9/11 anti-Muslim backlash and exist in an atmosphere and landscape of hate and suspicion as a result of Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric. This work used the greater Reno area as a model to examine a transnational BIPOC group and how they experience embodied Otherness in their daily lives, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary migrant and BIPOC experiences in small to mid-sized urban regions in the United States.

**Lessons Learned from Punjabi-Sikhs in the Greater Reno Area**

Nearly a quarter into the twenty-first century, a generation has passed since the early days of immigrant destination scholarship (Marrow, 2020), which focused primarily on major urban areas (Singer, Hardwick, & Brettell, 2008). A few small to mid-sized urban areas were included in the previous scholarship on immigrant gateways but received considerably less attention (Singer, 2015). As stated in the earlier chapters, Nevada’s migrant population has significantly changed over the last few decades, and most of this change can be found in its major cities (American Community Survey, 2019). Despite the velocity and scale of these population changes, little research has focused on the new and evolving human experiences of Nevada’s re-emerging immigrant destinations, like Reno. In the early American West, frontier railroad and mining towns, such as Reno, initially attracted diverse populations who were drawn by the prospects of wealth (Nelson-Limerick, 1987; Ringhoff & Stoner, 2011). Although the state of
Nevada remains rich in mineral resources, its immigrant populations dwindled in the mid-20th century. However, in the early part of the 21st-century, Reno has re-emerged as a sizable immigrant destination. This research offers examples of ongoing processes in a re-emerging and previously overlooked immigrant destination, thus making it a resource to contextualize contemporary changes in small to mid-sized urban regions in the United States. This work uses the greater Reno area as a model to examine Punjabi-Sikhs, an understudied transnational BIPOC group, and its engagement with unfolding current events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the presidential election, and other public issues that have affected their day-to-day experiences and socio-spatialities. While some of the examples presented in this research are unique to the setting of Reno, I maintain that a similar study in another small to mid-sized urban area in the American West could produce similar results.

While past events have impacted all Punjabi-Sikhs both in India and the United States, this research contributes to the conversation on what it means to be Punjabi-Sikh—as members of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and transnational/migrant communities—in re-emerging immigrant destinations and small to mid-sized urban areas in the United States during this contemporary era of increased xenophobia. The implications of this study can be attributed to some shared experiences across transnational and immigrant groups simply because of their migrant status. Just as there are differences between immigrant groups because of historical backgrounds and their reception in the United States, there are also similarities (Tiwana, 2012), such as the challenge of navigating the host society’s social landscape, learning a new language, intergenerational value transmission, and transnational connections. Implications of this study can also be attributed to the shared experiences among BIPOC groups, simply because of their minority status in a predominately White nation. Therefore, I believe that a similar study on another immigrant, transnational, or BIPOC group in a small to mid-sized urban area would render similar general findings. Of course, however, there are broad implications that cross many
migratory, transnational, and ethnic groups and some that are specific to the Punjabi-Sikh community. Still, Punjabi-Sikhs have faced bias and discrimination in the United States for generations, not unlike other migratory, transnational, and BIPOC communities, and the challenges presented to them are often indicative of the nation's broader systemic problems.

This research has highlighted the impact of xenophobic political rhetoric on the general public, BIPOC communities, and transnational/migratory groups in re-emerging immigrant destinations and small to mid-sized urban areas in the United States. In this research, I have made clear connections between political rhetoric and socio-spatial exclusion and spikes in racial injustice over time while employing a historical analysis to contextualize the current moment in the specific setting of the greater Reno area. The recent surge in divisive anti-Asian sentiment as a result of the pandemic, anti-immigrant and anti-Black attitudes as a consequence of the increasingly toxic and polarized political atmosphere, and the devastating hate violence targeting South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities in the wake of the September 11th attacks, are products of a long history of political rhetoric and policies steeped in racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. The connection between xenophobic political rhetoric, anti-immigrant policies, and actual violence has appeared to grow stronger over the last few decades (SAALT, 2018). Today’s violence, racism, and xenophobia against these “Othered” communities are informed by the stated and implicit goals of our politicians and government and are also a product of the longstanding and systemic injustice that underpins many of our nation’s institutions (SAALT, 2018).

In the early twenty-twenties, it was clear that the discriminatory language used by those in positions of power such as elected officials, public figures, law enforcement personnel, hate groups, and mass media has targeted and scapegoated BIPOC and migrant communities for political gain. As discussed in chapter five, the xenophobic rhetoric explicitly used by President Trump had significant consequences not only for Punjabi-Sikhs in the greater Reno area but
members of other BIPOC and migratory groups in other small to mid-sized urban areas as well. In both the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, Trump’s right-wing ideology was characterized by a rhetoric of exclusion, targeting minorities as a threat while promoting White supremacy (Giroux, 2017). His xenophobic political discourse had an emboldening effect on far-right groups and opened the door for these radicalized individuals to be brought into the political landscape. The presence of neonationalists in everyday spaces of the greater Reno area made members of BIPOC communities and migrant groups question their belonging and safety, a valid concern given the statistical rise in violence directed at their populations nationwide (FBI, 2019; SAALT, 2018). Thus, BIPOC and migrant communities become more vulnerable in the everyday spaces of small to mid-sized urban areas when they are the repeated targets of xenophobic political rhetoric, such as that employed by Donald Trump.

In addition, when I began fieldwork at the beginning of 2020, many Americans, particularly White Americans, seemed to be somewhat content with their lives. When the coronavirus pandemic started, that contentedness started to wane and was gradually replaced with a sense of fear and unrest. When George Floyd was killed in police custody on May 25th, 2020, attention was redirected to an uncomfortable reality that most BIPOC communities already knew—racism was still alive and well in America. With the added attention came a renewed interest in understanding racism (Cuncic, 2022), as demonstrated by the multitude of Black Lives Matter protests that materialized across the nation. However, not everyone was willing to rekindle discussions about systemic racism and inequality. As stated in chapter five, some Americans felt isolated and alienated from the rise of progressive values and saw them as replacing traditional norms (Papakyriakopoulos & Zuckerman, 2021). The inflammatory xenophobic political rhetoric coming from people in positions of power had startling levels of public support. It caused some Americans to develop a psychological wall of fear, distrust, and difference toward BIPOC and immigrant groups, which remains one of the most serious impediments to creating sustainable
and equitable communities (Fuentes, 2015), including communities in Northern Nevada. With phrases like “bad hombres,” “shithole countries,” and “Kung flu” dominating our nation’s political discourse and mainstream media cycles, it had become clear that racism was a normalized feature of American culture. Even in our modern, multicultural society, there is a deficit in our broader ability to understand the lives and experiences of people who are different from us, and this lack of understanding has negative consequences for BIPOC and migrant groups in all major/minor immigrant destinations and rural/urban areas.

Hence, this research has highlighted the need for human geography, critical race theory, anthropology, anti-racism, and ethnic education, not just for the school-age population but for researchers, policymakers, politicians, educators, law enforcement agencies, employers, and members of the White majority alike. The frustration surrounding the issue of cross-cultural insensitivity was articulated by my participants on multiple occasions. For example:

Manpreet (19): More information is needed because people aren't informed… If there were more information out there, maybe we would feel safer. Just take a few classes and get information, so you’re not ignorant.

Sukhbir (44): Learn about your community… People are not educated enough. Schools don’t teach people about the world. We teach American history here, Western tradition, and that’s it. They think they don’t need anything else. People don’t know.

Our nation’s educational system, as Sukhbir stated, has remained largely Eurocentric, outdated, and disconnected from the growing diverse populations of the United States. Human geography, anthropology, critical race theory, anti-racism, and ethnic studies generally explore the histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of people of color with the added goal of promoting social transformation (Nguyen, 2021). These fields of study include the history of how we have become this nation, the obstacles we have overcome to get to this point, and the challenges we continue to face. Additionally, by looking at the role of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation in American society, these studies can provide a critical lens to examine and contextualize what is happening right now and why it is happening (Nguyen, 2021).
While interest in these studies has been reenergized recently after the murder of George Floyd and the historic protests of 2020, more exposure and education are needed so that members of BIPOC and migratory groups will, as Manpreet stated, “feel safer” in their daily lives and everyday spaces. America is living through a moment of social and political paradox. Never in its history have BIPOC and migrants been more fully represented in the public and political sphere. Yet, in many ways, the situation of BIPOC and migrant groups in America is dire. We are not anywhere near a post-racialized society. We do not talk and teach enough about the reality of race and difference in this country. Consequently, this creates a pervasive ignorance (Fuentes, 2015) that leads to spatial divisions among social groups, as evidenced by this case study conducted in the greater Reno area of Northern Nevada.

When considering the current ever-changing social and political atmosphere, general trends are evident: a consistent rise in anti-Muslim, anti-minority, and anti-immigrant discourse; increased xenophobic political rhetoric that translates into socio-spatial exclusion; and a lack of worldly knowledge among members of the general public that results in increased negative stereotyping and discrimination against Punjabi-Sikhs and other BIPOC and migratory communities in the greater Reno area. However, the findings of this research also show that Punjabi-Sikhs are incredibly resilient and have developed sophisticated strategies for navigating adverse social and political landscapes. In the United States, they have had to contend with barriers to immigration, anti-Asian and miscegenation laws, racialization, the backlash of terrorist attacks, religious persecution, institutional discrimination, mistaken identity, hate crimes, mass shootings, xenophobic political rhetoric, and socio-spatial injustice. Their strategies for navigating the current landscape of hate and suspicion as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and contentious political atmosphere can provide a glimmer of hope in a nation plagued by systemic inequality, gun violence, White supremacy, the rise of neonationalism, and a public health crisis.
Much can be learned from the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area in their ability to adapt to their changing environments. When faced with ignorance and prejudice, they take the time to educate others. When presented with injustice, they mobilize to enact change. When faced with the homogenizing forces of globalization and Americanization, they stay true to their identities. When they endure suffering, they take personal responsibility and look inward to alleviate their pain. When they see others in need, they come to their aid. They donate their time and hard-earned wages to support the betterment of their communities. They believe in mutual respect, gender equality, and religious tolerance (because there is no single path to God). And when faced with socio-spatial exclusion, they stick together and cultivate pathways to inclusion. Although various geopolitical events have caused some Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno to develop an Ambivalent Americanness—feeling American but not viewed as such by others—they do their best to contribute to American society and live out their American dreams. These are values and efforts that America so desperately needs during these turbulent times.

Limitations

Understandably, this study's limitations and contextual specifications reflect the inherent complexity and diversity within humanity. However, these limitations should not preclude considering implications beyond a specific context (Tiwana, 2012). The first limitation of this study concerns the small sample size. Due to time constraints, the threat of the ongoing pandemic, and the small population of the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area, my sample size was fixed at fifteen subjects. Indeed, a study that includes more cases might produce more nuanced results.

Another study limitation involved my White, non-insider status within the Punjabi-Sikh community. According to Alder and Alder (1987), my role in the observational methods of the present research is defined as a peripheral member who does not participate in the core activities of the group. Although my membership status in relation to the participants did not seem to
negatively affect the interviews, it does raise an important point that must be considered in all qualitative research endeavors (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). For each of the ways that being an insider researcher enhances the depth and breadth of understanding a population that otherwise may not be accessible to an outsider, questions about objectivity, reflexivity, and authenticity are raised because one may know too much or is too close to the subject being studied (Kanuha, 2000). Correspondingly, there appear to be as many arguments in support of outsider research as against (Serrant-Green, 2002). However, the intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows researchers to remain true outsiders to the experience of those being observed (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As a qualitative researcher, it was impossible to completely separate myself from the study. Instead, I was involved in all aspects of the research process and was, therefore, essential to it. My preexisting relationships with Central Valley Punjabi-Sikhs, interaction with participants throughout the duration of the study, and the knowledge gained from graduate studies (including reading the literature, attending academic conferences and seminars, and conducting prior research), informed my approach. Yet, my role as the researcher does not qualify me as a complete insider either.

To counter my outsider status, I needed to familiarize my presence within the Punjabi-Sikh community by conducting prolonged and immersive participant observation. Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 “stay at home” and social distancing mandates, I was limited in my ability to completely familiarize my presence as a researcher within the Punjabi-Sikh community. Under normal circumstances, I would have conducted more participant observation by regularly attending gurdwara services, langar (communal food service), seva groups and clubs, athletic leagues, cultural events, and celebrations.

However, my presence in these Punjabi-Sikh spaces was limited as in-person data collection at my institution was halted for a period, events and gatherings were canceled, and public access to religious services was restricted to prevent the further spread of the virus. This
narrowed interaction and diminished the available time spent with my participants and the wider Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area. Regardless of these barriers, I did my best to counter my outsider status by maintaining good working relationships with my informants. In future studies, it is recommended that qualitative researchers conduct prolonged engagement and immersion in the setting of observation to discover and interpret the patterned meaning of organizational and collective life among their participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

A final area to be noted pertains to the limited data on Punjabi-Sikhs. Limited data were available, including accurate population counts in Nevada and the greater Reno area and statistical information separating Punjabi-Sikhs from the larger Asian or South Asian communities. For example, in the most recent report published by the national coalition Stop AAPI Hate (2021), the number of racially motivated attacks related to the pandemic is only provided for Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. The acronym “AAPI” encompasses a diverse group of people with heritages rooted in all Pacific Islands and parts of Asia, including South and Southeast Asia. Therefore, Punjabi-Sikhs were lumped into this broad category. Another advocacy group, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT), gathers information on discriminatory incidents carried out against South Asian groups but only accounts for the categories: Bangladeshi, Bhutanese, Indian, Maldivian, Nepali, Pakistani, and Sri Lankan. No specifications are made between these broadly Asian, South Asian, or Indian categories, which made gathering information on Punjabi-Sikhs problematic. Additionally, because the United States Census Bureau has not traditionally asked Americans about their religious affiliation, estimating the number of Punjabi-Sikhs (or any small religious group) in a given region is uncertain. However, the upcoming 2020 Decennial Census changed how religious groups were counted and included questions about religious affiliation. These numbers would have aided in determining the size of the Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area and would have been beneficial to my analysis had the data been available.
Suggestions for Future Research and Community Action

The transnational Punjabi-Sikh community in the greater Reno area was utilized as a case study because I had the most intimate knowledge of this community within the Western United States as a researcher and activist. These perspectives were necessary in order to gain a deep understanding of the everyday processes embedded within Punjabi-Sikh geographies of inclusion and exclusion. Only through these kinds of understandings could this project move beyond a practice of social analysis to contribute to social change. The beauty of qualitative study lies in its ability to bring the reader closer to the nuanced details of social processes, which are necessary for any kind of social intervention (Tiwana, 2012). These interventions ultimately attempt to institute social change (Tiwana, 2012). The results of this study have several implications for future research and community action. This section will detail recommendations in the following areas: (1) addressing the need to build a historical archive of Punjabi-Sikh presence in the state of Nevada, and (2) what we can do in our communities to support BIPOC and migratory groups, like Punjabi-Sikhs, during this new era of social and political upheaval and increased xenophobia.

When conducting the foundational research for this study, it became apparent that there is little to no record of Punjabi-Sikhs in Nevada’s history. Some Punjabi-Sikh families have been in the state for three, going on four, generations—they are part of the fabric of society—yet there is no record of them in Nevada’s archives. This is a deficit that needs to be addressed. Putting together a database of Punjabi-Sikh presence in the state would be another area of fascinating research and would benefit Punjabi-Sikhs by acknowledging their presence and influence in the region and by bringing further visibility to their community. Research in this area must include data provided by the United States Census Bureau when it becomes available and should focus on the histories and biographies of the first migrants to relocate to Nevada, what initially attracted them, and their labors to lay solid foundations for their families. During interviews, many participants talked about their family-owned or operated businesses and their struggles to make it
in America. Therefore, Punjabi businesses and business owners should be included in this research as many of my participants, or participants’ parents, came to and remain in Nevada because of its status as a business-friendly state. Punjabi-Sikh-owned businesses that extend employment opportunities to other members of the Punjabi-Sikh community would also be of interest, as these connections create inclusive networks.

In addition to future research, there are several ways our communities can counter xenophobic discourses and be more responsive to the reality that BIPOC and migrant groups face in their everyday lives. First, we must pressure our government officials, both elected officers and candidates, to remain watchful of policies that sanction racial profiling and surveillance and address racism and xenophobia by acknowledging the growing problem of White supremacy. Continuing to characterize White perpetrators of discrimination and violence as lone actors ignores systemic racism (SAALT, 2018). Government programs dedicated to understanding the violence and discrimination perpetrated by White supremacists are necessary.

Second, although it is tempting to view incidents of hate and xenophobia as isolated episodes, we must begin viewing them as part of a more extensive system of systemic racism before we can address their root causes. This starts with confronting xenophobia, racism, and pro-Whiteness in our communities. Therefore, community data collection, such as the data collection involved in the present research, is crucial to understanding the magnitude of xenophobic discourses aimed at BIPOC and migrant communities. Providing non-profit organizations and researchers with the funding and support for this type of data collection is essential. This data can be viewed in real-time by community members, government officials, media, and other stakeholders, which allows for ongoing analysis of emerging trends (SAALT, 2018). We must also invest in community organizations that support BIPOC and migrant groups. Coalition building among BIPOC and migratory communities is critical for developing the power necessary to counter xenophobic discourses and socio-spatial exclusion. As the convergence of anti-Black,
anti-Asian, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant policies and attitudes grows stronger in contemporary America, community collaboration will be even more critical (SAALT, 2018). This can include joint organizing efforts and other partnerships that encourage and facilitate cross-cultural understanding and interaction.

Engaging in political and ethnic education continues to be a crucial part of contextualizing and understanding the xenophobic discourses directed at BIPOC and migrant groups and their resultant separation from other people in society. Critical race theory, human geography, anthropology, ethnic and anti-racism studies are agents of change. If one thing distinguishes these studies from other academic disciplines, it is their commitment to social transformation. Students of these academic studies become activists. The Civil Rights Movement, feminism, and more recently, environmental justice, Black Lives Matter, and #MeToo, are just some of the countless social movements examined by these studies. These studies are more than simply topics of academic inquiry; they encourage social justice, empower the powerless, and speak for those who have been denied their voice (Sagás, 2018). Through this type of education, individuals can reassess their own prejudices and biases and effect a change within themselves. Once we have acquired the information necessary to see each person as an individual rather than through the eyes of a preconceived stereotype constructed by the government and media, we can begin this change on the personal level. As a result, resolution on the community and societal levels can occur (L. Green, n.d.).

In short, I hope that my academic training and knowledge of the Punjabi-Sikh community in the American West has helped lay the groundwork for community action and future studies on BIPOC and migratory groups and socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion during these turbulent contemporary times. The lived experiences of BIPOC and migratory groups need to be conceptualized from a support framework rather than a need to help. A need to help presumes there are deficits within BIPOC and migrant communities, whereas support tries to leverage the
strengths that lie within them (Tiwana, 2012). Strengths-based and resilient-focused research projects should not dismiss or de-legitimize the obstacles and inequity BIPOC and migrant communities face. Instead, they should highlight the strength acquired through resiliency by these communities into creative and effective solutions (Tiwana, 2012). I hope that this project is a productive contribution to this important work.
Hi, folks! I’m Heather Benson (@commonheather), a doctoral candidate at UNR. I study Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno, NV, from a geographic perspective. I created this account to recruit participants and share my research and other historical photos I find along the way. I’ll start by posting these photos of the two local gurdwaras: (1) Northern Nevada Sikh Society and (2) the Reno Sikh Temple. The Reno Sikh Temple was the first to be constructed in the mid-1980s. Back then, there were only a few Sikh families in the area. Eventually, the community grew large enough to warrant the construction of a second gurdwara, and the NNSS was born in 2008. If you would like to participate in my research OR if you have any photos to share, please send me a private message.

#sikhism #reno #renosikhtemple #northernnevadasikhsonociety #washoecounty #dfmi #northernnevada #nevada #biggestlittlecity #sikhsofreno #nevadahistoricalsonociety #sikharchives

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Hello everyone! I’m Heather, the researcher behind this IG account. As you know, I started this account to bring visibility to the Northern Nevada Punjabi-Sikh community. My research explores the socio-spatial landscape from a Punjabi-Sikh perspective.

To understand the Punjabi-Sikh perspective, I need insiders—like you—to tell me about your experiences. Now, I don’t know if you can tell from the above photo, this may come as a surprise, but I AM WHITE. Ha! Because I am not a member of the Punjabi-Sikh community, I am
certainly considered an outsider. As an outsider, it will be difficult to adequately tell the local Punjabi-Sikh story without the help of Punjabi-Sikh narrators.

I have already conducted several interviews in the Reno-Carson area. Still, I am looking for women over the age of 30 and men between 18 and 50-years to balance my participant sample. If you fit into one of those categories and would like to help, please make yourself known in a private message. I will take you to lunch or buy you a coffee in exchange for your unique insight.

Interviews:
~ expected to be about an hour in length
~ can be done in groups or individually
~ will take place in a location that is safe and comfortable for everyone involved
~ will follow all COVID-19 health and safety procedures per UNR's guidelines

Furthermore, if you have any photos (first families to arrive in the area, Punjabi-owned businesses, the construction of the local gurdwaras, cultural events, etc.) that you would like to see featured, please get in touch with me! There is no visual record of Punjabi-Sikhs in Nevada archives, and I’d like to change that.

#sikh #Sikhism #punjabi #panjabi #renosikhs #sikhsofreno #punjabisofreno #reno #Nevada #DFMI #homemeansnevada #northernnevada #biggestlittlecity #sikharchives #westernsikhs #nevadasikhs #nevadapunjabis #geography #humangeography #geographer #transnationalism #migration #northernnevadasikhsoociety #renosikhtemple #gurdwara #travelnevada #nevadaculture #nevadahistorical #nevadan #renohistory
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Name(s) of Interviewee(s):

Age(s):

Gender(s):

Occupation(s):

Contact information:

Date, Time:

Location of Interview:

Interview 1

1) What does it mean to be ‘Sikh’ to you?

2) What are the most important ways that you express your Sikh identity? Your Punjabi identity?

3) How important is dress to your identity as a Punjabi-Sikh? Why? When and where do you wear traditional attire? Are there occasions that you wear traditional attire outside of the temple? Where and when?

4) What are the religious practices that you participate in? Where do the practices occur? When do these practices occur? Have these practices changed over time?

5) Do you worship a gurdwara? If so, which one? Why do you prefer this gurdwara? If not, how come?

6) How long have you (or your parents) lived in Reno? Why did you or your parents decide to live in Reno? What keeps you here?

7) How would you describe the greater Reno area?
8) How do you define home? What does that mean to you?

9) Does Reno feel like home to you? If so, why? Do other places feel like home to you? Are there times when Reno feels more or less like home to you? If so, when? Why do you think this way?

10) What kinds of family or religious connections do you have outside of Reno?

11) Do you socialize with people who aren’t Punjabi-Sikh? If so, who? When? Where?

12) Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

13) Do you have any historical photos of Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno or family photos you’d be willing to share with me?

**Interview 2**

1) Do you feel like you’re a member of the community here? What sorts of communities or groups do you belong to? Where do you engage with those communities? Hobbies? Are there times when you feel that you are more or less a part of the community?

2) What are the connections between your community and other communities in Reno? What do these connections mean? Have these connections changed over time?

3) Are you part of any social outreach or community service initiatives? If so, what initiatives? What is the goal of these initiatives? When and where do these activities occur? Have these activities changed over time?

4) Where are your favorite places to go to in Reno? With whom do you gather at these places? What happens at these places? When do you go to these places? Have these places changed over time?

5) What are your favorite events to attend in Reno? With whom do you attend these events? What happens at these events? When do you attend these events? Have these events changed over time?
6) Does assimilation or desire to fit in vary between generations? Has this changed over time? Why do you feel this way?

7) Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

8) Do you have any historical photos of Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno or family photos you’d be willing to share with me?

Interview 3

1) What are some challenges about living in Reno? What are some difficulties that you may face here? Why do you think you feel this way?

2) If you have worries or challenges in Reno, how does this translate to your children? Why do you think you feel this way?

3) Are there places in Reno that make you feel uncomfortable? Where? Why do you think this way? Are there times when you are made to feel more or less uncomfortable?

4) Have you ever been made to feel uncomfortable about the way you dress or your outward appearance? If so, can you describe what happened? Where? How did you respond? Are there times that you are made to feel more or less uncomfortable about your outward appearance? Why do you think this way?

5) Have you personally, or has anyone you know experienced racism or xenophobia here in Reno? If so, what happened? Where and when did this occur? How did you (or the person) respond? Why do you feel they reacted that way?

6) Have these negative experiences and interactions changed over time? For better or for worse? Why do you think this way? How do you feel about that?

7) Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

8) Do you have any historical photos of Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno or family photos you’d be willing to share with me?
Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Name(s) of Interviewee(s):

Age(s):

Gender(s):

Occupation(s):

Contact information:

Date, Time:

Location of Interview:

1) What does it mean to be ‘Sikh’ to you?

2) What are the most important ways that you express your Sikh identity? Your Punjabi identity?

3) How important is dress to your identity as a Punjabi-Sikh? Why? When and where do you wear traditional attire? Are there occasions that you wear traditional attire outside of the temple? Where and when?

4) How would you describe the greater Reno area?

5) Does Reno feel like home to you? If so, why? Do other places feel like home to you? Are there times when Reno feels more or less like home to you? If so, when? Why do you think this way?

6) Do you feel like you are a member of the community here? What sorts of communities or groups do you belong to? Where do you engage with those communities? Hobbies? Are there times when you feel that you are more or less a part of the community?
7) Are you part of any social outreach or community service initiatives? If so, what initiatives? What is the goal of these initiatives? When and where do these activities occur? Have these activities changed over time?

8) Does assimilation or desire to fit in vary between generations? Has this changed over time? Why do you feel this way?

9) What are some challenges about living in Reno? What are some difficulties that you may face here? Why do you think you feel this way?

10) Are there places in Reno that make you feel uncomfortable? Where? Why do you think this way? Are there times when you are made to feel more or less uncomfortable?

11) Have you personally, or has anyone you know experienced racism or xenophobia here in Reno? If so, what happened? Where and when did this occur? How did you (or the person) respond? Why do you feel they reacted that way?

12) Have these negative experiences and interactions changed over time? For better or for worse? Why do you think this way? How do you feel about that?

13) Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?

14) Do you have any historical photos of Punjabi-Sikhs in Reno or family photos you’d be willing to share with me?
References


American Community Survey. (2016). Language spoken at home by ability to speak English for the population 5 years and over. *ACS 5-year estimates, United States Census Bureau.*


Associated Press. (2021a). More than 9,000 anti-Asian incidents have been reported since the pandemic began. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2021/08/12/1027236499/anti-asian-hate-crimes-assaults-pandemic-incidents-aapi


Fernando, C., & Ortiz, J. (2021). He tried to warn his co-workers, then he was shot: Loved ones mourn victims of shooting at San Jose rail yard. *USA Today*. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2021/05/27/san-jose-shooting-victims-mourned/7464683002/


Millis, H. (1912). East Indian immigration the Pacific Coast. Survey, 28(9), 379-386.


Nguyen, H. (2021). Through ethnic studies, schools push to include marginalized perspectives: Ethnic studies proponents say K-12 curriculum has remained largely Eurocentric and disconnected from the growing population of students of color in the U.S. Edutopia. https://www.edutopia.org/article/through-ethnic-studies-schools-push-include-marginalized-perspectives


Sagás, E. (2018). Why we need ethnic studies (now more than ever). *Colorado State University, College of Liberal Arts Magazine.* https://magazine.libarts.colostate.edu/article/why-we-need-ethnic-studies-now-more-than-ever/


